



***Holy Mass Commemorating the 125th Anniversary
of the Diocese of Sioux Falls***

The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain

Bishop of Sioux Falls

Celebrated at Saint Paul Church

Marty, SD

July 12, 2015

Memorial of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (observed)

We come together today as a continuation of our celebration of the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Diocese of Sioux Falls. We come together especially to acknowledge the important presence and influence Native peoples have had and continue to have in our state and the Church, an influence under-appreciated and under acknowledged.

We do so humbly recognizing that the Native peoples were here long before Benedictine Monk Martin Marty came as a loving missionary to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. He encountered a spirituality that enhanced his own. It includes the recognition that man-made boundaries and barriers close us in and divide us from one another, that we are to be respectful of God's Creation which we hold only in trust for future generations, that family relationships as children of God are more important than short-term personal or economic advantage, and that the land, the sky, the horizon and more teach us and offer us perspective.

As we look back on our shared history, we do so with joy but also with sadness. Pope Francis only a few days ago in Bolivia noted¹,

I say this to you with regret: Many grave sins were committed against the native peoples of America in the name of God. Like Saint John Paul II, I ask that the Church 'kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters.'

Like Saint John Paul II and Pope Francis, I too ask the local church of Sioux Falls to kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters, including me.

He went on to say that it is also important to remember the many bishops, priests and laity who stood beside the native peoples and "strongly opposed the logic of the sword with the power of the cross¹." One who did so was Bishop Martin Marty. One who did so was Father Sylvester Eisenmann, OSB, long-time pastor here in Marty.

We come together also in thanksgiving for the many Native persons who answered the call of Christ and for their witness of faith. This beautiful Church building dedicated to Saint Paul is visible icon of their witness. We especially raise-up the mothers and grandmothers who have kept faith in Christ alive from generation to generation.

We also come together in thanksgiving for the sacrificial ministry of the religious, especially the Benedictine women and men who followed in Bishop Marty's path, the Sacred Heart Fathers and Brothers, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, the Franciscans, the Presentation Sisters and others. I especially want to acknowledge with awe and admiration the continuing beautiful ministry of the Oblate Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament inspired by Saint Katherine Drexel, and the Benedictines at Fort Thompson who are Christ to those in need 24-hours a day.

May I also acknowledge the ministry of those Native Americans who have assumed among in leadership roles in our diocesan family. We especially remember Deacon Ed Zephier, the first Native deacon in our diocese with whom I was privileged to pray at his home only days before his death. How powerful has been the gentle ministry and in personal witness of Deacon Bud and the ever-gracious and upbeat Frances Jetty who served the diocese as Directors of Native American ministry for so many years and who in retirement continue to offer moving and thought provoking prayers which touch both the heart and the raw reality of life. Your prayers are spiritual food and teaching moments for me. I am grateful for Deacon Chet and Colleen Cordell who have picked up the Jetty's mantle so well. After Mass, Deacon Steve McLaughlin will offer some personal thoughts for us. We are grateful for his ministry with the support of his wife, Marlene, in two dioceses, and especially at Fort Thompson.

We remember our history and we learn from it, but we also know that we are creating history ourselves. We cannot ignore today's reality where racism, poverty, addiction, hunger, housing and health care are issues of life, especially on the reservations; that the most impoverished counties in our country are here in South Dakota is a badge of sadness and embarrassment. This is much too heavy a topic for a homily on this occasion or within the powers of a diocese alone to address, but it also must not be ignored by our nation. What the Church can be in the midst of this reality is what she has always been, a sign of hope which it is reflected in all of you who declare by your lives that our hope is in the Lord.

Today we also remember Saint Kateri Tekawitha, Lily of the Mohawks, Lily of us all. Saints were saints before they were publicly recognized as such by the Church. They are raised up as signs of hope, as models of faithfulness, as teachers of Christian living and as intercessors on our behalf. What can we learn from Saint Kateri?

One of the most important lessons that I think we can take from the life of Saint Kateri is her model of faithfulness having persevered in the midst of misunderstanding, hostility and personal suffering, exercising her innate right of religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

I am grateful to those who have made widely available the Novena in Honor of Saint Kateri Tekawitha and for adding a South Dakota flavor to it through intercessory prayer. I prayed it in anticipation of today. This litany teaches us nine guides toward holiness which Saint Kateri modeled and encourages:

1. Love of Jesus
2. Love of the Cross
3. Love of the Eucharist
4. Love of Humility
5. Love of Chastity
6. Love of Charity
7. Love of the Church
8. Love of Creation
9. Love of Heaven

A Native religious sister told of a special gift she received from her mother as a child. She was crying for no reason she knew. Her mother asked her “what’s the matter?” “Nothing, leave me alone,” was the response. Her mother did, and she recalled, “Then I really started crying”. Later her mother said to her, “there are going to be many times in your life when you will cry and won’t know why. You won’t understand and neither will anybody else. I am going to teach you a prayer for the times you are crying and don’t know why.” She told her to stand up and said put your hands around your body like you would hold a baby in your arms. “Then close your eyes and rock yourself real good, the way you would a baby. As you do so remember you are God’s little girl and that God understands why you are crying. And remember too that God holds you close just the way you are holding yourself because God loves you very much. Then just keep rocking yourself and be comforted.” A very beautiful thought of reassurance: God loves us all very much.

Let me close with this prayer many have prayed:

God of all nations and peoples, you have filled your creation with your mighty presence. Through your handiwork you speak to our hearts words that satisfy our every desire.

You have called us to embrace the Gospel of your Son Jesus Christ, to do your will, and to serve others with the gifts you have given.

O Saint Kateri, Lily of the Mohawks, your love for Jesus so strong, so steadfast, grant that we may become like you.

Your short and painful life showed us your strength and humility. Grant that we may become forever humble like you.

Like the bright and shining stars at night, we pray that your light may forever shine down upon us, giving light, hope, peacefulness, and serenity in our darkest moments.

Fill our hearts, Saint Kateri Tekawitha with your same love for Jesus, and grant us your strength to become one like you in heaven.

May you who held tight to the cross of God’s only begotten Son, throughout your short life marked by sickness, suffering and persecution, be our intercessor during our own trials.

May your embrace of the Catholic faith and your openness to sharing Jesus with others, inspire us to be new evangelizers to all cultures and peoples.

May you who sought out Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament lead us to similar reverence for the Eucharist, so that like you, our last words may also be, ‘Jesus, I love you.’

Commemorating the 125th Anniversary of the Diocese of Sioux Falls
Celebrating the Contributions of Native Americans
July 12, 2015

We ask for your intercession to Grandfather above, that He may instill in us and our relatives the leadership, courage, and strength needed to step forward and use the light of Christ within each of us, to shine on the path of salvation for all Native peoples to see and to follow. Amen”

Saint Kateri Tekawitha, pray for us that we might love Jesus as you love him and as he has loved us.

¹ – Pope Francis, Address to the Second World Meeting of the Popular Movements, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, July 9, 2015