



**Prayer Vigil Homily**  
**The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain**  
**Bishop of Sioux Falls**  
**Monday, December 3, 2018**  
*Memorial Feast of Saint Francis Xavier*  
**O'Donnell Chapel, Holy Name Heights in Madison, WI**

*offered in anticipation of the Mass of Christian Burial to be prayed for  
the Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino, the 4<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Madison*

Please accept my sincere sympathy and promise of prayers for all those grieving the sudden passing of Bishop Morlino which includes me.

Recently the Liturgy of the Hours has raised up the often neglected blunt letters of Saint Peter. In the second letter of Peter there are these haunting words which are especially instructive for those of us who have been privileged to be designated successors of the apostles, as well as all priests and deacons. These are Peter's words:

His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power.-Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love. These are yours and increase in abundance, they will keep you from being idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who lacks them is blind and shortsighted, forgetful of the cleansing of his past sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more eager to make your call and election firm, for, in doing so, you will never stumble. For, in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.<sup>1</sup>

That is a challenging plea to bishops and clergy but really to all of us whatever our vocation. They identify the high standard of being called "Christians," disciples of Jesus Christ, and its challenges but especially among us called to orders. This admonition to make our call and election firm helps us understand and humbly appreciate Bishop Morlino.

Please bear with me as I share some personal experiences with Bishop Morlino by which he affirmed his call and election. I need to be careful for he was always bothered when attending funerals where the canonization of the deceased was proclaimed. Since this is Vespers I have a little more leeway, I pray.

I had never heard of Bishop Morlino before being informed of his appointment as Bishop of Madison by the then-Bishop William Bullock for whom I served as Vicar General who was anxiously awaiting retirement. That anxious waiting is something with which I can identify personally today.

My first memories when meeting him early in the morning on the day of his announcement was that of a genial man who seemed a bit surprised at this sudden change of assignment from the Diocese of Helena in Montana. Surprise I have learned is part of the job description of a bishop.

We were both from the east of the United States, he from Scranton, Pennsylvania and me from western New York state. By the grace of God we both landed in Madison, Wisconsin which the governor I once worked for described as “36 square miles surrounded by reality.” Reading his pedigree I was pleased that so learned a priest would lead us in this heart of secularism rooted, at the University of Wisconsin, from which I received two degrees, and where the first Newman Center was established because faith in Jesus Christ was not always welcomed, and is still not by many.

I grew to admire Bishop Morlino’s fine intellect, his robust sense of humor, his deep love for the Church and the priesthood, his courage to speak the truth with a colorful turn of phrase, and especially his genuineness and caring nature, not widely known. It is this man and shepherd who I remember today.

There hardly could be two more different personalities, he of the bold statements framed in pithy phrases and always accompanied with a wide smile, and me the measured lawyer who guarded every word and gesture. Yet we hit it off immediately. I was surprised when at his installation after his knowing me for only a short time he announced that I would become his Vicar General.

A transformative and bonding moment occurred when the Cathedral of Saint Raphael where I was rector and in residence was destroyed as a result of a fire started by a troubled man.

I was deeply shaken, as was Bishop Morlino, yet he showed his gentle self by on the very evening of the fire he cooked dinner for me. Though criticized by some for not doing so himself, he encouraged me rather than he to tend to the Cathedral flock that was mourning and lost, sensing that my grief needed expression and that the flock needed their rector. Our Cathedral family first came together after the devastating fire on Passion Sunday in a borrowed church as we entered Holy Week and the Passion which led to the Resurrection and new life. I remember the newspaper story noting that the smoke from incense rising to heaven in prayer was much different from the destructive smoke of only a few days before.

The troubled soul who started the fire was arrested. Bishop Morlino and I together visited him in the county jail where he apologized, Bishop accepted that apology and forgave him in the name of Christ, and we prayed for him. It was a humbling experience especially given that from the high up window of the room where we met we could see devastation of the burned down Cathedral.

Another personal recollection, I was in Salt Lake City visiting the Cathedral dedicated to Saint Mary Magdalene, a convert like me, thinking of the importance of building a new Cathedral here in Madison, which thoughts remain with me today. At the request of the Nunciature given that the Nuncio was out of the country and the Diocese of Sioux Falls had been without a bishop for nearly two years, Bishop Morlino called me while he was on retreat and told me that Pope Benedict had appointed me Bishop of Sioux Falls in South Dakota where I had never been, and conveyed the usual simple direct question: do you accept. He encouraged me to do so. In retrospect, I wish he had told me that the Diocese of Sioux Falls was 35,000 square miles compared to Madison with 8,000. When I lived here, I thought a trip to Milwaukee was a long journey; now it is a just trip to the store.

Returning from Utah after saying yes, my plane was several hours late. Bishop Morlino waited for me alone at the airport and then took me back to his residence and served me one of his famous meals. He also gave me a pectoral cross which Pope Saint John Paul II had given him, so respectful of the office of bishop instituted by Christ was he.

Over time after I left Madison our shared moments became fewer as schedules and distance played their role, but those fewer times especially at meetings of bishops were always warm and uplifting during which our friendship was deepened.

At the ordination of a bishop nine questions are asked of the bishop-elect which is the standard by which we will be judged, by which Bishop Morlino will be judged, by which I will be judged. Recalling them may provide insight into this man of the Church.

In the current rite, the primary consecrator speaks these words:

“An age-old custom of the Fathers decrees that a bishop-elect is to be questioned before the people on his resolve to uphold the faith and to discharge his duties faithfully.

My brother, are you resolved by the grace of the Holy Spirit to discharge to the end of your life the office of the apostles entrusted to us, which we now pass on to you by the laying on of hands?

Are you resolved to be faithful and constant in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ?

Are you resolved to maintain the deposit of faith, entire and incorrupt, as handed down by the apostles and professed by the Church everywhere and at all times?

Are you resolved to build up the Church as the body of Christ and to remain united to it within the order of bishops under the authority of the successor of the apostle Peter?

Are you resolved to be faithful in your obedience to the successor of the apostle Peter?

Are you resolved as a devoted father to sustain the people of God and to guide them on the way of salvation in cooperation with the priests and deacons who share your ministry?

Are you resolved to show kindness and compassion in the name of the Lord to the poor and to strangers and to all who are in need?

Are you resolved as a good shepherd to seek out the sheep who stray and to gather them into the fold of the Lord?”

The expected response to these eight questions is ‘I am’.

The final question is

“Are you resolved to pray for the people of God without ceasing, and to carry out the duties of one who has the fullness of the priesthood so as to afford no grounds for reproach?”

The expected answer to this question is: ‘I am, with the help of God.’<sup>2</sup>

Bishop Morlino took these promises seriously, especially acknowledging the need for the help of God, recognizing how hard it is to consistently live them.

How can it be possible? I suggest only with the help of God by taking to heart the challenge presented by the first Vicar of Christ, St. Peter, to supplement the faith with virtue, with knowledge, with self-control, with endurance, with devotion, with mutual affection enveloped in love.

To conclude, what I know is that for a while I was privileged to serve, support, learn from and assist a great mind, a great man of the Church who became a great friend. Acknowledging his human frailties, he lived the exhortation of Saint Peter to make his call and his election firm. Bishop Robert Morlino with his unique style, occasional bravado, humor, deep faith, historical perspective and firmness coupled with gentleness is one more of us in the episcopacy would be well served to emulate.

God rest his soul. May God forgive him his sin and reward him for his kindnesses to me and to so many others. And may Our Lady whom he deeply loved continue to intercede for him and for us all.

1 – 2 Peter 1:3-11

2 – Rite of Ordination of a Bishop, 1968