

Do not hide 'the light of faith,' rather share for all to see

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

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*All Schools Mass, Catholic Schools Week
Shanley High School
Fargo, ND*

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to be with you and celebrate Mass for Catholic Schools week. It's good to have all of you together from Holy Spirit, Nativity, St. Joseph's and Shanley-Sullivan. I also want to congratulate the team from Shanley that won the Know Your Faith competition again this year in Dickinson, for the third year in a row.

What a blessing it is to be here, and how fortunate we are to have this opportunity. In the early days of the Church, this kind of gathering would not have been possible. To openly show one's Christian faith was very risky, and might even lead to imprisonment or death. Those were the days of the Roman Empire, and it became law that every person must worship the emperor as a god. On certain days, everyone came to make a sacrificial offering before an image of the emperor. You got a certificate of good standing, and then you could go to worship any other god you wanted.

But many Christians refused to do this, and they died rather than hide or compromise their Christian faith. They could easily have concealed their Christian identities and gone on believing in Jesus privately with no trouble at all. But they knew their faith in Christ could not be hidden. It had to be witnessed in the presence of others, and even shared! They knew they could not take the light of faith and hide it like a lamp under a basket. They needed to make this light visible, to make it known to others. After all, as Jesus tells us in today's gospel, a lamp is not to be hidden but placed for all to see. And the same is true of our faith in Christ.

Even today, many of our brothers and sisters around the world face the very same dangers that those early Christians faced. In many parts of the world, people are prevented from worshiping God and learning about Jesus, our Savior. Or they suffer just like those early Christians did. Here in this country, it's hard to imagine, but many people pay a steep price to even admit that they believe in Christ.

Jesus has given us a gift, and he wants it to be shared freely with others. He has kindled a light, a fire within us, and he wants others to share in that light, and the warmth of that fire. So, out of gratitude for this gift, we do not hoard or hide that light. It is meant to be seen and known, and we are called upon to make it visible. I was incredibly proud of the witness of our students from Shanley who travelled to Washington last week. You were like that lamp that gives light, that isn't hidden but gives light to others. You were showing to the world the light of God's love for all human life. And Julia Johnson, who spoke so powerfully to the crowd, was doing just what the first reading tells us to do: she roused us to love and good works in the cause of life. Jesus has asked us to be his lamps, his missionaries, the ones he can send into the world who will make him known to others. And we shouldn't be stingy with this gift. As Jesus says, "The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you." In other words, as you give so you will receive, and as you have received so you should give.

Each one of us here, from kindergartners to seniors, teachers, parents, grandparents and priests, each one of us must be like a lamp of faith for others. Don't be afraid to show others that you believe in God, that you love Jesus, and that you love your neighbor. I'm sure you challenge each other to do your best in sports and other activities; challenge each other to virtue and goodness too. You work hard at your studies to get good grades; work hard at kindness and charity too. And why is this so important? Because God has made us for heaven, he has made us to be saints. I'm sure every one of us here wants to eventually be with God in heaven. Well that starts now. If we want to be with God in heaven, then we must be with him here on earth, we must be the saints that he has created us to be. And part of being a saint is to live our faith joyfully and openly, to share with others the gift that we have received.

Last year, Pope Francis spoke to millions of young people at World Youth Day in Brazil, and he said, "You too, dear young people, can be joyful witnesses of Christ's love, courageous witnesses of his Gospel, carrying to this world a ray of his light.... Dear young friends, Jesus Christ is counting on you! The Church is counting on you! The Pope is counting on you! Go and make disciples of all nations!" During this Catholic Schools week, let's be sure to thank God for the education we're receiving. Let's thank him for the gift of his love and the gift of faith, and let's share that gift with others. God bless you, and I'm praying for you.