

July 21, 2021

St. Augustine Cathedral

2:00 p.m.

Mass of Thanksgiving for the 50th Anniversary of the Diocese of Kalamazoo

(Ez.47:1-2,8-9,12; 1 Peter 2:4-9; Mt.28:16-20)

My Brother Bishops, Priests, Deacons, Consecrated Women and Men, Family Members, Parish Representatives, Honored Community Leaders,---all of us, Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

What a joy it is to celebrate this festive Jubilee Mass with you here in our beautiful, newly renovated Cathedral of St. Augustine! Today, we turn 50 years young! Along with our “sister Diocese” of Gaylord who just “turned 50” yesterday, as I mentioned at the beginning of our Celebration, that means that we have the distinction of being the youngest Diocese in the Province of Michigan by one day. And for that matter, we are also the youngest Diocese in our Episcopal Region of Michigan/Ohio. In fact, there are only 29 other dioceses in the United States younger than we are (though there are also 12 Eparchies younger than we are).

Now you might find this hard to believe, but this Diocesan Church, which I have come love and cherish over the 12 years I have been privileged to be your Bishop, is the same age as I am----at least in the number of years that I’ve been ordained a priest.

However, it’s important to remind ourselves that our treasured Catholic Faith has been vibrant, growing, and long-standing here in this territory of our Diocese since the French Jesuits landed at St. Joseph in Berrien County in 1679. And over those 342 years, this territory has been a part of the Diocese of Baltimore, Bardstown (which eventually became Cincinnati), Detroit, and most recently parts of Grand Rapids and Lansing.

So, in some ways of looking at “time”, compared to most other Dioceses, our Diocese might be compared to having completed our “adolescent years”, and will now begin growing into the “young adult” part of our Ecclesial Life.

On this, our 50th Birthday, before I actually begin my Homily, there are a number of people I would like to recognize. First of all, my 3 predecessors--- Bishop Paul Donovan our founding bishop, Bishop Alfred Markiewicz, and Bishop James Murray. I want to particularly express my appreciation to a number of Bishop Donovan's family members who are here with us today, and a special greeting to his dear sister, Sister Maureen living in Bay City who told us she intends to participate virtually. Thank you, Sr. Maureen. Would those members of Bishop Donovan's family who are here please stand so we can see you, and thank you?

I also want to thank the hundreds of dedicated priests, deacons, and consecrated women and men who have poured themselves out in pastoral, educational, catechetical, charitable and health-related ministries over these 50 years. And a heartfelt word of thanks and admiration to all my brother priests, deacons and consecrated religious who are here with us today.

Because the Sisters of St. Joseph have been so instrumental and have contributed so much to the life and spiritual well-being of our Diocese over these 50 years (and many decades before that) in our Schools and Catholic Hospital in particular, I would like to ask those members of the Sisters of St. Joseph here with us today to please stand so we can thank you as well. (*To the camera:* And to those Sisters with us virtually, thank you as well!)

I also want to acknowledge Msgr. Michael Hazard, one of our two Vicars General, who has the distinction of being the first priest to be ordained for the Diocese of Kalamazoo in 1971. (Msgr. Hazard, please stand....) And, would all of you who were present 50 years ago here in this Cathedral for the Mass of Establishment of our Diocese please stand.....

Finally, I also thank the thousands of lay faithful Catholics who have lived, and handed on the faith, to each succeeding generation since 1679, and especially since 1971. Our Diocese has benefited from the rich diversity of so many cultures. First of all, we are grateful for the contributions of those Native Americans who were here in those very early years, namely the Pottawatami Nation, and who embraced the Catholic Faith in exemplary ways, personified in the leadership of the great Chief Pokagon, as well as by those who came to this country from Europe, from Mexico and other Central and South American countries, and most

recently from Viet Nam and Myanmar. Today, I am very pleased to welcome to our Cathedral lay representatives of all of our Faithful who are with us today from all over our Diocese.

In other words, I thank God for all of you---for everyone who has spent the past five decades building up the Kingdom of God here in our nine counties of southwest Michigan, and who profess Faith in our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

A “50th Anniversary”, whether for a married couple, a priest’s ordination, or for a Diocese, means that we can’t help but reminisce---that we take time to remember where we’ve come from---because we have a rich history that deserves to be recalled and celebrated. But from my perspective, this particular Jubilee celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Diocese of Kalamazoo is much more than a sentimental look backward. As Disciples of Jesus, our Risen Lord, our primary focus must always be on the present and what the Lord is calling us to do in the future.

That’s what the Risen Jesus, having completed His saving mission in this World and now ready to Ascend back to Heaven, was making clear to His eleven disciples in the Gospel passage we heard just a few minutes ago. He entrusted them with a sacred mission: *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*

Through our Baptism, in which we all share, we have been incorporated into the Body of Christ, and thereby, Jesus has given us also a share in that very same sacred mission—to be His “holy people” living in this world; to “be Christ” to everyone we encounter in southwest Michigan and beyond. Along with living our lives according to the Ten Commandments, and the Beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has summed up into what we know as the “Two Great Commandments” the way that we can most clearly give evidence that we are God’s “holy people”, both in our words and in our actions, by: loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and by loving our neighbor as Jesus loves us.

And that is the same mission we are given each and every time we receive the Holy Eucharist. The reason we can be confident in being able to embrace this sacred and challenging mission Jesus gives to us is because we know we are not

alone. That is what Jesus told His disciples, even as He was ascending into Heaven, *“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”* And the most amazing way Jesus has decided to “remain with us” is by being really, truly, substantially, and sacramentally Present with us in the Holy Eucharist.

I imagine that every generation feels this way, but I truly believe that the mission we have received from Our Lord Jesus Christ is more important now than ever. We are living in a very turbulent period of history. The culture and society have changed significantly since the 1970’s when our Diocese was established, with a very dramatic impact on the “practice of Faith” among our Society. And then, of course, there was the global pandemic which has challenged us all to rethink our values and priorities, and made us face our vulnerability.

The Promises that we all made on the day of our Baptisms commit us to believe in God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and to live according to the teachings of the Church, and the moral principles that flow from those tenets. We are called to live our lives in a way that proclaims the Good News of God’s Love to all the world; to live lives of holiness and virtue; to protect and defend the precious gift of Life; to care about one another and to serve the needs of the poor and marginalized; to be concerned about our world and the environment; to see all people as Jesus sees them, to work for justice and peace, and an end to violence and hatred. That means that when we take our Faith seriously, we are pretty much guaranteed to be in regular conflict with the values of the world around us.

What Jesus asks us to do in His Name is definitely as much of a challenge now in our day and time as it was for the Apostles, for the French Jesuits who came to this New Land, or for those who helped to form this new Diocese 50 years ago. Jesus is faithful to His Promise---He remains with us always!

The Eucharist that we celebrate today, and that we will receive in Holy Communion, is Jesus Himself. This Blessed Sacrament is the amazing Gift Jesus gives to us of Himself to be our Spiritual Food, both to renew and sustain us as the Body of Christ here in our Diocese, as well as to reignite the “Flame of Faith” within us so that we can bring the Love of Jesus Christ to all.

We must allow the reception of the Holy Eucharist to change us—both individually and as a Diocese; we need to allow the Eucharist to help us to be more like Jesus in what we say, what we do, how we make choices, and the ways we live. As we enter into communion with Jesus, as we become one with Him, we are then able to live out our mission as the Body of Christ. Our hands become His Hands on Earth; our Feet, His Feet; our ears become attuned to the cries of the poor; our actions continue Jesus' Acts of love, mercy, healing and reconciliation. We then can be transformed, as members of His Body, to **be** the very Eucharist we have received.

In this Jubilee Mass, we honor all those who have lived the Faith before us, and who have given of themselves so generously to the parishes, schools, through our health-care ministries, our social services and through Catholic Charities in our Diocese for the past 50 years.

That's what St. Peter was reminding us of in today's Second Reading when he described us as the "living stones" that make up the Body of Christ. While we come together here today in this beautiful Cathedral, or more regularly in our own parish churches, it is we---the clergy and faithful---the women and men of all ages, in all walks of life, of all races and backgrounds---we are the Church--- "the living stones" here in southwest Michigan---the vibrant Body of Christ.

We also heard that same message in today's First Reading from the Prophet Ezekiel. We must not only be "living stones", but also like the life-giving "*waters that flow from the sanctuary (which) become like a river. Wherever it flows, life flourishes and the world is renewed....Their fruit is used for food, and their leaves for healing.*"

As we move into our next 50 years as a Local Church, our mission is to enrich and help to transform the world in which we live by sharing the love of Christ with our neighbors. The only way for us to accomplish this bold mission is if we are "alive" with the Holy Spirit, and ready to allow the Spirit to set our hearts on fire with love for Jesus and for continuing to build up God's Kingdom here in this part of our world. This means that we must look to the Holy Spirit to lead us boldly and confidently into wherever He leads us in the future as the Diocese of Kalamazoo.

Because of the essential role that the Holy Spirit already has in guiding the Church throughout these more than 2,000 years, and in light of the challenges we

encounter as a Diocese (as does every Diocese throughout the Church) in carrying out our mission into the future, I am very pleased to announce today that on August 28th, the Feast of our Diocesan Patron, the great St. Augustine, I will launch a special **Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit** to be observed in all the parishes here in our Diocese of Kalamazoo throughout these next nine months, to culminate on the Solemnity of Pentecost 2022. More information will be available about this in the coming weeks, but it is my profound hope that this special observance of a **Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit**, flowing directly from the Year of the Eucharist we just completed, will enflame our hearts and souls with a fervent desire to be faithful to the call we heard Jesus give us once again in today's Gospel: *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."*

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, as we continue celebrating this joyful Mass, in grateful thanksgiving for all that has been throughout the past 50 years, and in confident hope that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit will make us courageous and bold in living our mission for the next 50 years and beyond, let us ask, in this Year of St. Joseph, for the special protection of St. Joseph, the Universal Patron of the Church; let us also turn again and again to the maternal intercession of our Blessed Mother and ask her to teach us how to say, and mean: "Let it be done to me/to us as You say". And let us continue to be inspired by the life and teachings of our Diocesan Patron, the great St. Augustine, who reminds us that "our hearts will always be restless until we find our rest in Jesus".

May our Lord Jesus Christ, who remains truly and always present with us in the Holy Eucharist, help us to remain always confident and filled with Hope in His Promise: *"I am with you always, even unto the end of the age."*