

## **Reflect on what has been accomplished, what more remains**

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

*October 12, 2014*

*Mass celebrating 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of St. Benedict parish  
St. Benedict's Catholic Church  
Wild Rice, ND*

I'm very happy to be here at St. Benedict's once again, and I'm especially happy to be with you as you conclude the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of your church, I believe the third for this parish. It's a great blessing to be able to celebrate this anniversary, because anniversaries give us a chance to reflect on all that has gone before and to consider things yet to come. They allow us to stop and to be grateful. They help us to remember things that perhaps we haven't thought about for a long time, the joys and the challenges, the successes and the failures. We do this in our personal lives after 25, 50, or 60 years. But how much more appropriate it is that we should make this same kind of reflection in a parish church after 100 years.

No doubt this anniversary brings forth a spirit of gratitude. After all, we've been invited to the wedding feast, and not just a little reception, but a feast that the King himself has invited us to! How many baptisms, how many confirmations, how many weddings have been celebrated here? And even more, how many Masses and how many Confessions have there been? Thousands, tens of thousands! For 100 years, the Eucharist has been celebrated in this Church, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has been re-presented for us day in and day out, year in and year out, drawing us into the marvels of the our Lord's paschal mystery, his work of salvation. And during this time, your good pastors all the way back to Fr. Bernier and now up to the time of Fr. Kadlec, have also celebrated the healing sacrament of Reconciliation, and the faithful of this parish have had an opportunity to come to the Lord and to seek his mercy and forgiveness. As Isaiah tells us, the Lord has wiped away tears from every face, and taken away our reproach. What a remarkable thing to consider that God has been at work in this place over all these years and has touched the lives of so many people, even before any of us were around to remember! How many young people were taught the faith through religious instruction in this parish? And how many of you present today were formed in the faith here at St. Benedict's!

Of course, this parish and church didn't appear out of thin air. They are the result of the great faith of our ancestors who first came to the Red River Valley, who braved the challenges of weather, economy, and every hardship. These courageous and faithful souls endured and sacrificed much in order to settle this area, and they brought with them the great treasure of their faith, which moved them to build this church where that faith could be cherished, strengthened, and passed along.

In my brief time of just over a year as bishop, I have enjoyed reading and hearing the stories of those early settlers who can only be described as heroic. They sacrificed so much to build their own homes, but they didn't forget a home for the Lord. Besides their own dwelling places, they realized the need for a dwelling for the Lord as well. They had the wisdom to recognize that all their efforts and sacrifices would be for naught if they did not also make a place for Christ in their lives. So this Church of St. Benedict is truly built on the faith of many generations, certainly that oldest generation who were the founders, but this generation too, those

who continue to make this parish their spiritual home, and who see in this parish the family that God has called together here and now.

But anniversaries aren't merely occasions to look back, to rest on our laurels. They also lead us to look forward, and to bring the zeal, the love, the commitment of a past moment into the present so it might continue with renewed dedication and enthusiasm. An anniversary like this is an opportunity to reflect on what has gone well and also what remains to be done. More than ever, as our society and culture become more secularized, there is a need for a holy place such as this, where the faithful can come to pray and worship, and where the faith can flourish and grow. Our young people need to know Christ in their lives, so they too can enter into the glorious history of those who have been parishioners here and who have gone from here into the world. And of course, there is a great multitude of our brothers and sisters all around us who know nothing of our Lord and who crave the love of God and knowledge of his truth.

The mission of this parish must not only be directed to those we know and already serve, but it must also include the multitude of our neighbors who do not have or have not accepted a relationship with Christ and his Church. In that sense, this must be an evangelizing parish, just as our Church must be an evangelizing Church. It is part of who we are as followers of Jesus Christ! As we celebrate, let us ask ourselves, how have we done in going out to others and sharing the good news? Pope Francis repeats this challenge often. The Church cannot keep to itself, close itself in. The Church must always have an outward view and be ready to extend the reach of Christ to everyone in our local areas. As Jesus says in the Gospel parable, "Go out into the main roads, and invite to the feast whomever you find." Our Lord is asking us to not only heed his invitation ourselves, but to extend it to others too. We are like the servants that the king sent out to invite his people. And this outward movement starts with your own witness, your own living of the faith. Our neighbors first learn about our faith by learning about us! They see our faith lived by observing us! And the way we live out our Catholic faith can be decisive in the effect that our parish has on others in this community.

We have ascended this mountain of the Lord, and already tasted of the banquet that Jesus has spread before us. And now, by our witness of faith, we have an opportunity to lead others to that same mountain, to the wedding feast that he has prepared. Your example as members and sharers in the life of this parish may be the first and only Gospel that your friends and neighbors will ever see. And by your love for Christ and fidelity to his Church, you will declare to others that this faith of ours is a joyful and beloved faith, and we truly could not live without it.

As we think of the past 100 years, no doubt we are also thinking of the years to come. I know many here are wondering about the future of your parish and this church in particular. Last year, I had the opportunity to meet with your pastor and your building committee, and I've also spoken with many others who have some insights into the future of this area, including some local officials. I'm not able to make any promises yet, but I can tell you that I hope your parish site can stay right where it is. It seems very likely that there will be considerable growth in this area in the years to come, so you might have to make some changes to welcome in those who are invited to our Lord's feast. As I said, I can't tell you this is a final decision because there are still some uncertainties in the landscape, but my hope is that St. Benedict's will be able to grow right here. And that's the key: not only to rejoice in the past 100 years, but to move forward into the next 100, and to open wide the doors so that many others can enter in and enjoy the Lord's feast as you and the past generations have. I look forward to walking that journey with you.