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DIOCESE RECEIVES A 'PIETA' FOR THE CATHEDRAL

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Father Adam Keiter and Pat Kerivan walk around a replica of Michelangelo's Pieta after it was set into place Tuesday morning in the gathering space of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Wichita.

Father Keiter is rector of the Cathedral. Kerivan is a representative from ArteDivine, the licensee of the Pieta reproductions. (Advance photos)
Exact replica of Michelangelo's work is a wonderful example of mercy in this special year.

A pilgrimage to the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception will be greatly enhanced if the Diocese of Wichita is able to purchase a replica of Michelangelo's Pieta.

The diocese has been offered one of 100 exact reproductions of the statue that hundreds of thousands travel annually to Rome to see in the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican. The offer is being made by ArteDivine, the licensee of the Vatican Observatory Foundation, which has duplicated the original using cast Carrara marble.

In a videotaped interview, Bishop Carl A. Kemme calls Michelangelo's Pieta one of the world's most renowned works of art.

He said the word "pieta" is translated into English as piety or pity. "But I think really the work of art means feeling...a deep feeling when you see Mary holding her son Jesus in her arms after his death – after his cruel crucifixion. Her love and her compassion for Jesus, that's what it evokes." The statue has a strong relationship with the Year of Mercy. "It's a work in which we see mercy itself," Bishop Kemme said.

"We call Mary the mother of mercy – and she holds Jesus. Every mother loves to hold her children. Even when they get older – and especially when they're suffering or when they have died. And so this evokes the spiritual meaning of Mary. She loves us, her children, as she loved Jesus."

Jesus, the merciful one, gave his life for the salvation of the world, Bishop Kemme said. "Mary receives that in the beautiful expression of her holding that sacrifice. And so in this Year of Mercy, we are focusing – in a very extraordinary way – on the mercy of Jesus and how that's communicated through the church through Mary and the saints and through our prayer life."

He said he hopes the diocese is able to procure one of the statues so that those not fortunate enough to be able to travel to Rome will be able to see an exact duplicate from cast Carrara marble.

"I saw one of these in Philadelphia in September," he said. "It's striking, it's very striking."

Bishop Kemme said some will have good and appropriate questions about whether it's appropriate to put the amount of resources necessary to purchase the work of art.

"But I see this as a way of serving everybody – the poor and rich alike," he said, adding that the same question could have been asked about the renovation of the Cathedral.

"But now the Cathedral is open and people can come in and worship and pray and have spiritual consolation," he said. "The same is true with this. To see a replica of the original Pieta will just be a great blessing and good for all of us to be able to have it for many, many years – hundreds of years to come."

The statue would be one of the highlights for pilgrims visiting the Cathedral, Bishop Kemme said. "It's not just seeing a work of art, it evokes our spiritual life and devotion from our hearts."

Answering a question regarding how he would explain the Pieta to a group of fifth graders, Bishop Kemme said mothers never tire of holding their children – especially when they're sick or suffering.

"Mary was unable to hold Jesus while he hung on the cross," he said. "She was prevented from coming to help him."

After his death, Jesus' body would have been taken to her.

"We can understand that from our human perspective, from our human experience," Bishop Kemme said. "That's what mothers do and they do it out of the depth of love in their hearts. That's what Mary shows us in this beautiful masterpiece."

The reaction from local artists and art lovers about the statue was positive. Bob Workman, director of the Ulrich Museum of Art at Wichita State University, said the replica promises to inspire devotion and impress all who view it.

Patricia McDonnell concurred. "Viewers of the full-scale replica of Michelangelo's 15th-century Pieta will find it impressive," the director of the Wichita Art Museum said. "Christian and Catholic viewers should find it inspiring, a moving devotional touchstone."

“Having traveled extensively in Italy I have seen most of the impressive artworks of the Italian Renaissance. As an artist, art instructor, gallery director and art enthusiast I can’t emphasize enough how wonderful it is for the Catholic Dioceses of Wichita to bring a replica of Michelangelo’s Pieta to the Wichita community.”

Mary Werner, an associate professor of art at Newman University in Wichita said (Michelangelo’s) Pieta is undeniably the most outstanding work of Christian art.

“It is filled with passion, emotion, and spirituality and continues to move viewers today to get a glimpse of the agony and death of Christ and the sorrow of Mary. Beyond its sacred meaning it is also the most impressive display of the talent of Michelangelo.”

Shelly Prichard, president and CEO of the Wichita Community Foundation, said the Pieta is her “absolute favorite piece of art.”

She was in Rome a few years ago and saw the Pieta, she said, but added that because of the crowds and because of the distance between a barrier and the statue, it’s not easily viewed.

Nonetheless, she said, “seeing the image of Mary and Jesus touched me in a more meaningful way than anything else I did.”

“I work a couple of blocks from the Cathedral. I know where all my lunchtime walks will be taking me.”

Want to contribute to the Pieta effort?

Those who wish to donate to help purchase the statue may visit

Give.CatholicDioceseOfWichita.org.



A close-up of Jesus being held by the Blessed Virgin.



The Pietà will greet visitors to the Cathedral who enter through the parish office entrance.

