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June 29, 1980
Immaculate Conception Parish
100th Anniversary Celebration
2:00 P.M.
Most Rev. Thomas J. Murphy
Homily

Part of what it means to be a human being is to share in the dreams and visions which are within each of us. It is only right to celebrate such dreams and visions and to tell and re-tell the story of who we are as a community. If this is true within the human condition, it is even more true within the Christian community.

We come together this afternoon to celebrate a dream and vision which began centuries ago and continues today. That dream and vision has been shared with us in the Scripture readings which we have heard. We listened once again to the story of Peter and Paul, the heroes of the dream and story that God has shared with us. We listen again to the words of the Lord who would tell Peter that he would be the rock upon which the Church would be founded and built.

Two thousand years later we come together to share in that story of faith and hope, love and vision which began when a God would send His Son to share a dream with the human race. We share in that story in a special way today as we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the parish community of Immaculate Conception in Fort Benton, Montana.

The story of the faith community here at Fort Benton is a story of struggle, hopes, disappointments, and life - but it is basically a story of a people who sought to find the presence of the Lord within them, among them, and around them. We are here today to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Ft. Benton's Immaculate Conception Parish because of the people who shared in this story and left us a heritage and legacy to continue the dream and vision of Jesus.

The presence of the Catholic Church in Fort Benton is^a a thrilling story of missionaries, religious men and women, who would cross a new frontier a century ago and tell the story of Jesus to a group of pioneers and Native Americans. Fort Benton is but one example of the growth and development of the Catholic Church in central Montana. But this story of faith and hope cannot be contained. It must continue to be told and celebrated.

As we come to celebrate the past, we look to the future. The future is filled with hope and joy, confidence and faith because of our relationship to the Lord. We are asked to be the story tellers of today, the story tellers of the meaning and significance of Jesus and the Church in the life of the Fort Benton community.

We tell our story today in many ways, but the challenge that is ours is to tell this story, not in isolation, but in the context of the dream and vision of Jesus, the hope and faith of Peter and Paul, and the unity which should be ours as members of a universal Church. How do we tell such a story today?

We are here this afternoon because others shared the story of Jesus with us. They came from distant parts of our country and our world to begin the story of faith here in Fort Benton. Today, the challenge is for us to be conscious of the ways in which we share our Christian faith with others in Eastern Montana, in our nation and in our world. Fort Benton is a community of faith today because others shared this faith with us a century ago.

We are asked to be faithful tellers of the story of Jesus and the Church. The Church today is challenging us in countless ways. We cannot hold on to the past as some are trying to do. We cannot isolate ourselves into separated communities who claim they are the only ones preserving the story of Jesus. In reality, they have been unfaithful and their celebrations and gatherings contradict the values of Jesus and the Church.

At the same time, we are asked to tell the story of Jesus in relationship to other Christian communities who share a dream and vision with us. We are asked to look for that gathering point which brings us together, instead of separating us whenever we can.

As people who are asked to preserve the story of Jesus today, we do this best in the liturgy and worship which brings us together, a liturgy and worship which reflects a life of a people who have committed themselves to the Lord. We become more aware of our story of faith when we open ourselves up to grow in that faith as adults, as young people, as children and families.

And finally the challenge for us today is to respond to the need for young people to consider the possibility of giving their lives to continue the story of Jesus by considering a vocation to the priesthood and religious life. Men and women came great distances to share the story of Jesus with us. We are asked to raise up from our own midst others who will continue to tell the story to others as priests, sisters, laity who are willing to respond to the ministry to which we are called.

For a hundred years, the parish community of Immaculate Conception in Fort Benton has told and celebrated a story, a story of Jesus, a story of a Church, a story of faith and love and hope. It is a story that never grows old, but needs to be told and retold. To all of you who have shared in this story these past 100 years, thank you for the gift you have given. To the priests, sisters, and laity who have served this parish, a special word of gratitude for being the Peter and Pauls of today. In a special way, to Fr. Erickson and Fr. Burke, may I express my gratitude as Bishop of the Diocese.

The story began almost 2000 years ago in a crib outside Bethlehem. That story made all the difference in the world in an empty tomb outside Jerusalem. We tell that story today in Fort Benton. It is a story worth telling over and over again.

May the people of Fort Benton tell this story for centuries to come!