

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo
Evening Prayer – Sts. Anne & Joachim
January 28, 2018

“This is God’s dwelling among men. He shall dwell with them and they shall be his people and he shall be their God who is always with them.”

The establishment of a new parish and the building of a new church is always an occasion of joy for a diocese. And today you could say we are extending that celebration. Through the generosity of this parish and the leadership of your pastors and all your lay members, you have worked together to completely retire the debt for this great parish of Sts. Anne and Joachim. Just as a family celebrates that day when they can burn the mortgage and say that their home belongs to them, so now you can do the same. And that’s a cause for celebration and gratitude, because we always have to give thanks to God for whatever we accomplish through his Church.

In ancient Israel, Jerusalem was the holy city, the place where God dwelled among his chosen people. The Temple of Jerusalem, the holy of holies, was the abode of God, that sacred place where God made his throne and ruled over Israel. But we know that a new Israel has been established on the person of Jesus Christ. All those who believe in him, who share in his life through grace, form this new people of God, the new Israel. Jesus chose to come among us as a man, with our human nature, to be with us on earth so we might be with him in heaven. And your parish church is a foreshadowing of that new Jerusalem. We are all called to abide in Christ. He forms us as his people, as his mystical body. The Church is the bride adorned to meet her beloved husband, her spouse. And right here, in this parish church and complex, that

holy people is taking shape and getting a foretaste of the joy we are meant to have with Christ in eternity.

Every time Mass is celebrated and we receive the Eucharist, Christ comes to dwell among us, to nourish us, and to renew in us the grace of our redemption. Every time the Gospel is preached here, every time children and adults are taught, the Word of God comes to abide in our souls, to open our minds and hearts to the truth of God, which is Christ himself. Every time we come to confess our sins and hear the words of absolution, Christ is present with God's mercy, reconciling us and healing us, purifying us so we might enter into the house of God in heaven. Whenever we celebrate a wedding here, we celebrate the spousal bond of love that Christ has with his bride, the Church. Whenever we celebrate a funeral, we pray and console one another, and we commend to God a brother or sister to be welcomed into the place Christ has prepared for them in eternity. When we come together here for works of charity, we are caring for Christ among us. As he said, "Whatever you did to one of these least ones, you did for me."

A parish church should be beautiful, a sign of the heavenly dwelling of God, and your church is certainly a place of beauty. But the church is more than a building. It is the dwelling place of God here on earth, it is his family gathered around our Lord, it is the new Israel assembled and looking toward that new Jerusalem to praise and worship the One who loves us as his own. Every time we look at this church, every time I see the great steeple in the distance, I know Christ is with us.

This is certainly an occasion to celebrate a great accomplishment, but I'm sure you know the work isn't done. The mission and the work of the Church are ongoing. A building is completed, but the doors must always open outwards, we must always go out into the world, to the margins, as Pope Francis says. We must share with others what we have received, Jesus himself. We must live and give witness to the grace that he has offered to us. As the Holy Father tells us, every one of us must be a missionary disciple of Christ. We can never be satisfied until we enter into our true heavenly homeland and bring a multitude of people with us. Right after he was elected as the Successor of Peter, Pope Francis spoke to the cardinals gathered together, and he urged them to walk with Christ, to build with Christ, and to proclaim Christ. In other words, we must be one with Jesus in prayer, in the sacraments, in charity and holiness. We must walk with him and accompany him on the way that he shows us. We must also build with him and never apart from him, making sure that everything we build is actually built on the firm foundation which is Christ himself. And finally, we must proclaim Christ, we must make him known to others, and invite others to know and love him as we do. You have walked with Christ, you have certainly built with Christ, and I have no doubt you have also proclaimed Christ. The church is built, the bills are paid, thanks be to God! We have every reason to rejoice and celebrate. But the work of Christ and his Church continues, and we must always welcome others into our family.

May Saints Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary and grandparents of Jesus, pray for us and lead us always to our Lord. May they obtain for us the grace to live more fully in Christ and to abide always in his holy dwelling.