

(Invocation in Ojibwe Language)

I want to welcome you all here this morning in a good, kind way. I opened with a traditional greeting in Ojibwe and my name is - Ricky is English. DeFoe is French. It's strange that my last name is Defoe. I was pretty much raised in the city of Duluth, which is French, and the reservation where I reside now is Fond du Lac, which is French. But, I wasn't raised a French boy and society didn't see me as a French boy. They see me as an Indian boy.

So in this land here, we welcome you in a warm way. We call upon our ancestors to help us and guide us in the way we do things today, the way we treat one another, the way we have respect for the Mysteries, the unseen, and the faith that those things would need to be in our lives. We asked for guidance as we look to teach our children those things that have been taught to us in a good way from our great-grandparents, our grandparents, our parents. To us, we are the center, and then we have our children, our grandchildren, our great grandchildren. Those are the seven generations that are interconnected, and we asked to be guided in those things that are relevant today to (our responsibilities).

Each of us has a duty, a responsibility, to heal our Mother Earth, who is the source of all life. Often times, we treat her as a resource so we've got to change that way of thinking. We want to sound out our gratitude for this moment that we've got, the life that we've been given, and the relationship that you and I have together at this moment. So again, we want to thank all those Mysteries and all of our ways of believing in the world, of the Unseen manifested in the way of our actions of treating one another, in a good way today, on this day. Thank you for hearing me.

(A message of responsibility and community)

Good morning again. My name is Ricky DeFoe. I'd like to share a story here with you this morning. It begins - I am Anishinaabe, Indigenous (to here). Our creation story, the gist of it, is giving of yourself for the greater good where a small muskrat went to the bottom of the flood waters and came up with some pieces of dirt. (This) soil from the bottom of the flood waters was placed on a turtle. That's how we now have Turtle Island. The creation story leads into a migration story where we're told that (we are) to migrate to the place where there is food (that) grows on water. So, there's a number of stopping places along the line. (We're told) that we came from the East and that Anishinaabe means to be lowered here, to be put here. No place in our traditional stories does it talk about coming across the Bering Strait. So, we journeyed here and we see, back in the days where the food that grows on water - the wild rice was in Spirit Bay (in the St. Louis River near Duluth). We have Spirit Island. We have Spirit Mountain. All these things are relevant to who we are and how we carry ourselves.

So, my journey is (that) as young boy to be raised on the reservation to be in this world, immersed in this world, to begin in a traditional fashion, to hear our language, to smell our medicines, to be immersed, to hear the drums, to hear the Shakers. Our way of being was foundational to us growing up, who to be with. We're instructed in all of these things.

Then, there was influence with the Catholic church on our reservation, Fond Du Lac. We became (Christian). As we relocated to the city of Duluth, we were raised in the Catholic fashion. So I recall my grandmother rolling the Rosary, speaking Ojibwe. My father was influenced heavily by my grandmother so that's why we were raised in such a fashion here in the city of Duluth.

And then, we started to see the worldviews that come because of that. In Ojibwe ways, we have levels of existence on our Mother Earth. We talk about the Gichi-Manidoo-Akii, the place where the Great Mystery abides, and we don't know, our language does not tell about, is the Great Mystery male or female.

So, we understand these things. The Great Mystery abides. We see some things that we know are unseen but then we come to see some things that we can see - the planets, the stars, the star world - these things that we can see as we come closer to our Mother Earth. Then we see the sun, the moon, who control the seasons. Then, when we come onto our Mother Earth we know then that there are levels. The rock nation, the mountains, are animate in our language and were placed here first to bring stability. Then, from there we have the seedlings, the grasses, the bushes, the trees that brings oxygen. Next, placed here was the animals - all the flyers, the walkers, the swimmers, the crawlers - all of them were here also - placed. Last, Anishinaabe was put here, the original man. Through all this, we know that being last that (everything) can survive without us, but we cannot survive without them. So we know there's an interdependence there, so we're told that we do not own anything, that we need to take care of some things, not only for honoring our ancestors and their teachings, but for life. As we go forward then, we start to think about what are we leaving for our grandchildren so we become stewards.

To be Indigenous is to have responsibility. Responsibility to the teachings of our ancestors and to bring them to our young people - our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren in the future. We have our great-grandparents, our grandparents and our parents (in the past). We're the center. Those are the seven generations. So we know about the interconnectedness of those things and how we carry ourselves.

Then as we go along, we start to see a world, a worldview that has a paradigm. A paradigm in the sense that has dominion over all things and also a hierarchy in all life and a God that is male, and we start to think about these things and how does that play in our worldview. We think about the chaos and the ambiguity and the conflicts that happen in the world today, and we wonder that maybe, perhaps (its) because of that paradigm that we're socialized into. So we think about those things along those lines.

So our challenge as a people, as humanity, is to right side that world that is upside down and then we can be - we will sustain life. So, we've got a challenge on her hands - to right side that world, to recognize this journey that we're on as I recognize my journey from traditional to Catholic back to traditional, and I'm living now in a fashion as best as I can. We owe it to our ancestors, we owe it to our great-grandparents, we owe it to our grandparents, we owe it to our parents to live the best way that we've been taught, to honor them. So we've got to do that today. This moment that we've got is the only moment that we have. We don't have five minutes ago, we don't know what the future holds, this moment now in this circle (is all) that we've got. So, I want to say thank you for hearing that. I'm going to do my part and I hope and pray that you and your family will do your part also. Thank you.