



**Mass of Thanksgiving
In Recognition of the Inauguration of Pope Francis
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
March 19, 2013
Solemnity of Saint Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Cathedral of Saint Joseph**

We gather this day on the Solemnity of the patron saint of the universal Church and the patron saint of the local Church of Sioux Falls. With great joy we also gather on this day when our new Holy Father, Pope Francis, celebrated the Mass of inauguration of his papal ministry.

We often call upon St. Joseph as our protector. In Sacred Scripture we have evidence of that role not in words but in action. Joseph, the just man and therefore a man of faith, sought to protect Mary when he prepared to divorce her quietly before the angel expressed to him God's will which he did without hesitation. He sought to protect Mary and the unborn child on their journey to Bethlehem and by finding a place for them to stay, if only a stable. He sought to protect Mary and Jesus at our Savior's birth so beautifully depicted in art here in the Cathedral above. He sought to protect Jesus and his anxious mother from the murderous intentions of King Herod by exiling to Egypt. And he sought to protect him and her in the quiet years in Nazareth. If he protected the Holy Family in such profound ways it makes sense that he is the protector of today's holy family, Christ's Church.

Pope Francis in his homily at Mass at the Vatican earlier today asked the question: how did Joseph exercise his role as protector? His answer was: "Discreetly, humbly and silently, but with an unfailing presence and utter fidelity, even when he finds it hard to understand."

"How does Joseph respond to his calling to be the protector of Mary, Jesus and the Church?," he asked. His answer: "By being constantly attentive to God, open to the signs of God's presence and receptive to God's plans, and not simply his own." "We," he said, "are to be protectors in that way."

Drawing on the themes we recall from St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis noted that we are to be protectors of God's creation, which includes the environment of course. But God's creation also includes people who need protection especially the unborn, the poor, children, the elderly, those in need.

Recalling that Francis of Assisi was also a defender of peace, the Holy Father called on those with power, leaders from some 132 nations were present at the Mass, to remember that authentic power is for service. "Only those who serve with love are able to protect as did Joseph" he said.

To summarize what will surely be the hallmark of his time as our spiritual father and teacher Pope Francis ended his homily with these words: "To protect Jesus with Mary, to protect the whole of creation, to protect each person, especially the poorest, to protect ourselves: this is a service that the Bishop of Rome is called to carry out, yet one to which all of us are called, so that the star of hope will shine brightly. Let us protect with love all that God has given us".

As Pope Francis accepted his new responsibilities as Pope, may we accept our responsibilities as disciples of Christ which flow from our baptisms "to protect with love all that God has given us."

May the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, patron and protector of Holy Church, pray for and protect His Holiness, Francis, our Pope, and us all.