

FROM THE PASTOR'S



26th Sunday in Ordinary Time, October 1, 2006 B

RESPECT LIFE SUNDAY—THE CALL TO SAY “NO” TO A CULTURE OF DEATH AND “YES” TO A CULTURE OF LIFE.

Today our church celebrates and proclaims her respect for the dignity of all human life from the womb to the tomb. All human life is infinitely precious to God because it is created in the *image and likeness* of the Creator. Hence, anywhere or anytime human life is desecrated we, the followers of Christ, should speak up. Not only that, but we must be willing to look into our own hearts and ask: do we generally treat other persons with dignity and respect? Where do we stand on Respect Life issues such as abortion, domestic violence, street violence, war, assisted suicide, euthanasia, capital punishment, social justice issues like poverty at home and abroad, fair wages and fair working conditions for workers? How pro-life are we? Are we pro-life on some issues but not on others? The late Pope John Paul, in his celebrated encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (Gospel of Life) calls us to defend life at all its stages—from womb to tomb. Yet, we know that many Catholics today disagree with this teaching. Some are pro-choice, some are pro-capital punishment, some are pro-euthanasia. Some Catholics have more loyalty to their *political* party on these issues than they do to their church whose teaching is solidly rooted on the Gospel of Christ.

Hope and Healing After Abortion

When it comes to life issues, the most controversial one in our society is the issue of protecting the right to life of the unborn child. Since January 1973, it is legal for a mother in America to ask a doctor to end the life of her unborn child. Too often women who find themselves with an unwanted pregnancy end up believing that abortion is the best way to solve her problem or that abortion is the *only* choice they have. We now know that large numbers of women who made the decision to allow some doctor to kill their child, frequently have to deal with a tremendous amount of emotional and spiritual suffering.

While our church teaches that abortion is *always* a wrong choice, she also offers mercy and healing for women who are struggling to deal with their decision to end the life of their unborn child.

I am most grateful to Karen Reilly for her willingness to share her story of hope and healing after she had decided to have an abortion. Karen writes.

“Once a woman is pregnant, the choice is not simply between having a baby and not a baby. The choice is between having a baby and having the experience of abortion.”

I read these words and knew the author understood. She understood the years of pain and anger and confusion. She understood that abortion is not a ‘non-event’. It is a life-changing event. My abortion experience began 14 years ago. I was a 34 year old student. I left a good job to return to school. I was briefly re-involved with a man I’d had a relationship with a couple of years before - and became pregnant. He knew that abortion was the one ‘never’ in my life. And, after learning of my pregnancy, he disappeared.

Alone and Overwhelmed

That he abandoned me and our child was a well-guarded secret. Every emotion related to him was pushed aside. It was another layer in my ‘abortion experience’ that would be acknowledged and dealt with much later.

I had more pressing issues to handle. I had no money, no income, no home, no insurance – and I was alone...Although I wasn’t a child, I was still scared and confused and panicked and rather in shock of it all. How would I support myself and my baby when starting with nothing?

I kept these concerns to myself. Everyone around me was voicing them enough. I somehow knew that if I verbally agreed to the difficulties I was facing, then I was agreeing to an abortion. And I was not pursuing that option. Although raised Catholic, during the time of my pregnancy, I was not involved with any church. There was no ‘other voice’. It seemed all I heard was the negative about my situation.

The Adoption Option

I briefly considered adoption – and the option was dismissed. I thought I could not go through nine months of pregnancy and give my child away. Prior to this, I never understood why every unintended pregnancy did not end in adoption rather than abortion. It seemed so logical. I learned the hard way that it isn’t a question of ‘logic’. I knew it was irrational. I knew it did not make sense. It wasn’t a conscious thought, but my reaction seemed to be, “If I can’t have my baby, then neither can you.”

My family didn’t know what to do or say. Exactly one week after telling them I was pregnant, I went back and told them, “I can’t go through with it.” Although not supportive of abortion, they didn’t know how to respond. Some siblings simply said they understood. Some voiced a stronger yet still too subtle reproach. My parents were angry, hurt, confused, devastated, and yet had no words.

The Irrevocable Decision

I learned much later that no one in my family wanted to tell me what to do. In comparison, everyone recommending

abortion had no problem telling me what to do. 'Abortion is the best decision you can make at this time'. It was like a mantra. It was very difficult to think clearly about anything. I have since learned that a person in crisis is more readily influenced by outside sources. This was certainly true for me.

I could not believe I was doing this. It was incomprehensible that my life had come to this...This unfathomable decision to take the life of my child. This went against everything I believed. Yet, one day, with a pain that shattered my heart, I said goodbye to my baby. I went numb. Every thought and emotion shut down. And, days later, he was gone.

The Aftermath

After the abortion, I felt paralyzed. I left school within weeks of the abortion, started working again – with long hours and with rather demanding expectations of others. I was depressed; I gained a lot of weight. And I was angry. This anger surfaced in a variety of ways throughout many relationships. I told myself I would never become pregnant again. I could not bear even the thought of having another child when I killed my first one. I also struggled with being around other pregnant women.

I knew part of my heart was gone forever. Part of my life would never be recovered. I knew I was a different person now. I was simply going through the motions of life. The abortion was always just below the surface. I quickly learned this was to be a 'private pain'. It was an uncomfortable topic and no one knew what to say.

Recovery and Healing

It took many years to untangle the web of emotions and to recognize symptoms related to my abortion. Though much of my journey was solitary, there are many resources available to assist anyone experiencing the hurt and pain of abortion. The wounds associated with abortion are real and they must be tended to.

During my journey, I learned to forgive others and with more difficulty, to forgive myself. And, I accepted the forgiveness, the mercy and grace of our Lord, offered through the Church. Post-abortion programs, such as Rachel's Vineyard Retreats, are a source of hope and healing.

I realized too late that I simply needed to hear the words, "I'll help you", or at least, "I'll help you find help." I am grateful to all who encourage me, or in many cases, simply do not discourage me, in sharing the truth about abortion; the truth about my abortion.

Silent No More

I am saddened by the sheer numbers of women and men who cannot share their burden; who do not recognize or cannot admit the source of their pain and grief; who suffer the effects of this trauma alone and in silence. They are the 'walking wounded'. Those of us that can speak out, must.

Many of those unable to seek help or to speak out are torn between the confusion of hearing 'it's no big deal; get on with your life' from some; and the shame of being judged, condemned and shunned by others. A post-abortive woman (or man) does not need to hear 'It's no big deal' and does not need to hear a message of condemnation.

The Church's Message

In a booklet, *Rachel, Weep No More*, the authors' state: "The message of the Catholic Church avoids both...Our clean identification of abortion as an evil, which is never morally licit, corresponds with the deepest truth she (a post-abortive woman) is hearing in her mind and heart. It cuts through the rhetoric, the empty excuses...breaks through denial, and assures her she has a reason for her grief. At the same time, and in the same breath, we give the message of hope. The doors of the Church are open..."

"The woman suffering from abortion may think we (in the Church) are silent because we do not know her pain, do not care, or have no hope to offer. In truth, however, we speak because we do know, do care, and do offer hope."

Post Abortion Symptoms

Post-Abortion symptoms are real. These symptoms vary by individual and may include difficulty with relationships, lowered self-esteem, sexual problems, promiscuity, substance abuse, anger, sadness, or emotional numbness. They may also include eating disorders, bouts of crying, guilt, inability to forgive yourself, multiple abortions, nightmares, sleep disturbances, anxiety attacks, flashbacks, suicidal urges.

If you or someone you know may be suffering from post-abortion symptoms, please contact the Respect Life Office (407.246.4819) for assistance or visit www.rachelsvineyard.org.

A Prayer for Life

Loving Creator of all life,
Renew in us all a deep respect for all persons:
The unborn, the disabled, the aged, the homeless.
Through the intercession of Mary, Mother and Virgin,
May all our words and actions foster
Reverence for human life.
May we be true witnesses to the truth that all life is
Precious and has sublime dignity.
Lead our nation and our world to this understanding
So that we may be a people dedicated to the protection
Of all your sons and daughters.
We ask this through your son, Jesus Christ, the Word
Who became flesh and lived among us. Amen.

Have a blessed week,

Le Sarah