

**“He’ll remain with you, if you remain with him”**

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

*May 21, 2014*

*Fifth Wednesday of Easter  
Shanley High School Baccalaureate Mass  
Holy Spirit Catholic Church  
Fargo, ND*

“I am the vine, you are the branches.” “Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”

Dear friends, and dear graduates, I know this is a day of great happiness, and I’m honored to be a part of it. I’m sure many people here are filled with satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment: the parents, the teachers, the administrators, but especially you, the students, those who are graduating today. You’ve done it, you’ve completed your work, and now you get to move on. Now you get to start a new chapter, set off on a new road. It’s a day of excitement.

But perhaps it’s also a day of some apprehension, filled with questions about the future. I have no doubt that every one of you who are graduating today is looking for the way to go forward, the right way, the way that you are meant to travel. And to each one of you, I can say with complete confidence: Jesus is that way. He is your way forward, he is your guide, he is your sure thing.

Of course, you’re thinking about college, about majors, about jobs, about future plans. Maybe you’re thinking about travel too, about friends, about vacations. These things are great, enjoy them, but they can change, they can come and go, and yet Jesus stays the same. He is our one sure thing. If you remain in him, if you walk with him, come what may, you will be on solid ground, and all will be well, not just for tomorrow or ten years from now, but into eternity. “Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”

And how do we do this, how do we “remain in him?” How do we bear the fruit that Jesus speaks of? Well, if Jesus says, “without me you can do nothing,” then we had better make sure that we’re never far from Jesus! There will be many other things and attractions out there that will compete for your attention, that will try to win you over, or even draw you away from Christ. But make sure that Jesus keeps his place within you and isn’t pushed aside. Pray! Pray often, pray every day. You’ll need it, we all do. There’s nothing childish or immature about prayer, it’s just spending time with God, talking to the one who knows you better than your best friend, listening to what he has to say, or just sitting in his presence, like we do with someone we love. Prayer is actually quite realistic, because it acknowledges that I did not create myself, and despite my best efforts, I am not in complete control of my life or my eternal destiny. I am not alone; he is with me. So make time each day for our Lord, even if it’s only for a few moments, and you won’t lose him. He’ll remain with you, if you remain with him. I know you have many plans, and many hopes, and maybe a few fears too. Pope Francis said to the young people

gathered in Brazil last summer, “Do not be afraid... Jesus never leaves anyone alone. He always accompanies us.” Let us accompany him too, let us remain with him and in him, so that like branches on the vine we can thrive and grow and bear abundant fruit.

And what is that abundant fruit that our Lord speaks of, that we are supposed to bring forth? I think you already know, because you already know what it means to be a Deacon. A deacon is a servant, one who serves others, one who gives of himself, one who thinks of others and does whatever needs to be done. This isn't some kind of involuntary servitude or slavery; it's a willingness to give your best, the best of what you have and the best of what you are. If you are living out the deacon spirit, then you are already bearing the abundant fruit that Jesus speaks of. Wherever you are headed, whether it's to college, or to a job, or to the military, to family life, to religious life, look for new opportunities to be of service to others. And why not start with the Church? Be active members of the Church. The Church needs you. It's your spiritual home, it's where you belong. Search out the parish where you can meet Christ in the sacraments, where you can give of yourself and be a part of the mission that Jesus gave all his followers. Be an apostle, be a missionary wherever you are, and invite others to experience the same gift of faith that has been given to us. You each have a part to play in the life of the Church.

Pope Francis said to the young people in Rio last summer: “Dear young people, please, don't be observers of life, but get involved. Jesus did not remain an observer, but he immersed himself. Don't be observers, but immerse yourself in the reality of life, as Jesus did.” Jesus made himself a servant, and he calls upon us to do the same. Let your life be a life for others, and I assure you that you'll find happiness. Years ago, I heard a saying that stuck with me: “What I kept for myself I have lost, but what I have given is mine forever.” Those words were actually engraved on someone's tombstone, and maybe that seems morbid on an occasion like this, but I think it reflects pretty well this idea of service and self-giving. When all is said and done, we will be known more by what we have given of ourselves than by what we have kept. A deacon serves, and gives, and bears fruit that will last, and I hope you will always hang onto that deacon spirit.

My friends, whatever service you give, whatever you give of yourself, will not only enrich those around you. It will make you rich as well. And in being of service to others, you will indeed remain in Christ, like branches on the vine, living, growing, and fruitful. I know I've only been your bishop for a short time, but I can tell you honestly that I'm proud of you, I'm proud of what you've accomplished, and I look forward to hearing more of the great things you will do. When your school patron, St. John Paul II, visited St. Louis, he said to the young people there, “Remember, Christ is calling you; the Church needs you; the Pope believes in you and he expects great things of you!” With all my heart, I believe in you too, and I expect great things of you, and I'm praying for you. God bless you.