



**Mass of Thanksgiving Homily
Celebrated on the 5th Anniversary of
Episcopal Ordination
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
October 26, 2011
Cathedral of St. Joseph**

There is the old saying that the more things change the more they stay the same. There is a kernel of truth in that.

Last night I watched the DVD of my ordination five years ago today. My first reaction was: what happened to that young man.

My next thought was how much has changed over those years. It was with some sadness that I noticed so many who shared that day who are now gone – my mother, my brother, my best friend, the papal nuncio, two bishop friends, numbers of priests, Jeremiah Murphy, Sister Martin Mergen among others. I am blessed they were part of my life and they still are. They remind us that we live in a world that is passing. I pray for their souls at this Mass.

Then I decided I was getting a bit maudlin and that I should consider all the blessings that have been part of my life these years. They include all of you, the priests, deacons, sisters, lay faithful, Chancery staff, the tens of thousands of people who I have met; the dozens of egg bake recipes that I have tried, the thousands of young people I have confirmed, the sixteen priests I have ordained, the seminarians with whom I have journeyed to discover God's will, the two pheasants I allegedly shot, the several hundred thousand miles I have traveled safely, the seasonal beauty of the prairie, the spiritual beauty of the prairie, the children who have entertained and enlightened and offer such hope. I especially remember one little boy who when I asked if they had any questions raised his hands and said simply, "I love you." Don't we all like to hear that, need to hear that once in awhile? Tell it to those you love before they are gone. Let us remind ourselves each day that God is love and he loves you and me. The depth and breadth of that love is powerfully reflected in that crucifix and will be present body and blood, soul divinity in a few minutes on that altar.

I have often joked that I am amazed that so many people know what a bishop should do or say yet I so often don't have a clue. God has filled these years with surprises. That is why I have to spend so much

time in chapel. All I wanted when God gave me a second chance through my conversion to the Church was to be a parish priest. I still do. That surely was and is a selfish thought, for what we all should want is that God's will also be my will.

Anniversaries tend to focus on accomplishments but accomplishments are passing. For those things that have gone well, I give praise to the Lord. For those difficulties others have experienced because of my weaknesses and sinfulness, I ask forgiveness. Sometimes anniversaries can focus on a look to the future. We will do so in the months ahead. However, when we pause on an anniversary perhaps what we really ought to focus on is our faithfulness; how well have we returned God's love reflected in so many ways. As St. Paul put it to the Romans in our first reading, "all things work to the good for those who love God." In terms of faithfulness I have work yet to do.

In the Gospel reading Jesus is asked who can be saved, and his response is a call to action: "strive to enter through the narrow gate" he said, not just enter because we want to, but rather "strive" to enter which suggests it is not easy or certain. Christian discipleship is an on-going struggle, a daily battle with our human limitedness, with the lure of false gods in the secular culture and the tantalizing pull of the evil one for us to stop striving. It is through the church Christ instituted that we can receive the grace to keep striving, to keep struggling, to keep faithful.

Friday I leave on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Rome where I will pray in thanksgiving for all God has offered me, including being your bishop. Certainly the Holy Land offers a sense of history and a deeper understanding of Sacred Scripture. Rome offers a sense of continuity and unity around Peter and his successors. But most importantly they offer perspective. The places we will visit where Jesus walked are not the same as when he did so. The Rome of Pope Benedict XVI is different from the Rome of St. Peter. Change is always with us though not always easy for us. And that is true here at home. Through it we are called to remain faithful.

One great truth of our faith is that it is about the person Jesus Christ and not about buildings or places though they can point us to Him. He does not change; He as Scripture puts it is the same yesterday, today and forever. The great consolation of our faith is that the paschal mystery lived by our Lord and passed on through his Church serves as a model for us – out of suffering and death comes life, out of darkness comes light. I am confident this will be true in our planning process though not without struggle; it will be true with the new Roman Missal though not without awkward adjustments, it is already true in the Cathedral restoration; it is true in the unpredictable variables of weather and the economy; and it can be true in our personal lives as tough as they may be sometimes. The truth is that there is always new life in Christ if we remain faithful. I have experienced that new life here in the Diocese of Sioux Falls for which I thank God

and each of you. Five years ago I was a Wisconsinite relocating. Today I am a South Dakotan through and through. What could have been more unexpected; what could have been better?

People have asked me: what is the most significant moment in my five years as bishop. There are so many special ones. But the most significant moment was when I five years ago today here in the Cathedral of Saint Joseph was privileged to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the first time as Bishop of Sioux Falls. And I am humbly privileged to do so again today. The more things change the more they stay the same.

Give Praise to the Lord.