

Jesus: The source of our hope

Dear friends, soon we will celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ at Christmas. In these last days of Advent, we are filled with anticipation at the coming celebration, knowing that the birth of Jesus nearly two thousand years ago was the beginning of God's redeeming work among his people. This is a time of joy and expectation, and in my opinion, these are some of the most beautiful days in the life of the Church.

We are also approaching the conclusion of the Jubilee Year that the entire Church has been observing over the past twelve months. When he proclaimed this holy year, Pope Francis declared that its theme would be "Pilgrims of Hope." And indeed, we have been on a pilgrimage throughout this year, journeying forward towards our Lord in the hope of eternal life. In the last months before he died, Pope Francis drew our attention to the words of St. Paul, who tells us, "Hope does not disappoint." A hope that is based on Christ, that has Christ himself as its foundation, is the assurance of God's love and saving grace. Every one of us is on this pilgrimage, placing our trust in Jesus, whose life, death, and resurrection are the definitive sign of God's gift of salvation.

As part of this Jubilee Year, I designated six pilgrimage sites throughout our diocese. I have been amazed at the number of people who made a pilgrimage to one or more of these sites and received the commemorative coins to mark the completion of their journey. People often speak of making pilgrimages to famous places like the Holy Land, or Rome, or Lourdes, places that have obvious spiritual and historical significance in the life of the Church. But our pilgrimage sites around the Diocese of Fargo are just as significant for those who visit them, because Christ himself can be found in each one of these holy places. Jesus is the final goal of every pilgrimage, because in him alone do we find the fulfillment of all our hopes.

If you haven't yet made a Jubilee pilgrimage, there is still time before the conclusion of the Holy Year. The pilgrimage sites in our diocese are St. Mary's Cathedral in Fargo, St. Michael's Church in Grand Forks, St. James Basilica in Jamestown, St. Therese (Little Flower) Church in Rugby, Maryvale Retreat Center in Valley City, and the Carmel of Mary just outside of Wahpeton. The Jubilee indulgence can be obtained at these sites by reciting the Creed and praying for the intentions of the Holy Father, followed by the sacrament of Reconciliation and attendance at Mass, even at another location. The pilgrimage itself is simply a sign of our desire to seek Christ, our determination to leave behind the bondage of sin and whatever separates us from him. For those who are not physically able to make this pilgrimage because of illness or old age, you may make a spiritual pilgrimage wherever you are, spiritually journeying with our Lord and united with all those fellow pilgrims who seek him in their hearts.

Another aspect of this Jubilee Year and "pilgrimage of hope" has been the call to share this hope with others. There are many who do not know the love of God in their lives, who have no knowledge or understanding of our salvation in Jesus Christ. We can perform no greater work of charity than to share with them the gift we have received and gently introduce them to our loving Savior. Many are deprived of even the ordinary experience of human love and concern. Far too many are alone and isolated, sad or in despair. Our Lord sends us to them and asks us to offer the gift of our friendship, companionship, compassion, and a listening ear. Many others suffer from real destitution and can find no reason for hope. To all of these, and others that you might know, Jesus asks us to be emissaries of hope, assuring them that they are loved and they are not alone.

In these final days of Advent, allow me to suggest that you join in pilgrimage with two solitary figures who quietly made their way to a little town not far from Jerusalem called Bethlehem. Those two travelers were Mary and Joseph. Like us, they were also pilgrims, obeying the call of God and awaiting the coming of a child who would be the Savior of the world. Mary and Joseph were on the road at the orders of Caesar Augustus, who commanded a census of his empire. But they were actually led by the hand of God, who chose them out of all people to welcome his own Son into this world. They were probably unsure about where this whole experience would lead, and they certainly faced many obstacles along the way. But they placed their hope and trust in God, who promised that the child to be born of

Mary would be *Emmanuel*, God with us. At the conclusion of their pilgrimage, they were able to look upon the newborn child, Jesus, the One who is the source of our hope. In him we encounter the incarnate love of God, and our hope for salvation.

Dear friends, as pilgrims of hope, let us prepare to welcome Christ the Lord into our lives. And as we look upon him with wonder and awe along with Mary and Joseph, let us remember once again what Paul promised: "Hope does not disappoint." May this Advent and Christmas bring joy and hope to you and all your loved ones.