

Mass For Victims and Survivors of Sexual Abuse Cavan 7 March 2020

My your love be upon us O Lord as we place all our hope in you.

Just last week a new film called *Sulphur and White* was released. This film is based on a true story. It is about a man called David Tait who spent his early years in South Africa before moving to England where he became a very successful and wealthy businessman. However, he struggled with emotional and mental health issues because he carried with him the memories of the sexual abuse he had endured as a child. The film shows how, with the help of a loving relationship, he bravely faced up to his childhood trauma, got the help he needed and moved from being a victim of abuse to being a survivor. He was determined that the abuse he had experienced would not define his life. Instead, he found healing and peace in his own life and became an active campaigner for the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. He climbed Mount Everest five times and in doing so raised millions of pounds for that great Children's charity. This film *Sulphur and White* is not easy watching but it tells a wonderful and true story about the redemptive power of love and how it is possible for us human beings to overcome traumatic experiences in lives.

For the past four years the Church here in Ireland has set aside a National Day of Prayer for victims and survivors of abuse and today we mark that day here in the diocese of Kilmore. Today, throughout the diocese we pray for healing for all those who are victims and survivors of physical, emotional, sexual and spiritual abuse. We pray that with God's help and the support and understanding, love and care of others, that they will find healing and peace in their lives.

At the heart of our Christian faith is that belief that all human beings are created by God and loved by God. We believe that God lives in each and every person and that every person is unique and special and that they have the right to be treated with dignity, with respect and with love. Sadly, in our imperfect world, this does not always happen. Sometimes the young and the vulnerable, the very ones that society should be protecting most, come to the wall. And very often the one who is abused feels weighed down with a sense of guilt and shame, somehow feeling responsible for what happened to them. But we must be very clear about this, the one who is abused has no reason to feel guilty or ashamed and they are in no way to blame for what happened to them. Instead the one who abuses is the one who should rightly feel all the guilt and all the shame as they, and they alone, are responsible for their own misdeeds.

The good news is that God is the great healer and He is close to all who struggle in any way. In psalm number 34 we read: *The Lord is close to the broken-hearted, those whose spirit is crushed he will save.* So if you have been abused, or indeed if you are struggling in any way, turn to God in prayer. God who is close to the broken hearted loves you more than you will ever know. So turn to God in prayer asking His help and the words of the psalm in today's Mass would be a good way to begin. It says *May your love be upon us O Lord, as we place all our hope in you.*

Tonight as we gather to pray for all victims and survivors of abuse we humbly acknowledge the sins of abuse perpetrated by church members over the years and we acknowledge too the sins of some church authorities who failed to respond as good shepherds when they learned of the abuse that had taken place. We acknowledge these failings and we pray for forgiveness for them as we pray for healing for all who have been abused.

We thank God for the victims and survivors of abuse who have bravely disclosed the suffering they endured and in doing so have shed a light in the darkness and have helped our church become more Christ-like, a better, a safer and a more caring place for all. We thank God too for all those people who are working tirelessly to safeguard children and vulnerable adults and who have set up good practices and safe systems in our parishes, our diocese and our country. And we thank Bishop Leo O'Reilly, who as bishop of the diocese for more than twenty years, has given great leadership and established good safeguarding practices throughout the diocese, practices that are firmly embedded and will be continued into the future. We finish with a prayer:

Heavenly Father, you love and care for all your children, especially the smallest and most vulnerable, we entrust to you the lives of the many children and vulnerable adults who have been abused, and whose trust and innocence have been destroyed. Help us to hear their cries of pain and to take responsibility for so many broken lives.

We pray that within their communities and families they may find understanding and support so that with the help of your grace their wounds may be healed and they may once again know peace.

We make our prayer through. Amen.