



Mass of Healing of Victims of Abuse

The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain

Bishop of Sioux Falls

October 13, 2016

Prayed on Thursday during the Twenty-Eighth Week in Ordinary Time

Cathedral of Saint Joseph

We come together during this Jubilee Year of Mercy to offer this Mass of Reconciliation and to humbly pray for the healing of those affected by the horror of child sexual and other forms of abuse.

What we have learned over the sad years of the scourge of child abuse by some in the Church is how heavy a wound abuse imposes and that its evil must be recognized and addressed. We also have learned that we must seek God's mercy for those times when that recognition and intention has not been present. We have also learned how important it is to reassure those affected that God is love and in a special way loves and seeks to be present to those suffering. As the first reading from Isaiah encourages us all: "seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near¹." It is in the Lord alone that reconciliation and healing may be found.

This is Respect Life Month. The theme this year is "Moved by Mercy." If we are moved by mercy it leads to repentance and conversion. The fullness of respecting life is respecting the fullness of every person at conception and at natural death and every day in between. We respect life in the in between years by being present as best we can as individuals and as Church, praying for healing for those suffering, offering support as best we can and seeking protection for those who are vulnerable today. Thus, we also pray that as individuals and as a society, which too often seems to casually accept this evil, we will continue to confront its reality and its consequences.

Reconciliation begins with seeking God's mercy which starts with honestly admitting the need for repentance and conversion of heart which we also do today. I once again as Bishop of Sioux Falls, and as Paul Swain, apologize to all those who have been abused by priests and others who violated their privileged status within the Church. I also apologize for those bishops and others who did not act appropriately and for all of us who have been insensitive to the evil around us. Once again I invite any victims to contact the diocese in a confidential way that we might be supportive in whatever way we are able. Or if they are not comfortable coming to the Church, I encourage victims to go to law enforcement and social service agencies whose personnel are anxious to help.

Those in the Church who broke their vows and promises also broke the trust of a safe environment that ought to be without question in the Church. Remedial actions were required and have been taken. We reaffirm that child abuse is not only a sin but a crime and will be treated that way, always reported to civil authorities. Over the years the Church has undertaken significant efforts to restore trust and to better assure that children and young people are protected now and in the future. Trust of course cannot be restored simply by programs, but by witness and by action.

Every year clergy and lay professionals and volunteers undergo safe environment training. Seminarians are more thoroughly screened. Background checks are routinely made. Human formation for future priests and the continuing formation of active priests have been strengthened; as we did just this past week at Clergy Days. Recent Popes have instituted processes to assure greater accountability. We also seek to be attentive to the possibility of false accusations.

While not minimizing the historic reality of abuse within the Church which is called to a high standard, we must also recognize that abuse is epidemic in many sectors of society including families, schools, sports and other areas where adults have a mentoring role in the lives of children. Of increased concern is human trafficking which is sadly too present in South Dakota. Thus children in Catholic schools and religious education programs are taught to be sensitive to and to avoid situations that could put them or their friends in harm's way.

Ultimately however the answer to ensure protection is to respect one another as children of God, and to recognize that the best vehicle for healing is a personal relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ guided by the Holy Spirit. God created each person out of love and loves each person every moment of their lives as Our Lord's sacrifice on the cross so powerfully declares.

There was a little girl who was living in an orphanage. She was regularly rejected for adoption. The staff at the orphanage felt sorry for her, hoping that some long lost relative would come and take her home. One day she was seen

writing a note and leaving it tucked in a branch of a tree near the gate. Could she be communicating with a friend, perhaps a relative who would come to her, the staff speculated? Hopes soared. As soon as she was out of sight they went to the tree and fished out the wrinkled note. There in a child's scrawl were the words: "whoever finds this, I love you." A deep breath was taken. The innocence of children teaches and challenges us. We will love the little ones like this little girl by protecting them from evil and assuring them of God's love. That is not just a task for us; it is a mission.

We can be instruments of God's love and healing presence to all we encounter. One powerful way to begin is through prayer. Please join me in praying the Litany for Healing:

Litany for Healing

Lord have mercy, *Lord have mercy*

Christ have mercy, *Christ have mercy*

Lord have mercy, *Lord have mercy*

Protect all children and all victims of abuse, *Lord, with your enduring love:*

Grant us the grace Lord, *to protect and nourish the innocent*

Preserve our nation Lord, *to be chaste and pure in love*

For all who suffer from any form of abuse, *save, heal and protect them, O Lord*

For those whose innocence has been stolen, *save, heal and protect them, O Lord*

For those who cannot love, *save, heal and protect them, O Lord*

For those whose hearts are filled with fear or sadness, *save, heal and protect them, O Lord*

For the Church, called to be the light of the world, *banish all darkness from her children, O Lord*

For bishops called to be Good Shepherds, *make them vigilant defenders of her children, O Lord.*

For priests conformed to the person of Christ, *grant them purity and Christ like love, O Lord*

For all those who minister in the Church, *help them to live Christian values, O Lord*

For priests who abuse children, *grant them repentance, O Lord*

For parents or relatives who abuse their children, *grant them repentance, O Lord*

For teachers, coaches and others who abuse children, *grant them repentance, O Lord*

For those who abuse spouses, the elderly or vulnerable others *grant them repentance, O Lord.*

Moly Mary Mother of God, *pray for us*

Saint Peter and Saint Paul, *pray for us*

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, *pray for us*

Saint Maria Goretti, *pray for us*

All the angels and saints, *pray for us*

Lord have mercy, *Lord have mercy*

Christ have mercy, *Christ have mercy*

Lord have mercy, *Lord have mercy*

God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong, always present, always just: You gave your only Son to save us by his blood on the cross.

Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace, join to your own suffering the pain of all who have been hurt in body, mind, and spirit by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.

Hear the cries of our brothers and sisters who have been gravely harmed, and the cries of those who love them. Soothe their restless hearts with hope, steady their shaken spirits with faith. Grant them justice for their cause, enlightened by your truth.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts, heal your people's wounds and transform brokenness into wholeness. Grant us the courage and wisdom, humility and grace, to act with justice. Breathe wisdom into our prayers and labors. Grant that all harmed by abuse may find peace in justice.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

¹ – Isaiah 55: 1-3; 6-9

² - 2014, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, DC