



**Mass of Dedication of the New Altar**  
**The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain**  
**Bishop of Sioux Falls**  
**July 26, 2011 ~ Memorial Feast of St. Joachim and St. Anne**  
**Cathedral of St. Joseph**

Brother bishops, Abbot Dennis, priests, deacons, consecrated and lay faithful, Mayor Huether, and other dignitaries, thank you for being here this afternoon on this historic occasion for the Diocese of Sioux Falls and for the greater community. I especially want to acknowledge the presence of Archbishop Carlson whose vision began what we complete this day. We also welcome home Archbishop Gullickson and Bishop Kettler, priest sons of the diocese.

In our first reading from the Book of Genesis we hear of the dream of Jacob, in which appears a staircase, sometimes called a ladder, connecting heaven and earth with angels going up and down. Jacob encounters the Lord and is moved to exclaim what we might proclaim today, “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.” Angels abound in our Cathedral which too in a way is a gateway to heaven. Here too we can encounter the Lord. He will be present in an even more profound way through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and with the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle. Truly the Lord is in this place.

It is appropriate that we gather to celebrate the completion of the preservation, beautification and restoration of the Cathedral on the Memorial of SS Joachim and Anne, by tradition the names given to the parents of the Blessed Mother and often referred to as the grandparents of Jesus. It was your parents, grandparents and great grandparents who built and maintained this special place with vision, sacrifice, perseverance and faith. Bishop O’Gorman and they clearly desired to send a bold message in stone, one of faith, one of hope and one of invitation. Proclaiming boldly the love and mercy of Christ is as needed today. Thank you to all of you who have made this day possible. Because of their and your sacrifice, this is once again a place to come to pray, to rest, to be forgiven, to be restored, but most especially to encounter God. Truly the Lord is in this place.

Oh how we need signs of hope and places of rest in our world today, so filled with violence, incivility, injustice, narcissism and disrespect for life. Pope Benedict XVI when he visited St. Patrick Cathedral in New York several years ago noted the beauty of its stained glass windows, not unlike ours.

He said, “From the outside those windows are dark, heavy, even dreary. But once one enters the Church, they suddenly come alive; reflecting the light passing through them, they reveal all their splendor. . . It is only from the inside, from the experience of faith and ecclesial life that we see the church as she truly is: flooded with grace, resplendent in beauty, adorned with the manifold gifts of the Spirit. It follows that we, who live the life of grace within the church’s communion are called to draw all people into this mystery of light.” That is our mission here in the Diocese of Sioux Falls, to respond to the call to new and renewed evangelization.

But then he continued: “this is not an easy task in a world which can tend to look at the church, like those stained glass windows from the outside, a world which deeply senses a need for spirituality, yet finds it difficult to enter into the mystery of the church. Even for those of us within, the light of faith can be dimmed by routine, and the splendor of the church obscured by the sins and weaknesses of her members. It can be dimmed too by the obstacles encountered in a society which sometimes seems to have forgotten God and to resent even the most elementary demands of Christian morality. You who have devoted your lives to bearing witness to the love of Christ and the building up of his Body know from your daily contact with the world around us how tempting it is at times to give way to frustration, disappointment and even pessimism about the future. In a word, it is not always easy to see the light of the Spirit all about us, the splendor of the Risen Lord illuminating our lives and instilling renewed hope in his victory over the world. Yet,” he concluded, “the word of God reminds us that, in faith, we see the heavens opened and the grace of the Holy Spirit lighting up the church and bringing sure hope to the world.”<sup>1</sup>

It is my prayer that this restored Cathedral will be a shining light on the hill outside and in, by the beauty of sacred things and by the beauty of faith lived well, and therefore be a sign of the hope that can only be fulfilled in Christ. And so we invite all to come here on pilgrimage and to seek to satisfy the yearning for the holy, to discover meaning in the midst of trial even fear, and to experience the peace that comes from knowing Jesus Christ as Lord, Savior and friend.

This place is filled with examples of those who discovered the peace that Christ offers. We will soon place in the new altar the relics of three saints who can inspire us: Maria Goretti, who at the age of 12 was violently attacked yet forgave her attacker before she died and received the fullness of life; Thomas Becket, who too was martyred for the faith for his refusal to give in to unjust laws and what was popular or politically correct; and Pope Pius X, who recognized what a grace receiving Holy Communion is by urging regular reception, who raised up sacred music, and who stood firm to preserve the unity of the Church universal. There are more inspiring witnesses portrayed here in window, in relief and in symbol. There is Peter.

“Who do you say that I am,” Jesus challenged the apostles in the Gospel. Peter’s response has been called his profession of faith: “You are the Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>2</sup> He did not at first fully understand or live it perfectly. We know that subsequently he tried to get Jesus to change his travel plans to avoid the danger that was the Passion, and that he denied Jesus three times ultimately breaking down in tears over his failure to be true. We also know that Our Lord forgave him and missioned him and built the Church upon him. Strengthened by the Holy Spirit Peter experienced the conversion to which each of us is invited. He too is a witness of Christ’s love and mercy.

Each of us each day, whatever our vocation, is asked to respond to the question who do you say that I am. Not what do the polls say or what do others say, but who do we say He is. How we respond will shape our lives and affect those we love, and the life to come.

Sacred art, beauty can show us the way. As Pope Benedict XVI noted, beauty, “genuine beauty unlocks the yearning of the human heart, opening afresh the eyes of our hearts and minds, giving man wings.”<sup>3</sup>

Allow me to share one testimony on how beauty helped change a life. There was a young reasonably successful professional who felt something missing in his life. Searching for what he knew not, he found himself spending time in a Catholic church though he was not Catholic, mystified about why. This confused and aimless young man sat in the back trying to find his way in the missalette, was moved by the Stations of the Cross and intrigued by the statues of saints he had never heard of. Ever before him was a haunting crucifix, the body of Christ on the cross. “Who do you say that I am,” Jesus was asking him. That young man of course was me. It took awhile but I was touched enough in part by beauty to turn from my old ways and to open my heart to declare in a new way: “You are the Christ, the Son of God.”<sup>2</sup> Like Peter I did not know what it fully meant but the “eyes of my heart and mind were opened afresh”. That response was deepened when I accepted the truth of His real presence Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Holy Eucharist. After that I could not help but come home to His church. What a joyful day it was when I like Peter professed my faith. Then God called me to the priesthood. And He topped it off by bringing to South Dakota. Perhaps men or women, young and not so young, will be drawn to the Lord by pondering the genuine beauty here in this Cathedral which your parents and grandparents, and you, have made possible.

When asked what was my vision for our new crucifix my response was something to the effect, I want us to be able to look with awe at our Lord hanging there and then humbly acknowledge: He did that for me, for us; He loved us that much and still does.

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.”

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<sup>1-</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Mass Homily, St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York City, April 19, 2008

<sup>2-</sup> Matthew 16: 15-16

<sup>3-</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with Artists, Sistine Chapel, November 21, 2009