



Mass of Healing for Victims of Sexual Abuse
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
September 29, 2011 ~ Feast of St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael
Cathedral of St. Joseph

We come together on this the feast day of the Archangels in humble prayer for the healing of all those affected by the horror of sexual and other forms of abuse. Angels have been described as messengers of God, envoys to humanity. St. Michael is the envoy of God's victory over evil. St. Gabriel, who at the Annunciation appeared to the Blessed Mother with the glorious news that God's son would become man through her, is the envoy of God's love. St. Raphael, having walked with Tobit in his time of physical trial, is the envoy of God's healing.

What we learn from them is that evil exists and that it must be fought; that God is love and in a special way loves those suffering; and that anything is possible with God, including healing from such suffering.

This Sunday is Respect Life Sunday. The theme this year is "I have come that all may have life and have it to the full." We pray this day for protection against the evil of abuse. We pray today for the healing of those who are suffering. And we pray today that they may be restored to a life of hope and therefore to have it to the full.

Allow me to once again apologize for the abuse of children 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. 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.

Those who broke their vows also broke the trust of a safe environment that ought to be without question in the church. Over these last years the church has undertaken significant efforts to assure that it does not happen again. Child abuse is not only a sin but a crime and treated that way. The screening of seminarians has been improved and the human formation of future priests and continuing formation of active priests have been strengthened. We also are attentive to assure priests are not falsely accused.

While not minimizing abuse within the Church which is called to a higher standard, we know that abuse is epidemic in other sectors of society. A recent study entitled “Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States”, independently researched by the John Jay School of Law, included this troubling conclusion: “Sexual victimization of children is a serious and pervasive issue in society. It is present in families, and it is not uncommon in institutions where adults form mentoring and nurturing relationships with adolescents including schools, and religious, sports and social organizations¹.” We pray today for those harmed in any environment.

As a way to help prevent the opportunity for such victimization again all in our parishes and institutions who spend time with children including volunteers must undergo background checks and annual safe environment training. In addition the children in Catholic schools and religious education are taught to be sensitive to and to avoid situations that could put them in harm’s way. We must ever be alert to those who may be abused in whatever setting and report it to authorities as appropriate.

Ultimately however the answer to ensure protection is to respect one another as children of God, and the vehicle for healing is a personal relationship with God. Someone put it this way: “God is king. And this king is no remote or egotistical tyrant, but a Father who created and re-created us, a Son who loved us to death, and a Spirit who lovingly longs to live within us in utter intimacy. His kingdom is first of all in our hearts, our souls, our spirit. Secondly it is in our lives and our works.”

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 claim her. 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 for her, the staff speculated. Hopes soared. As soon as she was out of sight they went to the tree, fished out the wrinkled note. There in a child’s scrawl were the words: “whoever finds this, I love you.” The innocence of children. We 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 are missioned as well to be supportive of those who were not so protected whatever the forum. Angels are messengers of God, envoys to humanity. And so are we. We can be instruments of God’s love and healing presence to all we encounter. One powerful way is by prayer. Please join me in praying a Litany for healing:

A Litany of Healing²

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 from 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.*
 Holy 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*

Let us pray:

God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong, always present, always just:
 You gave your only Son to save us by the blood of his 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 our cries as we agonize over the harm done to our brothers and sisters.
 Breathe wisdom into our prayers, soothe restless hearts with hope, steady shaken spirits with faith:
 Show us the way to justice and wholeness, enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.
 Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts, heal your people's wounds and transform our brokenness.
 Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace, so that we may act with justice and find peace in you.
 We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
 Amen.

¹ The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950-2010, John Jay College Research Team, May 2011

² Litany of Healing, USCCB, 2004