



Blessing and Opening of the Doors
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
July 25, 2011 ~ Memorial Feast of St James
Cathedral of St. Joseph

Confitemini Domino. Give Praise to the Lord is my Episcopal motto. I truly give Praise to the Lord this evening for your presence and for this moment.

Some 15 years or so ago then Bishop Carlson began the process to care for the Cathedral of St. Joseph, the mother church of our diocese, Eastern South Dakota, which also stands as a state and community landmark. He did so by assuring the exterior safety of the building, making it accessible, creating the Sacred Heart Chapel and the parish hall. Archbishop Carlson, we are grateful for your vision and leadership, and your presence here tonight. Then of course he was transferred nearly seven years ago. The worship space was yet to be addressed. To the surprise of many, including me, I was appointed bishop and therefore was charged to pick up the mantle with you.

And so, over two years ago we prayed Solemn Vespers, processed out of the Cathedral and closed the doors as we began to implement our shared vision to preserve, beautify and restore the essence of our mother church, the worship space. At the same time we undertook a diocesan wide capital campaign to raise \$16.2 million dollars to fund it and pay off indebtedness from the earlier work. We adopted the theme Beacon of Hope, which the Cathedral truly is for so many. And we ascribed to ourselves the motivating charge: this is our time, meaning this is our responsibility. It was a leap of faith we took together.

In a few minutes we will bless these new wood doors which serve as a visible sign that what we set out to do has been achieved. We will open these doors and process back into our mother church, we will return home.

Our home, our mother church now has up to date infrastructure, including electrical and lighting, heating and air conditioning, and an improved sound system. The unique sacred art has been enhanced by a tapestry of colors. There is additional sacred art reflecting the teachings of Christ that he is our gate to abundant life. We have sought to do all this respecting the intentions of Bishop Thomas O’Gorman and

Emmanuel Masquarrey, the architect who designed the Cathedral. And we have done so in a way that is respectful of current liturgical norms.

We have been able to do so because of the over 6,600 persons and families who contributed financially to make it possible, and we were strengthened by the prayers of so many more. And we were blessed by the creative artisan and skilled craftsmen who entered into this effort not simply as a job but as a privilege. With a humble and grateful heart I am able to announce that we have not only accomplished the restoration, we have also met and exceeded our financial goal. This project is debt free and no other diocesan funds have been used to support it. Give Praise to the Lord.

Two years ago I asked the question why do we care about this building made of stone. Three thoughts came to mind then and remain even truer this beautiful evening. We care about this building because it is a place where prayer is welcomed. It is a place where faith is expressed. It is a place where hope is made visible.

This is a place of prayer, where individually we can lift our hearts to God in supplication and in thanksgiving, in praise and in need. It is a place to ponder the meaning of life and to own up to our sins and begin anew. It is a place to rest from the sadness of the culture and to reflect on the future. It is also a place of community prayer, a house of prayer for all people, in the Holy Mass, in the celebration of the sacraments, in sacred concert and in gathering as one family of faith. This is a place where prayer is welcomed.

This is a place where faith is expressed, notably in the dramatic architecture, the stunning artistic renderings in the reliefs, the dazzling colors in stain glass windows, the dramatic depictions in the Stations of the Cross, the exultant sound of organ and voice, and in the simplicity of the Mary and Joseph shrines. The crucifix, the altar and the Tabernacle express our belief in the continuing sacrifice of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Through the bishops chair and the coats of arms etched in marble of Pope Benedict XV, who was Pope when the Cathedral was built and of Pope Benedict XVI, our current Holy Father, the cathedral teaches that the local church and her parishes are bound together in the universal church united around the Holy Father. They reflect our belief in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. This is a classroom where faith is expressed.

And this is a place where hope is made visible, a sign of the living God in our presence, an affirmation that the Word became flesh and dwelt and dwells among us. It also offers a glimpse of what tomorrow may hold for those who remain faithful. Our sights are lifted when we look up to this building from the outside, this shining light on the hill, prominent from all directions. When you enter the Cathedral in a few moments I am confident that your spirits will be lifted in a new way; that your hearts

will be touched, that you will be reassured by encountering signs and symbols of what true love is. This is a place where hope is made visible.

Our challenge now that the stones are preserved, beautified and restored is to assure that this does not become just a beautiful place, but a living Beacon of Hope for all peoples, where prayer is welcomed, faith is expressed, and hope is made visible, where everyone who enters encounters the love and mercy of God.

I end with this poem written in 1930 by May O’Gorman, the niece of Bishop O’Gorman, which expresses what is in our hearts this day:

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.

Oh, it means much more to us all.

May the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph our patron watch over you. May God reward you for what you have accomplished in Jesus’ name.

Confitemini Domino. Give Praise to the Lord.