



**Chrism Mass Homily**  
**The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain**  
**Bishop of Sioux Falls**  
**March 21, 2012**  
**Cathedral of St. Joseph**

Welcome to the Cathedral of St. Joseph as we celebrate the Chrism Mass. It is good to be home. One of the moving moments at this Mass will be when we priests renew our promises made when we were ordained. How appropriate it is that we do so here where most were ordained.

One of the recent traditions has been to recognize those priests who are celebrating significant anniversaries of ordination during this year. Congratulations to Father Charles Duman, Msgr. Carlton Hermann and Father Lawrence Marbach who are celebrating 60 years as priests. Father Duman and Msgr. Hermann are with us, Father Marbach has health issues. Celebrating 50 years as priests are Father Tony Imberi and Father John Riedman. Father Tony is recovering from surgery and Father John resides in Texas. Celebrating 25 years as priests and with us tonight are Father Joe Vogel and Father Paul Josten. Every year is an anniversary for us all, congratulations to all priests and deacons who have labored so well in the vineyard for one year or for many. Be assured of the love prayers and support of me as your bishop and of all the faithful. Thank you for responding to God's call to ordained life. Thank you for being priests and deacons in the Diocese of Sioux Falls.

I also want to acknowledge the presence of so many young people, many of whom are preparing for the sacrament of confirmation. The oil that will be used for your confirmations will be consecrated tonight. It will also be used in the sacraments of baptism and holy orders. I urge that once anointed with this sacred oil you open your hearts to what God wants you to do with your lives; consider priesthood and religious life. Those gathered here will attest that it is a good and satisfying vocation.

To all of you I bring greetings from His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI. I along with my brother bishops from Minnesota and the Dakotas had the privilege of being received by him several weeks ago on our *ad limina* journey to the tombs of Peter and Paul. People ask me how he is. My response is that I wish I had his vigor of mind and the serenity of faith at my age now, let alone at 85 which he will soon become. While I cannot say this about all Vatican officials, the Holy Father knows where South Dakota is.

One of the most moving experiences during that journey was to continue the tradition of bishops to gather over the tomb of St. Peter and proclaim the Profession of Faith, the successors of the Apostles reaffirming the faith that the first of the Apostles proclaimed in his own way for which he was martyred. I asked myself, as perhaps you might ask yourself, am I willing to die, if not physically, at least in popular esteem because I am actually living the words I speak? When the priests renew their ordination promises in a few minutes, they will be asked whether they resolve to "discharge faithfully the sacred office of teaching, following Christ the Head and Shepherd,

not seeking any gain, but moved only by zeal for souls.” Do we truly so resolve? What faith offers is the perspective to look beyond the moment; to have zeal for souls is to look to the life to come. It is my view that we are going to be put to the test in these next years in new ways. We need to prepare for the test by learning what the Church really teaches and why, and then share it with those around you with joy and charity.

An early example of the danger is the mandate of our own government that threatens the free exercise of religion and the freedom of conscience not only of those leading Catholic institutions but individual Catholics seeking only to work in the public square and to provide for their families while being true to what Christ teaches and they believe.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement last week with which I completely concur. It sets forth the core issue well which advocates of this government incursion seek to deflect<sup>1</sup>:

“We wish to clarify what this debate is—and is not—about. This is not about access to contraception, which is ubiquitous and inexpensive, even when it is not provided by the Church’s hand and with the Church’s funds. This is not about the religious freedom of Catholics only, but also of those who recognize that their cherished beliefs may be next on the block. This is not about the Bishops’ somehow “banning contraception,” when the U.S. Supreme Court took that issue off the table two generations ago. Indeed, this is not about the Church wanting to force anybody to do anything; it is instead about the federal government forcing the Church—consisting of its faithful and all but a few of its institutions—to act against Church teachings. This is not a matter of opposition to universal health care, which has been a concern of the Bishops’ Conference since 1919, virtually at its founding. This is not a fight we want or asked for, but one forced upon us by government on its own timing. Finally, this is not a Republican or Democratic, a conservative or liberal issue; it is an American issue.”

This mandate attacks directly our freedom to defend the dignity of all human life and to live that core belief ourselves.

I thank you for your support on this issue so far; sadly it will be with us for some time. Shortly we will make available to you a prayer Catholics throughout the country will be praying together. Let me say this clearly: we will not give up and we will not give in on something so fundamental to who we are as children of God the Father and disciples of Christ.

What I find especially troubling is the charge that the Church is fighting a war against women. Here in our own diocese, Catholic healthcare was founded by and has been maintained over the years by religious women, especially the Benedictine and Presentation Sisters, supported by countless lay women and men. Some of the most caring programs and innovative therapies have been and are being provided to women without precondition and often at no cost by Catholic healthcare. Religious women including here in South Dakota have long been on the front lines of assuring women have opportunities in education to develop their talents and share their gifts without discrimination. That charge disrespects this history and their accomplishments which continue today. All that and more is now at risk.

The real war against women is being fought by those who seek to extend access to abortion that has encouraged gender selection abortions, which statistics document means little girls, women in the making, are the overwhelming target of abortions in many countries including our own. That is the war on women we will continue to battle against despite government threats of mandates or fines. Every life is sacred, every child is a gift, and each deserves the opportunity to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In his discourse to we bishops a couple of weeks ago, Pope Benedict made the salient point<sup>2</sup>:

Children are the greatest treasure and the future of every society: truly caring for them means recognizing our responsibility to teach, defend and live the moral virtues that are the key to human fulfillment. It is my hope that the Church in the United States, however chastened by the events of the past decade, will persevere in its historic mission of educating the young and thus contribute to the consolidation of that sound family life which is the surest guarantee of . . . the health of society as a whole.

A beautiful case in point. Karen Gallagher of St. Mary's Healthcare Center in Pierre, told this true story:

"It was made of small triangles of black, white and pink patiently sown together into squares. The pieces link to form hearts. It is a heart and soul quilt. It was designed by a mother, Barb, for her daughter Kaylen. Barb had cancer, and Kaylen had fought it with her since she was three years old. Now, Kaylen was 15. 'She is my heart and soul, and it is so hard to leave her,' said Barb. 'I want her to pull it this quilt around her and feel my love. Kaylen picked the fabric. I have told her that the quilt means I will always be with her.' Barb worked on the quilt while in the palliative care suite at the hospital. When Barb knew she could not finish the quilt in time, the hospital staff called in an experienced quilter who helped Barb do so. On the quilt she sewed, 'You are my heart and soul.'"

Karen concluded: "Is the essence of our work found in our job descriptions, or is it in the heart and soul we apply to our daily activities. I know it is the latter. It was a sacred honor and privilege for our staff to help a mother to provide her daughter with a gift of love. In the years to come she can wrap it around herself, feel her mother's arms around her and hear her voice whisper, 'Kaylen, you are my heart and soul.'"

That is Catholic health care, that is Catholic teaching, that is priestly ministry, that is Christ proclaimed, that is living the creed we profess. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring glad tidings to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind."<sup>3</sup> May we go forth from here tonight recommitted to do so with zeal for all souls, with love in our hearts for all peoples, and with courage to stand up for life from conception to natural death, and all the years in between.

May God bless each of you, may the Blessed Mary, mother of life, watch over you and may St. Joseph, our patron, protect you all.

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<sup>1</sup> – "United for Religious Freedom; A statement of the Administrative Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops", March 14, 2012

<sup>2</sup> – Address of Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the United States of America from Region VII During Their *Ad Limina* Visit, March 9, 2012

<sup>3</sup> – Jn 4:18