“Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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Pilgrimage Mass
Carmelite Monastery

“Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” Dear friends, it is a joy to be with you again this year for our annual pilgrimage to the Carmel of Mary. This is truly a place of prayer, peace, and spiritual abundance, and I’m happy to be with you and with our Carmelite Sisters, who dedicate their lives to prayer for all of us. We are especially blessed by their spiritual companionship as we make our very personal pilgrimage through the journey of this life.

This certainly is a beautiful time of year, when the fields are lush with growing crops, and the harvest is already beginning. How blessed we are from the bounty of God, who is the source of all good things, the fruits of the earth and the grace of heaven. This pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Prairies is particularly appropriate as we begin to reap the fruits of the earth. As many of your know, this pilgrimage has been going on for more than 60 years, and what a beautiful custom it is. It allows all of us to give thanks to God for his generous gifts, especially the rich harvest of our fields and gardens, but also the labor of our hearts and hands in whatever kind of work we do.

And even more importantly, we have the opportunity to reflect on the spiritual blessings we have received, the fruits of our prayer, our generosity, our love for Christ and his Church. Jesus exhorts us to be vigilant, and to set our hearts on treasures that will last and endure. Even though our crops, our garden produce, and all the works of our hands may be abundant and wholesome, hopefully we have the wisdom to know that all these things ultimately will fade, they will lose their luster and their freshness, and they will pass away before our very eyes. But, we know by faith that the treasures of heaven will never fade, will never wear out, and will never be taken from us if we are truly grateful and faithful to the One who gives them.

Jesus says, “Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” There is no question, we must certainly be good and prudent stewards of the things God has given us in this life, but even more so we must be dedicated and zealous for the things of heaven. These are the treasures that will last and remain with us even beyond this life into eternity. So what do we treasure? Do we have our hearts set on Christ, his Church, his sacraments, his call to charity and justice toward our neighbor? Do we truly treasure and desire with all our hearts what God has offered to us? Jesus is simply urging us to look upon the works of our lives with the eyes of faith, with eyes that are fixed on heaven, and to set our minds and hearts on the greatest treasure of all, which is Jesus himself.

My friends, this pilgrimage is a perfect opportunity to refocus, to reorient our attention to those lasting and enduring gifts. No matter how long or short it is, a pilgrimage is a journey of faith. We set out on this journey to seek a higher good, a treasure that will forever transform us. In the letter to the Hebrews, we heard of the faith of Abraham, which led him to listen to God’s call, and to go out from his homeland to a new land that God would show him. He set out in faith, and allowed God to show him the way, to form and transform him, and even to establish through him a new nation, a chosen people. Our pilgrimage is a sign of our desire for a better
homeland, the heavenly homeland which our Lord has prepared for us. We set out because we know that we are pilgrims on this earth, passing through on the way to eternal life, which Christ won for us through his death and resurrection.

A pilgrimage always challenges the pilgrim to let go of something, to leave behind something that is not essential, or perhaps even detrimental to our well-being. A pilgrimage allows us to think once again of what really is important and what is not. And hopefully this pilgrimage will have the same result. Hopefully our journey here and our time of prayer today will move us to focus once again on Christ, our Savior, our one true and eternal treasure. Obviously, Jesus is encouraging us in the Gospel to be watchful and vigilant, to be fully engaged in the work of his Kingdom. He warns us not to be complacent or distracted, and to use the things of this world wisely, with an eye towards his return. We have been blessed in so many ways, both materially and spiritually, but we must be ready to give an accounting for these blessings. As Jesus tells us, “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” On this pilgrimage, may we each draw closer to Jesus and allow our faith in him to grow deeper. May we accept his love more completely so we might be ready when this earthly pilgrimage ends and the Son of Man comes for us. May we also be ready to share that love and the gift of faith with others, especially those who don’t yet know our Lord and who yearn for his love.

And we must also look to our Blessed Mother Mary, who leads us to her Son and whose assumption into heaven we will celebrate this week. Her example is especially helpful to us today, because she is the model of vigilance and openness to God for all of us. Her entire life was a journey, a pilgrimage of faith. She was ready to go wherever God would lead her. Mary was almost certainly surprised at the astonishing message that she had been chosen by God to be the mother of his Son. But can anyone really doubt that she was already watchful and attentive to God with every fiber of her being? Indeed, we could say that Mary was already waiting for the coming of her Lord, for the arrival of her Master. She was ready to give much, for much had been entrusted to her. And with her acceptance of God’s Son as her Son, she became even more fruitful, even more beautiful through His grace, and her destiny of sharing in her Son’s heavenly glory was even more assured. Jesus promises his disciples that “the Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.” Let’s hear that again: “The Father is pleased to give you the kingdom.” Let us follow the example of Mary, and journey with her to the Kingdom that our Lord promised us.