



## ***Holy Mass Commemorating the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Diocese of Sioux Falls***

**The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain**

**Bishop of Sioux Falls**

**Mount Marty College, Yankton**

**September 19, 2014**

***On the one-hundred eighteenth anniversary of the death of Bishop Martin Marty, OSB***

We come together this morning to begin the commemoration and celebration of the erection of the Diocese of Sioux Falls 125 years ago come this November. We do so here in Yankton recognizing this was the first home of Father and Abbot Martin Marty, who became bishop of the territory of the Dakotas and the first bishop of the Diocese of Sioux Falls which then included the entire state of South Dakota.

Beside me is the cathedra, the bishop's chair, used by Bishop Marty. I was told that I may not sit in it because it is an antique. I noted that at my age I am an antique. Apparently though one must be at least 100 years old to earn that title. I am, however, privileged to use Bishop Marty's crozier.

It is important that we celebrate anniversaries such as this significant one of our diocese. We do so especially to recall the many blessings that have been ours over the years and to thank God for them. It is also an opportunity to remind ourselves of those who have touched our lives along the way, known and unknown, and to thank God for them. There have been so many heroic men and women who helped form our diocese over the years as our prayer for this anniversary notes: "lay men and women, clergy and consecrated, native and immigrant who built and sustained the Church on the prairie and bequeathed to us an inspiring Legacy of Faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior."

It is also an opportunity to reflect on all that has happened, both the good and the challenging over these 125 years and more, and to learn from them. Reflecting on the past can help us avoid the errors of yesterday, keep perspective about today and make better decisions for tomorrow. History, as Mount Marty College surely affirms, is a powerful teacher. Core to that teaching is to trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior which can sustain, nourish and give us hope for the future.

Last Saturday I, with others from our diocese, visited Einseideln in Switzerland, the monastery where Alois Marty studied as a youth, was formed in the Rule of St. Benedict and became a monk, taking the name of Martin in honor of St. Martin of Tours. I spoke with a monk there who knew of Bishop Marty. When I informed him that we were on pilgrimage in celebration of 125 years as a diocese, he smiled and noted that the next day, September 14, the

Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, they were celebrating one-thousand and eighty years of the monastery. We remain the “new” world.

The monastery is quite beautiful, surrounded by the grandeur of the hills and mountains of Switzerland. As I surveyed the serene and picturesque scene, I wondered why Bishop Marty would have left this idyllic place. Yet no place is truly idyllic short of heaven, even South Dakota; though we are specially blessed. That monastery remains an active community where the Benedictine life of “*ora et labora*,” prayer and work, continues. An awe-inspiring church with moving sacred art open to all is a place of prayer, and fields, gardens, library and school reflect their work. Unique to its work which likely needs prayer as well is that the monks continue to breed horses – how regal they appear so well-groomed and cared for.

Some have thanked me for being here this morning after returning home from Europe only yesterday. While there I did have the privilege of greeting for us all Pope Francis on Wednesday; he asked for our prayers for him. My guess is that Bishop Marty would have been pleased to experience only jet lag given the means of transportation in the 1800s. How torturous were the means of travel he routinely experienced to get here, which foreshadowed his difficult journeys across the Dakotas.

We experienced a bit of that perilous travel on our way to the monastery. Father Justin Wachs, Mark Conzemius and I traveled by car to spend additional time at the monastery. One lesson learned was not to trust the confident tone of the GPS speaker. We were directed to the scenic way, which included winding and narrow mountain roads which went up and down and up and down. We encountered coming down the road as we sought to drive up huge Swiss cows, each with big bells belting out loudly and wearing colorful head regalia. They did not exhibit Benedictine or Swiss hospitality, nor did their shepherds. Needless to say, we spent less time at the monastery than intended, but we also experienced a taste of the life Bishop Marty knew and which prepared him for his missionary calling which has influenced and benefited our diocese ever since.

Alois Marty was ordained a priest, taught and shared his love and talent for sacred music, especially chant, and then was sent on a mission to restore unity to the monastery of St. Meinrad in Indiana. He was expected to remain there a short time and return home, but his heart was smitten with the mission to our country and especially to Native Americans in the Dakotas.

While still a student, a seed was planted within him by a Benedictine priest who returned to the monastery to recruit others to join the missionary outreach to America. He was a brilliant student, a gifted musician and fine teacher. He did however have an independent streak which is required for missionaries but can become a thorn in community. As a result his acceptance into the order was delayed until, he was told, he was better able to live the vow of obedience. When received into the order he took the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, stability and conversion to the morality declared in the Rule of St. Benedict. He lived those vows with integrity but also with missionary zeal.

I encourage you to read of his life and appreciate his legacy that resounds here over a century later.

There are three key themes that I wish to raise up this morning that Bishop Marty lived and that continue to be essential in our day: courageous evangelization, devotion to Mary and humility in prayer.

The courageous ministry of Bishop Marty, to share the good news of Christ crucified and risen to the Native Americans and the immigrant, often in opposition to the discriminatory and unjust policies of government, is well-documented. Less appreciated perhaps are those who supported him along the way. These include those Benedictine sisters and others who came to the territory of the Dakotas and blazed the trail in education and health care. While we were not able to visit the monastery from which the first sisters came here by way of Missouri, we did visit sister monasteries part of their federation. We also visited Mariazell. The Benedictine Sisters who came to our diocese first settled for a time in Mariazell, which we know as Zell near Redfield, where outreach to youth was the principal ministry. Eventually they moved to Yankton and founded Sacred Heart Monastery which led also to Mother of God Monastery in Watertown. How vital was the presence of Benedictine sisters to education and health ministries in the diocese and the state of South Dakota over these 125 years. That presence and impact continues today. Thank you to the Benedictines here today and those in our thoughts. We also recall the Benedictine priest and brothers who also serve with great sacrifice and love. The impactful role of the men and women of religious orders in the history of our diocese cannot be understated. Their courageous evangelization is a model of us today.

The second theme is the importance of devotion to the Blessed Mother. As we toured Austria, Bavaria and Switzerland this past week, it was clear that Mary was and is truly mother to so many. It is expressed through churches dedicated to her and the countless shrines, formal and personal, that are everywhere under many titles offered for prayer and endearment.

Bishop Marty personally experienced two touches with the Blessed Mother that deepened his devotion to her. His father was a shoemaker. As a youth Alois reportedly drank some acid associated with that work. You can imagine the threat of a devastating impact on the boy. His parents prayed to the Blessed Mother to save him, committing to a pilgrimage to a Marian shrine if he was saved, not an easy trek. Miraculously he was not significantly injured. While a student in his teens his older sister died of typhoid fever about which Alois became distraught. He went for a long walk in the mountains and became lost. He fell into a ravine; injured and disoriented he could not find his way out. His parents, worried about his lack of return that night, again prayed to the Virgin to save him, once again pledging to make the pilgrimage. The next morning he was able to find assistance and again no serious physical harm resulted. The Blessed Mother truly became his mother. Our Lord offered from the cross that she be the mother of us all. Surely his devotion to her guided his difficult travels and ministry through the Dakotas. His parents and he is a model for us all to call upon her in our times of trouble and also to pray to her in thanksgiving. Mary always points us to her Son with a mother's love.

The final theme is the importance, indeed the necessity, of humble prayer. St. Benedict in his Rule wrote,

“God is present everywhere – present to the good and to the evil as well, so that nothing anyone does escapes his notice; that is the firm conviction of our faith. . . If in ordinary life we have a favor to ask of someone who has power and authority, we naturally approach that person with due deference and respect. When we come, then, with our requests before the Lord, who is God of all creation, is it not all the more important that we should approach him with a spirit of real humility and devotion that is open to him alone and free from distracting thoughts? We really must be quite clear that our prayer will be heard, not because of the eloquence and length of all we have to say, but because of the heartfelt repentance and openness of our hearts to the Lord whom we approach.”<sup>1</sup>

Humble prayer to the God of all creation sustains and inspires, especially in challenging times.

Courageous evangelization to share Christ crucified and risen with all, devotion to the Blessed Mother as our Mother and mother of all, and humble prayer to the God of love and mercy for all, make up the legacy of faith we have inherited and are called to pass on. As we continue our commemoration and celebration of this anniversary in the months ahead, let us commit ourselves to be good stewards and faithful witnesses of that legacy of faith we have been given by God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit expressed through the lives of those who have gone before, for whom Bishop Martin Marty, immigrant and bishop, serves as a model and icon.

---

<sup>1</sup> – The Holy Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter XIX, 1949 edition