



**Mass Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the
Dedication of the Cathedral of Saint Joseph**
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
May 1, 2019
Memorial Feast of Saint Joseph the Workman
Cathedral of Saint Joseph

At the opening of the doors of the restored Cathedral of Saint Joseph in 2011, we recalled the poem written by May O’Gorman, niece of the visionary bishop who presided over its construction and its first Mass. It reads:

On the plains of South Dakota, beneath soft Western skies,
The spires of our Cathedral gleaming white in splendor rise,
In sweet majestic beauty, inspiring faith and love
And hope of future glory, in God’s fair land above.
It is not only finished form from crudest state, man-planned,
Not only stones and mortar changed, by work, to beauty grand -
To temple great and glorious, with columns strong and bold,
And arches stately, statues rare of sainted men of old.
‘Tis true that all its grandeur may thrill the artist’s soul,
May satisfy his longing - this splendid perfect whole.
Our church is wondrous pleasing - yes - and evermore must be
A masterpiece of art - but oh! It means much more to me.

Today we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the dedication of this Cathedral of St. Joseph and it prods us to ponder what does this Cathedral mean to us. It is especially poignant with the fire that recently happened at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in France which brought forth for me heavy memories of the fire that engulfed the Cathedral of Saint Raphael in Madison, Wisconsin while I was rector there. What if this spiritual and community landmark were to be lost? What does it mean to us?

The Church recommends that “In order that the importance and dignity of the local Church may stand out with greater clarity, the anniversary of the dedication of its cathedral is to be celebrated, with the rank of a solemnity in the cathedral itself, with the rank of a feast in the other churches of the diocese, on the date on which the dedication of the church recurs. . .¹” “It is desirable that in the cathedral church on the anniversary the bishop concelebrate the Eucharist . . . with the participation of as many of the people as possible².” That is what we do tonight.

It has become a local tradition that we remember the dedication of this Cathedral on May 1, the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, even though that feast day did not exist in 1919. The church was dedicated on May 7th, even though it was not fully-constructed. Whatever the date, we do so “In order that the importance and dignity of the local Church may stand out with greater clarity.¹”

It especially propitious today because May 1st is the birthday (in 1843) of Bishop Thomas O’Gorman who, with vision and courage, commissioned the construction of this cathedral. May 1st (1896) was also the day he was installed as the second Bishop of Sioux Falls.

Earlier today, it was announced (with my support) that the Sioux Falls Catholic School system has been renamed the Bishop O’Gorman Catholic School system to encourage the availability of Catholic schools to those youth who live in the greater metropolitan area, something that was nonexistent when the system was first inaugurated. Several descendants of Bishop O’Gorman were present for this announcement.

What is that importance and dignity here that needs to stand out with clarity? It basically comes down to the Truth that the Lord is in this place and that the Church He instituted is reflected in this place: the home of the bishop. In fact, seven bishops have presided and taught here (the only exception our first bishop Martin Marty) and, God-willing, the ninth bishop will be here soon, and the sacraments have been administered here in great abundance especially including ordinations of most of our priests and deacons. Among what ought to stand out with greater clarity are those who envisioned, and then built and maintained this sacred space over the years. We live in their legacy and those who follow us will live in ours. May our legacy be as worthy of remembrance as is theirs.

A few years ago in the presence of the bishops of Minnesota and North and South Dakota, I had the privilege of celebrating Mass at the Cathedral of Saint John Lateran, the cathedral of the diocese of Rome whose bishop is now Pope Francis. As universal Church, we, everywhere in the world, celebrate the anniversary of the dedication of that Cathedral every year. In my homily that day I noted:

Having had the privilege of being received in audience by the Holy Father, (then) Pope Benedict XVI, Bishop of Rome, earlier today, it is appropriate that we bishops from Region VIII (Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota) come here to the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the Cathedral of the Diocese of Rome to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The cathedrals in our dioceses are in a way an extension of this cathedral as we bishops are in a way an extension of the mission of the Holy Father. Being here and reflecting on this historic and sacred space can offer us perspective and hope.³

Recalling the dedication of our cathedral one-hundred years ago and the dedication of its fourth (or fifth) altar after the restoration nearly eight years ago, this sacred space ought to offer us perspective and hope as well. Reflecting on the challenges to build and maintain it over the years, the many twists and turns of history since 1919, with savage wars, economic devastations, fire- and weather-tragedies, it is still here, the beacon of hope where we worship in the continuing line of those who went before in spirit and in truth.

At that rededication I noted that:

This Cathedral of St. Joseph is not a museum though there is much to admire and ponder; this is not a concert hall though the beauty of sacred music will lift our souls; this is not a gathering space though it is a place where we can come together to share our joys and support one another in our sorrows. This is our Beacon of Hope where

we with humble and grateful hearts can declare: ‘How awesome is this shrine. This is nothing else but an abode of God, and that it is the gateway to heaven. Truly the Lord is in this place.’⁴

Yes, it is a masterpiece of art, but it means so much more to us because it is our mother church, our place of worship, our respite from the vagaries of the day, our place where we encounter and receive the Lord. As a result, as St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians put it: ‘in him (here in this Cathedral) you (we) are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit’⁵. We thank God for 100 years of its towering presence and its invitation for all to pray, to rest, and to be spiritually recharged. Let us never take it for granted.

‘Our church is wondrous pleasing - yes - and evermore must be
A masterpiece of art - but oh! It means much more to me.’

What does it mean for us?

1 – *Rite of Dedication of a Church and an Altar*, English Translation, 1978

2 – Holy People, Holy Places: Rites for the Church’s House, Thomas Simons, 1998

3 - Mass homily, March 8, 2012, St. John Latteran Cathedral

4 – Mass homily, July 26, 2011, Cathedral of St. Joseph

5 – Eph 2:22