NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Pro-life pilgrigmage to Millennium Cross

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Pilgrims circled a gigantic cross on the prairies northeast of Saskatoon to pray for an end to abortion on a sunny Sunday afternoon in August.

The 12th annual pilgrimage to the Millennium Pro-Life Cross on Highway 41 began Aug. 21 with the rosary prayed by pilgrims standing at the beads of a large rosary surrounding the 100-foot steel cross.

During the afternoon pilgrimage, Anita Sonntag spoke about the work of the awareness group Silent No More.

"We are post abortive women who have received God's mercy and forgiveness and have found healing," she said, describing the group's ongoing awareness campaign. "We want to expose and heal the secrecy and silence surrounding the emotional, physical and spiritual pain of abortion."

Women involved in Silent No More refute society's rhetoric that abortion is good for women, she said. "We want to help prevent others from making the same mistake we did by telling our stories of pain and regret and healing," she said. "And we want to help those who have had abortions to find the healing that we have found."

It is important to find ways to reach out and help women and men who suffer the consequences of abortion, Sonntag said.

"People who have been wounded by abortion are everywhere. They have to be, since researchers tell us that one out of four pregnancies end in abortion." Many are suffering in silence and don't know why, Sonntag noted.

Helping someone who has had an abortion includes listening, nonjudgmental compassion and a willingness to walk with them on their journey, she said, listing some do's and don'ts if someone discloses they have had an abortion.

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"Don't presume that it was a wanted abortion. Do realize that others may have been directly or indirectly involved, perhaps pushing for abortion in ways that were coercive, abusive or even by force," she said. "Do acknowledge their loss and express your concern and support for them. Don't leave them without offering your support and encouraging them to seek out a post-abortion healing program."

Sonntag also described the work of Rachel's Vineyard, which offers retreats to women or men who have struggled with emotional and spiritual pain as a result of an abortion. In Saskatchewan, two sessions are held every year, one in the spring and one in the fall, with the next one scheduled for Oct. 14-16 (www.rachelsvineyard.org), she reported.

Pilgrimage guest speaker Deacon Myron Yamniuk of St. George Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral said that victory belongs to Christ in the great battles with the forces of evil that are played out in our world.

In battling the culture of death, the enemy is Satan, Yamniuk stressed. "As St. Paul says, the enemies are not human forces. Sometimes we can get caught up as if we are battling people and their ideas," he said. "But they are our brothers and sisters. Every one of them is as loved as much as we are. They are all God's children."

Jesus showed us how to fight against evil: by complete obedience to God, he said. "He obeyed God to the point of death, to dying on the cross," he said.

"What is life? Jesus tells us what life is. First of all life is a person. Life is Jesus Christ," Yamniuk said. "He tells us if we follow him, if we take his words to heart, we will have that life within us.

Conversion of hearts will come about through the work of the Holy Spirit, he added, calling for prayer and perseverance. "We feel hopeless, and at times we struggle with the temptation of despair, but we hold onto the words of the Lord and we will have victory."

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At the foot of the cross, Jesus gave us his mother to care for and defend us, Yamniuk said, encouraging pilgrims to turn to her in the pro-life struggle. Just as the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe more than 500 years ago brought millions to faith in the midst of a violent culture of ritualized human sacrifice, the Blessed Virgin Mary is calling people to her son today, he said.

Five weapons to fight evil in the world are prayer from the heart, especially the rosary; the holy eucharist; the scriptures; fasting; and the sacrament of reconciliation, Yamniuk listed.

"We must not be surprised when the conflict seems difficult," he said, "But we go forward with humility, with love and trust … the world needs to hear the good news that we have victory in Jesus Christ."

The Millennium Cross was a project of the Sts. Peter and Paul Council of the Knights of Columbus, constructed on property donated by Joseph and Florence Bayda. In 2000, it was chosen by the Saskatchewan State Council as the recipient of the program director's award for "best millennium project."

Starting with a smaller wooden cross erected in 1999, the site has expanded to now include the 100-foot cross, lighting, and storage. A memorial for babies lost through miscarriage has also been set up at the site, 10 km north of Aberdeen, SK.