



Mass of Healing for the Victims of Abuse
The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
September 15, 2018
Memorial Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows
Cathedral of Saint Joseph

offered in reparation for the sins of those ministers who caused harm or failed to protect

We come together today on this Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows to pray for healing and forgiveness, penance and reparation, mindful of the horror of sexual abuse in all its evil forms, but especially of children. A major reason we must do so is that in the midst of all the recent turmoil in the Church focusing on priests, bishops and internal politics, too often neglected, even forgotten, are the innocent victims whose lives have been changed forever because of the violation of trust and chastity by representatives of the Church Jesus Himself instituted. We pray in a special way today for the innocent victims, for their families, especially parents and spouses. Often their loss is silent but never ending.

Words cannot restore wholeness to you who are hurting. But as inadequate as they are, on behalf of the local Church of Sioux Falls and my brother bishops, priests and deacons, I apologize. I promise we will continue to do everything we can to prevent such sinful and destructive behaviors in the future, hold those credibly-accused accountable, and be present to you, to the extent you wish us to be.

It seems appropriate to do so as we remember Our Lady of Sorrows. So often Mary is portrayed as a plastic saint, who was above all the squalor of the world. But in reality though specially chosen by God the Father to be the mother of His Son, she faced harsh realities along the way to her rightly due heavenly reward.

Recall the seven sorrows this devotion to her identifies:

the prophecy of Simeon who while glorifying the presence of the baby Jesus before him, told Mary that a sword would pierce her. Surely she pondered that in her heart;

the forced exile into Egypt to protect her son from unjust and corrupt leaders, not unlike our day, as any good mother would do. The fear for her young son seemingly-lost, the fear of any parent asking where is he, with great relief to be found in the Temple after several days. But oh the anguish of those days;

the way of the cross as she saw her son unjustly condemned, physically abused, beaten and worn down, certainly tears accompanied her on their joint journey to Calvary;

the crucifixion where at the foot of the cross she, with great courage, stayed and again with anguish watched her son suffer in agony and then die;

His being taken down from the cross and her caressing his dead body with the love and loss only a mother can know which (Michelangelo's) *Pieta* so powerfully depicts;

and the burial of her son with the tomb sealed, surrounded by soldiers, her emptiness and loneliness surely deep.

But she also trusted in her son's words and his promises, waiting in the Upper Room surely grieving, pondering what all this meant as she did when the angel appeared to her at the Annunciation. But she trusted, endured, persevered and surely with great joy encountered her resurrected son and is now with him having been assumed into heaven and having assumed the ministry of intercessor for all those suffering, especially for those innocents from abuse, in whatever form or forum it took place.

This is no plastic saint. This is a saint though hardened by the reality of the dark side of life, yet endured all of that to be true to her commitment at the Annunciation – I am the handmaid of the Lord. She is someone, who Jesus from the cross gave us as our mother and the mother of the Church; we can turn to in our sorrows whatever they are.

For those victims of abuse, you are invited by Our Lord to come to Him through His sorrowful Mother. You are also invited to come to Him through His Church, especially in the confidential presence of our Diocesan Victims Assistance Coordinator. Christ's Church stands ready to support you in whatever way you might find helpful, if only with a listening ear, with making possible spiritual and professional counseling, with support and with prayers. Mary your mother understands, Mary sorrows for you, Mary sorrows with you, Mary walks beside you.

We also are here today in embarrassment and in search of reparation for those in our midst who have violated the call of Christ to respect and protect others and who broke their promise to live chaste lives.

We pledge to continue to do whatever we can to prevent future tragedies as we have tried to do by fully-adhering to the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young Persons* for the last 16 years. (Its prescripts) include implementing safe environment programs which screen all who act in the name of the Church, cooperating with law enforcement in all ways, and assuring volunteers, children, and families are alert to the horror of child abuse. We must never become complacent.

We also pledge to establish an effective process to assure accountability of all who act in the name of the Church, including bishops, who have abdicated or misused their responsibility as shepherds. I can tell you that I personally, and other bishops I have spoken to have been shocked and shaken by recent revelations about some bishops who ignored, covered-up or even committed such horrible crimes. We demand an independent review by seasoned laity to discover why this horror occurred in the first place and how it can be prevented in the future. As sinners, we ask for forgiveness, we are also called to atonement; we are also called to account.

And we are here today to apologize to and seek to reassure the faithful who are justifiably deeply-disappointed, saddened and even angry with all of this. I encourage you too to pray to come closer to Our Lord through the intercession of the Sorrowful Mother, who cries for us all.

And finally we are here to support the vast majority of clergy who have lived up to their ordination promises yet are tainted by the horrendous dark clouds created by the sins of a few. Pray for them, encourage them, thank them.

One recent column quoted this Chinese folk song:

I leaned against a steady oak,
I thought it was a trusting tree,
but first it bent and then it broke,
my true love has deserted me

That broken oak is we, leaders in the Church. The writer noted we do not worship popes or bishops, monks, nuns or parish priests. He continued, "We know that should they all desert us, Christ will still be there."¹⁷

Yesterday the Church celebrated the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. The crucifix with the suffering corpus of Jesus in the center is a reminder that Our Lord died and rose for the redemption of our sins and is our Hope. That remains true even in these difficult times when we, weak oaks, have become unsteady and falter. Christ is still with us, with you.

We adore you O Christ and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

Sorrowful Mother of us all, pray for us, walk with us, console us, love us. Your Son is who we worship. We too, despite our human failings and sinfulness, for which we ask forgiveness, reparation, healing and hope, are servants of the Lord. May we better live up with courage and humility to that high calling.

¹ – “Path of the Hurricane”, David Warren, The Catholic Thing, September 14, 2018