



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

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Cathedral of Saint Joseph

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Vigil for the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica

Today the Church around the world, the universal church, recalls the dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the Cathedral of the Diocese of Rome, the diocesan home of the Pope. One hundred and twenty-five years ago this week, November 12, the Bishop of Rome, Pope Leo XIII formally erected or established the Diocese of Sioux Falls. It encompassed all of the newly created state of South Dakota. Bishop Martin Marty, OSB, was named its first bishop. Previously there existed the Vicariate of the Dakotas which included what is now both North and South Dakota. Bishop Marty was territorial bishop over that vast area. Several years earlier Bishop Marty had requested of the Pope that the territory be divided.

A diocese is a geographical area over which a bishop appointed by the Pope teaches, sanctifies and governs. Each diocese is called a local church and is named after the city in which the chair of the local bishop (cathedra) is located. In 1902 the diocese now known as Rapid City was established. Ever since the Diocese of Sioux Falls has been all of the South Dakota east of the Missouri River, East River as it is commonly called.

It is important for us to acknowledge this special anniversary. It is an opportunity to remember and thank God for those known and unknown who have left us a Legacy of Faith, having survived the rigors of prairie life. Their faith guided and supported them and they passed their faith on. This anniversary is also an opportunity to recall the history they experienced and learn from it. As we remember those who went before and recall how their lived faith sustained them, we can be inspired to honestly address the realities of our day with faith.

It is difficult for us to imagine the diocese in 1889. There were somewhat over 300,000 people in the new state of whom Catholics numbered an estimated 30 - 45,000. Bishop Marty was in failing health. A bishop-friend commented: "sod houses, buggy beds, no privies, long wagon rides . . . no wonder everything in the human machinery went to pieces." They were hard times, as are all times, each unique.

Bishop Marty could not have imagined the diocese of today with the technology, diversity and with core moral values taken for granted then under attack not only by the rigors of life but by the disrespect for life itself.

Bishop Marty identified three areas of need as he spoke with Pope Leo XIII: too few priests to serve the native and immigrant population, a lack of adequate financial resources to build and support churches, schools, missions and charitable needs, and the physical burden of extensive territory travel. Those three challenges have been consistent throughout the years and remain true. Yet it was his and is our mission to serve Christ here in East River.

The prayer for the 125th anniversary summarizes what is in our hearts today. Joyfully we give thanks to God “for the gift of life and for the gift of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.” We thank God “especially for those who have gone before – 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 have bequeathed us an inspiring Legacy of Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.”

During this next year we will recognize them in special ways: the religious who established and now seek to maintain Catholic education and Catholic health care; lay farm and ranch families who, despite the vagaries of weather, so generously supported and support parishes; Native Americans whose rich spiritual rooting has guided and points us to God; clergy who have and continue to minister the sacraments and offer encouragement and consolation. The list could continue.

The first diocese established in the United States was Baltimore in Maryland which is celebrating its 225th anniversary this year. John Carroll was the first bishop of Baltimore. He is famously quoted as describing the clergy of his time as a “medley of clerical characters.” There have been a few clerical characters in our diocese over the years; there are some today.

The identity of a diocese is usually associated with the bishops who served here, beginning with Bishop Marty whose commitment and faith is humbling as he sacrificed himself for those placed in his care. He was succeeded by Bishop Thomas O’Gorman, who built this Cathedral; Bishop Bernard Mahoney who guided the diocese through the dust bowl and Great Depression; Bishop William Brady who gave encouragement and perspective during the rigors of World War II and its aftermath; Bishop Lambert Hoch, from Elkton, who attended Vatican Council II and guided the diocese through significant change; Bishop Paul Dudley whose heart for the poor and the unborn touched so many. I had the privilege to be at his burial. Family members were invited to share a moment with him. One nephew recalled having said to Bishop Dudley that Minnesota was God’s country and the Bishop corrected him, “no, South Dakota is.” Bishop Robert Carlson inspired good stewardship and led uplifting millennium celebrations. I am privileged to be the 8th Bishop of Sioux Falls. My episcopal motto is “Give Praise to the Lord”. We do so today for 125 years of faith, hope and love.

The hands-on ministry of the Church is accomplished in the parishes, and so we give thanks for the priests who have served. How awesome are the hundreds of thousands of Masses, confessions, first communions, confirmations, marriages, burials and other gatherings over the history of the diocese. Over 300 parishes have been established as needs arose, and as needs changed many were merged. The Church never closes but sadly buildings sometimes must. At this Mass I will bless crosses that list each of the parishes in the diocesan history. These crosses will go on pilgrimage around the diocese from parish to parish, culminating in an anniversary Mass next August.

Having remembered those who have gone before and learning from our history, the anniversary prayer missions us to look to the future: “We pledge to honor them by being good stewards of this Legacy and with similar courage and sacrifice through witness and word pass on to future generations the call of Christ to follow him through his Church.”

The prayer closes with the recognition that just as those who went before we cannot do so alone. And so “we ask Mary our Mother and St. Joseph our patron to care for and protect our diocese today and in the years to come.” As always we pray “in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord.” Then we declare: “Amen”, which means we believe what we have just prayed and we will do what we have committed to do.

Today we Give Praise to the Lord for what was, what is, what is to come, and what never changes. Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

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