

2012 Pokrova Poem: Some Assembly Required

Built out of love and longing, I was theirs.

- Self explanatory. This is what people did because it was what they knew what to do. It was their identity and made them feel closer to home.

Celebrating love and belonging, they were mine.

- Baptisms, weddings, funerals; a religious family; she -- the Church -- gathered them.

Onward and upward, they left me.

- Success, ability to build a bigger place, migration to the cities - rendered her empty.

Piece by piece, I left them.

- Self explanatory. Curatorial element dismantling the Church in Alberta.

Put back together and standing again, here I am.

- An empty shell? Is she saying, 'hey, you there, come take a look!' (kind of like that tree in The Giving Tree - come, swing on my branches, nap in my shade...but the grown up is too busy). Rebuilt in the Museum of Civilization.

A picture in picture in picture, we are one.

- Here is the redemption. Each one of us an image (iconography), the church, a picture of beauty, the gallery a snapshot of time, the museum a tapestry of who we are. No picture stands alone.

Some assembly required, I am you.

- We are all made of different parts. They shift and shape and make room for other parts as we grow...but always retain an essence of where we have come from.

“Some Assembly Required – The Story of St. Onuphrius Church”

There was a country rich in people and fertile soils but also poor because of greed and war. Its name was Ukraine. Across the ocean and half a world away was a country – Canada – that was rich with land but poor in people – it needed people to work its fields. So the Ukrainians came to Canadian Prairies and brought with them their whole families, hopes and dreams.

They needed homes – so they built them just like the ones they left behind. They needed food – so they grew the types of vegetables that they had grown up with. They felt at home in their new country because they could even celebrate their old traditions. After a while, even before the priests came, they built a little church for themselves, named it after Saint Onuphrius, and celebrated family feasts and holidays there. Their community grew and grew. They loved their little church and the people who came there to celebrate with them.

After a while, the young men and women moved away from the community to study and work. The church was sitting unused more and more often, and so it was closed forever.

The church sat empty for many years. Then, some people thought of a better future for the little church. They knew that the Great Museum near Ottawa was looking for unique and precious Canadian treasures to keep there. So, they offered their precious church to the museum as one of these precious items.

People spent a lot of time taking the church apart, board by board, numbered each one and took many photos. They put all of the pieces of the little church in crates and shipped them to the Museum in several big trucks.

When the trucks arrived at the museum, the people there took all of the pieces out of their boxes and put them back together like a gigantic puzzle, so the museum visitors could get a taste of the old days in the Prairies. And so, the empty church from the Prairies began a new life, serving those who visited the Museum and worship there.

St. Onuphrius church is now a window into the olden times, seen by new and young eyes. It is a bridge between those early settlers who gave it life and their great-grandchildren who come to it now. It lives through the memories of old times and through new memories made there each year.

It is a part of all of us.

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