



***Holy Mass Commemorating the 125th Anniversary
of the Diocese of Sioux Falls***

**The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
Celebrated at the Sioux Falls Arena
August 16, 2015
*Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time***

Praised be Jesus Christ. Now and Forever. Praised be Jesus Christ for the 125 years of the local church of Sioux Falls. Praised be Jesus Christ for your presence today as we pray the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the source and summit of Christian life, of our faith.

As we celebrate this anniversary we do so with the underlying truth that Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. With that hope-filled and consoling Truth in mind, this past year we have celebrated this anniversary with three purposes: to remember, honor and thank God for those who went before us; to learn of and learn from their history and experiences; and to look to the future with hope.

And so we remember, honor and thank God for your fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, the lay men and women, clergy and consecrated, native and immigrant who with courage and sacrifice built and sustained the Church on the prairie and who bequeathed to us an inspiring Legacy of Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Over this year we recalled: our roots beginning with our first Bishop Martin Marty in Yankton, consecrated life in Aberdeen, rural life in Woonsocket, Native American life in Marty, Catholic education and formation with nearly 4,000 Catholic school students here in this arena, the erection of the diocese in 1889 by Pope Leo XII and our patron and protector Saint Joseph at the Cathedral, culminating in these last several days of spiritual enrichment. The banners just displayed, lovingly created by so many, identified over 300 parishes, schools and institutions that have existed at one time or another in our diocese over the years. They are icons of the thousands of faithful who loved the Lord, persevered in faith and passed its beauty and its strength on to us. These banners are also reminders that change is ever-with-us and that we need the Church, the sacraments and the Magisterium as the stabilizing presence in the midst of constant change.

Our second purpose has been to ponder what we might learn from the past. Over these 125 years there were good economic times, bountiful harvests, building booms and favorable weather. And there was drought, dust, floods, tornados and fires. There were boom times and busts, freedom of religious liberty and threats to it, respect for human life and its derogation, family joys and family hardships. In other words, they lived in a world which, at its core, is like all times including ours. What sustained them and can sustain us? Certain words come to mind as we reflect on our legacy: gratitude to God for blessings, beginning with life itself, petition to God for relief from or to bear crosses well, outreach of one another in good times and in bad, devout faith and trust in God's will with eyes fixed on the world to come.

As Vatican Council II over 50 years ago summarized it: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."¹

The mix of joys, hopes, griefs, anxieties is not an easy environment in which to live and sometimes can lead us astray. Our first reading challenges us: "Forsake foolishness that you may live"². St. Paul in the 2nd reading cautions, "Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons, but as wise, making the most of the opportunity because the days are evil."³

There is a Hagar the Horrible cartoon in which the husky Viking struggles up a snowy mountain. A barefooted monk-like figure wearing only a robe sits on top peacefully enduring the icy wind. Hagar asks him: "what is the secret of happiness?" The monk replies: "poverty, fasting, abstinence and celibacy." Hagar looks concerned and then asks: "is there anybody else up here I can talk to?" Sometimes we hold back, hedge our bets.

How providential, then, it is that in our Gospel reading Jesus offers the answer for overcoming the foolishness of our day and the lures of the evil one – his very self in the Holy Eucharist. "I am the living bread come down from heaven, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."⁴

Many of those who listened to Jesus when he declared himself the Bread of Life could not believe their ears. "He wants us to eat his flesh?" "Is there someone else we can talk to, follow?" Many today seek to follow government or media or technology or celebrities placing god-like expectations on them. This can lead to a sadness of the heart reflected in many unhealthy responses to the normal stresses of life.

My heart skipped a beat when I read what someone said, "the last thing our high-strung, workaholic, career-driven people need is a high-strung, workaholic, career-driven pastor." That is as true of a spouse, a parent, a boss or a friend. With the grace of God and sustained by the Bread of Life we can learn to live balanced lives.

I am often asked what motivated me to convert as an adult to the Church. Certainly yearning for something more was part of it. The moving beauty of sacred art and music was part of it. But it was when I opened my heart and accepted the truth that Jesus is truly present in the Holy Eucharist, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, I knew I must come home to Him in his Church. Let us always receive our Lord in the Holy Eucharist with awe and humility.

Having remembered and honored those who went before, having pondered their history and learned from it, where do we go from here, looking to the future with hope?

First, let us better accept God's love, ponder his word with openness of heart and allow Him to draw us to Himself.

Second, let us deepen our personal relationship with Jesus Christ, become more joyful disciples every day of the week. We will do so if we deepen our prayer life.

I recall one of my friends responding to my request for daily prayers. "You want me to pray every day?" he said. We can be like the little boy who was asked by his grandmother, "Did you say bedtime prayers?" "Yes, grandma," "Did you say your morning prayers?" "No, grandma," "Why not?" "Well, I'm not afraid in the daylight." Morning turns to night.

Blessed Mother Theresa once recommended that we pray by imagining that Jesus is staring right at us. Just the thought of it is a little unnerving, Jesus staring at me. She wrote: "Have you seen with the eyes of your soul how He looks at you? Not only does He love you, but He longs for you."⁵ If we are honest with ourselves we long for God: "our souls are restless until they rest in thee," St. Augustine declared. Make the most of today's opportunity to feel his love through prayer.

Third, let us reaffirm the truth that God is the creator of life at conception and the protector of life until natural death. Therefore respect the life and dignity of all persons as children of God, those unborn who are more than body parts, the frail elderly who deserve honor not disposal, and all the poor and needy whatever their age or position who are our brothers and sisters in Christ..

Fourth, let us recognize that the stability of society is grounded in marriage as created by God and in healthy family life, to be good role model ourselves and to support those struggling to live the covenant of marriage and responsibly parent.

Fifth, let us take advantage of the Jubilee Year of Mercy which begins on December 8 to better become people of reconciliation and forgiveness to others and to seek God's forgiveness for ourselves.

Sixth, let us courageously defend religious liberty and freedom of conscience in whatever forum is necessary. Religious freedom is not an act of government; it is a gift from God written in our hearts.

And finally let us ask the Blessed Mother, model of Christian discipleship and fidelity, to pray for and guide us. She always leads us to her Son.

Perhaps this true story catches the hope for the future that can be ours. A doctor attended an elderly Vietnamese woman in the hospital. She did not speak English. While checking her pulse he noticed a piece of jewelry laced around her wrist. He recognized it as a rosary bracelet. He smiled and showed her the crucifix he wore around his neck. She nodded. Later he returned with some medicine tablets in a mini paper cup. She closed her eyes for a few seconds, made the sign of the cross - in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – and then took her pills with a reverence that moved the doctor deeply. He wrote: “I realized I was witnessing a holy moment. She sacramentalized the routine of swallowing pills.”⁷

When we sacramentalize the routines of our day, referencing all we do to God, we can cope with the joys and sorrows with the faith and hope that is our Legacy.

May God continue to bless you and the Diocese of Sioux Falls.

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- 1- *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Paul VI, 1965, p. 1
 - 2- Proverbs 9:1-6
 - 3- Ephesians 5:15-20
 - 4- John 6:51-58
 - 5- *The Fulfillment Jesus Wants for Us*, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, 1993
 - 6- Confessions (Book I), Saint Augustine
 - 7- *Sacred Stories*, 16th Edition, Catholic Health Initiatives