

## **'Dare to be saints'**

*Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo*

*May 20, 2015*

*Shanely Baccalaureate Mass  
Cathedral of St. Mary  
Fargo, ND*

“Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me...As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.”

Dear friends, I'm very happy to be with you this morning and to welcome you to St. Mary's Cathedral for this Baccalaureate Mass. This is a joyful day for all of us, and mostly for you, dear graduates. You have much to be proud of, and we are proud of you. I'm sure this is also a day of gratitude for you: gratitude for your teachers, who shared so much of themselves; gratitude for your parents and families, who share life and faith and love; and gratitude for your friends, who travelled this journey with you and gave you joy along the way. You also have before you a future full of hope. It's exciting and maybe a little bit scary. There are lots of unknowns in our lives, especially when we make a big transition like the one you are making today.

But, you know as I do that in all things we can count on Christ. He prays and intercedes for us in the eternity of heaven, and he accompanies us on our journey here on earth. The entire gospel we just heard is Jesus praying for his disciples, praying that they might be protected and consecrated by God. But Jesus wasn't just thinking of that group of twelve. He is thinking and praying for us too. He is praying for you! When he was speaking to a group of young people, Pope Francis had this to say: “Put on Christ in your life, and you will find a Friend in whom you can always trust. Put on Christ and you will see the wings of hope spreading and letting you journey with joy towards the future. Put on Christ and your life will be full of his love, it will be a fruitful life.”

My friends, stay close to Jesus, and he will always be close to you. He is as close as the nearest prayer. Hopefully in these last four years you have discovered that Christ is the center of everything. You can trust him, and he will never leave you. Jesus was preparing to send out these disciples, but he would never send them out alone. He would always be with them as they continued his work, and he will be with you as well.

This has been a landmark year for Shanley and for your class. Most of you travelled to Washington DC this past January for the March for Life, and you were chosen to lead the March by carrying the banner. I was honored to walk with you. And one of your classmates, Julia Johnson, was chosen to speak in front of thousands at the March on the sanctity of life. Julia represented all of you, and all of us, when she rallied the crowds, and everyone knows that her talk was the best one of the day. Julia made a big impression that day, but I would suggest that each one of you is capable of making just as big a mark as she did. Not many of us get a chance to speak out as she did in front of huge crowds of people, but we all have a chance, you all have a chance to make just as big a contribution to our world. Every one of you has an opportunity to be an apostle, a co-worker with Jesus in the world. You have an opportunity to bring God's Kingdom a little closer to its full reality.

My friends, I dare you to be saints. I dare you to be men and women of great goodness, great holiness, great courage. Don't settle for mediocrity, but strive for greatness, aim for heaven. And when I say you should be saints, I don't mean like the holy cards that we've all seen, or the stories of saints from past centuries. I mean you should be saints now for our times, witnesses now of the goodness of God, witnesses of the truth that God has revealed to us in Christ. I guarantee you that somewhere along the way, someone will try to convince you that truth is an illusion, that there is no such thing as truth, that it's all relative. But Jesus thinks otherwise. He says to the Father, "Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth." I don't think our Lord was confused. He knows that we become holy, we become saints by living in his truth, the truth he gave us. So, be men and women of truth.

And the kind of saints I'm talking about aren't sad and gloomy. St. Teresa said, "Lord save us from sour-faced saints." I want you to be men and women of joy. I can honestly tell you that the most joyful people I know are people of great holiness. They know what really matters, they give of themselves, they are compassionate, they are one with the Lord. Jesus himself said, "I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely." He offers us his complete joy. The world claims to make things nice for us, and sometimes it does. The world is a great place in many ways, but only God can give us true and lasting joy. And the world needs that authentic joy, the joy of those who know Christ and are rooted in him. Friends, you can be the instruments of that joy, the joyful witnesses and missionaries that Jesus wants to send out into a challenging world. So, be men and women of joy.

Each one of you has a calling from our Lord, a call to holiness, a call to sainthood. It might be to marriage, to parenthood, to being a teacher, a doctor, an engineer, a carpenter, maybe even a priest or a sister. Whatever that calling is, let it be with Christ at your side, and you will touch countless souls in the world. Pope Francis said at World Youth Day, "Dear young friends, Jesus Christ is counting on you! The Church is counting on you! The Pope is counting on you!" We are counting on you too, and we send you out today with our love and our prayers. Congratulations on this day of your graduation, and with the words of St. Paul, I can say: "I commend you to God and to that gracious word of his that can build you up and give you the inheritance among all who are consecrated." So once again, I dare you to be saints. Be men and women of truth. Be men and women of joy. Aim for heaven, and take as many people with you as you can!