

July 21, 2017 St. Augustine Cathedral 12:10 p.m.

**46th Anniversary of Dedication of St. Augustine Cathedral/Establishment of
Diocese of Kalamazoo**

(Friday, 15th Week Readings: Ex. 11:10-12:14; Mt. 12: 1-8)

Happy Anniversary! This is an important day for us to celebrate ---- 46 Years as a Diocese. It's not because we're so old---in fact, compared to most dioceses, we're still quite young. Look at our neighboring Dioceses: Lansing is 80 years old; Grand Rapids is 135 years old; Detroit is 184 years old; Baltimore---the first Diocese in the U.S. is 228 years old. So, we're pretty young---as I sometimes like to say, we're entering our "young adult" years. I find it easy to remember that our Diocese is as old as I am years a priest. I was ordained a priest on May 1, 1971, so on July 21, 1971---the day that our Diocese was "born", I was in Pittsburgh still learning how to celebrate Mass and wear my vestments properly .

Who we are as a Diocese is so important. The Church was alive and well here in southwest Michigan for lots of years before we became a Diocese. Perhaps some of you were living here and were strong in your faith as Catholic young adults 46 years ago. But the Diocese, formed from our two parent dioceses of Grand Rapids and Lansing, and established and named as the Diocese of Kalamazoo, gave all the priests and people from July 21, 1971 forward a new identity---a sense of our unity around Bishop Donovan, our founding Bishop (who was ordained a Bishop on this same day), followed by Bishop Markiewicz, Bishop Murray, and now me. It's not the individual that matters as much as the Office---one who is a Successor to the Apostles who is charged with the privilege and grave responsibility to unite us together in our Catholic Faith as the Body of Christ, alive and well here in these 9 counties of southwest Michigan.

Our Diocese is integrally connected with all the other Dioceses in the United States, and the rest of the world, to make up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, in union with Peter, who is known to us as our Holy Father, Pope Francis. That's why the Anniversary of our Diocese is such an important day for all of us. I have no purpose as Bishop of our Diocese apart from you as the Church; and the same applies to you, apart from me as the Bishop.

Today's Scripture Readings are the Readings of Friday of the 15th Week of the Year---the Readings of the Day, but they are so very appropriate for our celebration today:

In today's First Reading from the Book of Exodus, we hear about the first Passover, and the powerful significance it has----what that meant to the People of Israel, and what that means from that day forward. The people were told to eat that Passover meal with "their loins girt", or as we might say today, "on your tiptoes", ready to respond to the Lord's call immediately. They were also told to slaughter the lamb and paint their doorposts with the Blood of the Lamb, which foreshadowed the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Who gave His Body and poured out His Blood for the salvation of the world. The Passover is the foreshadowing of the powerful celebration of the Passover the Lord Jesus that we celebrate here at every Holy Eucharist, as we continue on with the suffering, death and Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

In today's Gospel passage, we see Jesus dealing with a conflict over the rules regarding restrictions on the Sabbath. Jesus reveals Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath----and He tells us very clearly, quoting the Prophet Hosea: "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice", the importance of reflecting the very essence of God's nature: Love and Mercy.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis has helped us to appreciate Mercy in new and more vibrant ways, both through the Holy Year that he recently called the entire Church to observe, as well as through his beautiful Apostolic Letter called "Misericordia et Misera"-----taking it from St. Augustine's reflection on the Gospel story of the woman caught in adultery....one by one they all left.....and there was remaining only Jesus and the Woman----Misericordia et Misera/Mercy and Misery. And that's when Jesus' Mercy overcame her sinfulness as He told her to go, and from then on to avoid that sin.

That is the message of the Gospel---God's Love and Mercy. That is the mission of the Church ---- to proclaim that Good News. And that is the main responsibility of every Diocese----to share/teach/proclaim/and make known that Good News to all the people in the 9 counties of our Dicoese.

As we rejoice in our 46th Anniversary of being the Church---alive and well here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo---let us thank God for the gift of our Faith, and pray that the whole Church of Kalamazoo will continue to proclaim this Good News of Jesus for years to come, and that each of us will be worth "instruments of Mercy" to one another.

God bless you, now and always!