

Pulled Quote: “In the midst of these difficult times, Jesus offers the gift of his healing and peace. By his wounds we are healed, and by his resurrection, we are given new life.” –Bishop John Folda

Headline: The healing power of Holy Week and Easter

“Save us, Savior of the world, for by your cross and resurrection, you have set us free.” This acclamation from the sacred liturgy sums up the grace and mystery of Holy Week and Easter. By his suffering and death on the cross, Jesus saves us from the power of sin. And by his glorious resurrection, he conquers death forever. He truly is the Savior of the world!

We are about to enter the holiest days of the Church year, days that invite us into the paschal mystery of our Lord’s death and resurrection. Jesus experienced abandonment in the Garden of Gethsemane, the rejection of Jerusalem, the scourging and crowning with thorns, the weight of the cross, and the pain of nails pounded into his body. But most of all, Jesus felt the weight of our sins, the sins of all humanity bearing down upon him, who was guiltless and knew no sin. There is a somberness to Holy Week, a sense of sorrow at the realization that Jesus suffered so much, all for love of us.

There is also a quiet exultation in Holy Week, because we realize once again that Christ’s love has overcome the power of sin and death. His sacrifice manifests the infinite love of God for his people, and opens for us the way to heaven. We are exalted, lifted up by the sacrifice of Christ, and we know that there is no power on earth that can undo what Jesus has done.

And finally, the quiet but necessary sorrow of Holy Week will give way to the joyful exultation of Easter. As we celebrate the Lord’s resurrection, we discover once again that Christ is risen, and he lives forever. As his disciples, we are assured that the penalty of sin has been paid, and the gates of heaven have been thrown open to those who join their lives to Christ. The Lenten days of fasting and penance are good for our souls, and we experience our own dying to self and sin. But the joy of Easter is just as important, because our faith rests not only on the cross of Good Friday but also on the empty tomb of Easter Sunday.

For all of us, the image of the Risen Christ is a cause for hope. When we suffer from illness or despair, we know that Christ lives and lifts us up from our suffering. When we see sadness and sin all around us, we know that Jesus forgives sins and lightens our burdens. When we confront our own sinfulness, we know that Christ is merciful, and he invites us to new life in his risen glory.

These days of reflection and prayer are especially important for the Church right now. For the last nine months, the Church has suffered from the scandal of sexual abuse and from the sins of those who were entrusted with the care of Christ’s flock. We have faced once again the sinfulness of those who took advantage of minors and who caused deep wounds to them and to the entire Body of Christ. Members of the clergy have abused their positions of authority, and one could almost say that Christ is crucified all over again as a result of these sins.

There is a profound need for repentance, and the Church is working to restore trust among the faithful. Part of that effort is a commitment to accountability and transparency. A number of dioceses in this country have released the names of those clergy and Church personnel who have abused minors in an effort to bring healing to victims and to the entire Church. The Diocese of Fargo has also been touched by these sins of abuse, and we have reported the allegations of abuse that have come to our attention. I intend to also provide a full disclosure of those priests and deacons in this diocese who have, with substantiation, been accused of abuse of minors, and hopefully to experience a purification of our own diocesan family and history. The review of records has been underway for several months, and the release of this information will happen in the near future as soon as this review is complete.

The sin of sexual abuse against a minor is deeply offensive, and it brings sorrow and shame to us all. It is especially damaging to the victim, and a simple release of names cannot undo all the harm that has been done. But hopefully the release of this information will bring some measure of healing to victims and open the way for God’s healing grace to touch all the members of our diocese. We can pray that from the death of this experience will come a resurrection, a renewed life of grace for God’s Church in the

Diocese of Fargo. If we learn anything from the celebrations of Holy Week and Easter, it is that God is merciful, and he brings healing to a sinful world through the death and resurrection of Jesus, his Son.

When Jesus appeared to his followers on Easter Sunday, he said to them, "Peace be with you," and he says the same to us even now. He offers his gift of peace, and he banishes fear from the hearts of his followers. In the midst of these difficult times, Jesus offers the gift of his healing and peace. By his wounds we are healed, and by his resurrection, we are given new life. I pray that all of you will have a most blessed Holy Week and Easter, and that we will receive the healing that only Christ can give.