Happy Month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus! We are so blessed to belong to the Church that He started, preserves, and loves!

Yesterday I was able to attend a talk given by Damien Walker in Willmar. It was my first time attending an event at St. Mary’s in Willmar; thank you to everyone there who made the event and social time so welcoming! (And I loved the centerpieces on the tables!) But I digress. Let me tell you what I learned at this talk.

As you may know, Bishop Zielinski commissioned a painting from Damien Walker from New Zealand. Last year, Damien came to New Ulm to pray, observe, and visit the different areas of the diocese. The expansive prairies were striking and inspiring.

With much prayer and fasting, Damien began the painting on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, October 7. And he completed it on the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, May 13. What providence! Damien prayed during this time and communicated with Our Lady to see what she would reveal.

The image itself is about 7 feet tall and is rich in theology and is meant to be an aid in evangelization, a living homily. Let me tell you a bit about what different parts of the image signify.

* The white Mary wears remind us of her Immaculate Conception (free from original sin, pure), that she is full of the Holy Spirit and that she is radiant in the life of Christ.
* The wheat is 12 stems signifying the 12 apostles and 12 tribes of Isreal. Also, each stem of wheat is a different variety found in our diocese. These can also signify the “seed of faith”.
* Mary, the queen Mother is delicate, motherly, and firm. She hands you Christ.
* Jesus locks gaze with you as though this is the time of challenge.
* Jesus’ face, darker on one side than the other, reminds us that He is in the seat of mercy and justice.
* Jesus has his hand raised in blessing. Two fingers raised remind us of His two natures, God and Man. Three fingers down remind us of the Blessed Trinity.
* We know that “From His right hand he will save”. Our Lady is at his right!!
* The rosary is Our Lady’s (and our) spiritual weapon.
* The halos are not separated…they merge. This is to remind us that you cannot have Jesus without his Mother or his Mother without Jesus.
* The darkness reminds us of despair, anguish, hopelessness. Our Lady is an absolute contrast to this. She stands before the darkness as a mother to all and as a beacon to the Truth.

Damien said that we can explore the foundations of faith on the top half of the painting. The bottom half of the painting is more specific to our diocese.

* The cross on the hill (on the left side of the painting) casts its shadow on to St. Peter’s Basilica to show that Jesus overshadows the church. Its shadow can also represent the crucifixion of St. Peter who was crucified upside down.
* Following St. Peter’s is the Cathedral of St. Paul. This reminds us of the missionary aspect of the church. The waters (symbolizing the water from the side of Christ) continue to flow to New Ulm diocese. The tepees and canoes remind us of the Dakota. Bishop Zielinski wanted this painting of Our Lady to be a doorway to acknowledgement and healing necessary due to the Dakota uprising.
* The three fish are to suggest the three fish on the diocesan crest.
* The barn house and barn remind us of who we are “regionally”. And that from the works of our hands we can give glory to God. This also can be a reminder that our Lady has come to see us where we are.
* The next image is St. Joseph’s church, the first parish in Brown County.
* Finally, the waters lead us to our Cathedral. We have traveled from east (St. Peter’s) to west (New Ulm). We “see” the connection between the two.
* The flowers that are on the book of Gospels that Jesus is holding are also flowers that are found on our prairies. Each has a symbolism: brown eyed Susans, divinity of Christ; purple Gentians, royalty of Christ; red blooms, passion of Christ. The dove is the Holy Spirit, reminding us that we are to be a part of the renewed Pentecost.
* The band that Our Lady is wearing is reminiscent of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a Marian apparition dear to those of Hispanic descent. On the tilma of Juan Diego, the band tells us that Mary is pregnant. On this image, the band tells us that Christ is born. There are 12 stars and flowers on the band to remind us of the 12 stars and flowers on the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This aspect of the image is to remind us that this Lady in white is the same Lady who appeared in Mexico.

A few other things Damien noted:

* She was created on a door: Mary is the door that leads us to Christ.
* There are over 80 white tones in her dress.
* There are 30-40 layers of paint.
* When he finished painting and was ready to ship the image he ran into some problems. New Zealand was not shipping to the US because of tariffs. Damien called the bishop to let him know and the bishop said, “Let’s pray.” Two hours later the tariffs were lifted. Our Lady wanted to be in New Ulm! She is now with us and pours her graces on us!

There are many more things to learn about Our Mother under this title and I invite you to visit <https://www.dnu.org/ourladyoftheprairie> to learn more. Also, since all parishes will be dedicated to our Lady this coming Sunday, I invite your CCW to consider purchasing a print or canvas to be displayed somewhere in your church.

Damien Walker’s prayer is that when you look at Our Lady of the Prairie, you see her as *your* mother. Know that she sees and hears the cry of your heart. May she bring you to know the heart of Jesus.

Blessings on your Summer,

Mary Koralewski

Spirituality Commission