

The Spiritual Journey Of Healing

By Carrie A. Bucalo

1st Revised Edition

Copyright ©Carrie Bucalo 2010, 2016

All rights reserved

This material may be downloaded, printed or stored for personal use by permission of the author. But no part of this material may be sold or used for sale in any form without the prior written permission of the copyright owner/author.

Table of Contents

The Beginning...	3
The Dark Night of the Soul...	6
The Memories of God...	10
The Memories of the Church...	13
Forgiveness...	16
Spiritual Poverty...	18
Spiritual Fruitfulness...	20
Our Final End, Mary's Example...	22
The Holy Spirit...	24
Bibliography...	26

(Author's Note * All citations are numbered and can be referenced in the Bibliography section)

THE BEGINNING

O God of love, I turn to you now and ask you to be with me and to give me courage to embark on the spiritual journey of healing. I don't want to do this alone. I believe that you are here with me now. You offer me your help, and it is up to me to accept it. Sometimes I feel my heart is too closed to let you in, but even if it is open only a little I trust that you will make of it a perfect opportunity for your grace and your healing power to work in my life. I will give you what I can, and I trust that you will do the rest. Amen.

"Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love...

Send forth your spirit, and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Oh, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of your faithful. Grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolations, through Christ, Our Lord. Amen." (Traditional Prayer to the Holy Spirit)

Questions for the Beginning:

- 1) Am I willing to follow Christ, even if life presents me with thousands of difficulties?
- 2) How is my relationship with Christ? Are there any aspects of it that are painful because of abuse?
- 3) Do I judge myself, or do others judge me for having a complicated faith life?
- 4) Does Christ judge me? Does God understand my situation?

The Catholic faith teaches us that God can forgive any sin, and draw goodness out of any situation, even an evil situation. What about the sexual abuse scandal of the Catholic Church? It has created a deep faith-wound, which I believe has compromised and weakened the faith of the entire Church. I personally bear this faith-wound, which has pushed me beyond my personal limits to the fringes of disbelief. I know many others who have experienced the same, and still others who have abandoned their faith in God entirely because of this scandal. So, what's the good that can come out of this circumstance?

One idea comes to mind: *the faith of the martyrs.*

I believe we must jump straight to the heart of the matter. Ministers who have abused those in their care have created martyrs in the Church. I believe that victims are in a very unique position. Because of their piercing wounds, the smallest act of faith puts them directly into a dialogue with Christ crucified. Victims who believe, who cling to God in the most impossible of circumstances, are giving their life-blood for Christ. Meeting him there, victims share a mutually painful experience with him. They cannot stop the pain of their experience, and find it foolish to even try. They cannot approach God in a 'comfortable' or safe way. Wounds have no walls, no false pretenses of comfort, no doubts about what is suffered. But in this space of meeting with God, memories are shared, love is found, and all of time, history and eternity are brought into focus. Words cannot describe the treasure the Church has in the faith of these martyrs.

The Church has always taught that she is built through the 'blood' of the martyrs (1). Those who have suffered deep faith-wounds, and dialogue with Christ crucified, share and witness to God's love through a spiritual martyrdom.

St. Teresa of Avila- A Spiritual Martyr of Faith

I greatly admire the Carmelite saints because they suffered so much for their faith. If their life attests to anything it's that God can be found and loved, even in the most impossible and difficult situations. These saints were patient and persevered through the most grueling circumstances, and I believe they paved the way for us to navigate our way through the faith-wounds of our time.

St. Teresa of Avila was a tremendous guide for me as I set off on my faith journey in Carmel. I had the privilege of spending three years as a cloistered Carmelite nun, and literally "at the feet" of St. Teresa. She experienced a lot of suffering in her life. Her mother died when she was young, and she ran away to enter a Carmelite monastery. In Carmel, she suffered at the hands of lax and worldly superiors on top of suffering tremendous physical ailments, including a coma, being almost buried alive, and paralysis of the legs that lasted three years (2). She battled and fought with her own wounds and the wounds of those around her, and was pushed beyond her limits on more than one occasion. Journeying to open a new monastery, she was bucked off her horse into a puddle of mud:

"Lord!" She cried, "If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few!" (3)

I don't have time to list all of Teresa's trials, sufferings and tribulations, but surely, St. Teresa suffered the cross during her life, and somehow still experienced redemption and healing. Our Lord gave her tremendous and extraordinary graces to deal with her difficulties, including visions of him, levitations, encounters with an angel who pierced her heart with the flaming dart of God's love (4). She was eventually named one of the only women doctors of the Church (5), and her mysticism and writings about the spiritual journey have greatly impacted the Church for hundreds of years.

Through St. Teresa's example, we can trust that Our Lord is very just, and will grant us the perfect amount of grace to persevere in our faith. If we have suffered much, he will give us much, according to his goodness. Dealing with the wounds of sexual abuse is very difficult, and many graces are needed to confront it. But as St. Teresa demonstrated for us, we need to be real and human in our journey to God. When we suffer the cross, we need to dialogue with Christ crucified, "Lord! If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few!" But when God offers healing and grace, we also need to accept it with gratitude:

"Let nothing trouble you,
Let nothing frighten you;
For all things pass away.
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
Nothing is lacking,

for him who possesses God.
God alone suffices," -St. Teresa of Avila

Prayer

O Lord, I am broken. I am covered with wounds left from my abuse. I sometimes feel tempted to abandon everything about you and everything about myself, even the goodness you still see in me. I am not always able to stand on my own and run into your arms. I sometimes feel frozen and alone; I feel washed ashore like driftwood, in the darkness of a cold night.

But I hold one thing in my heart, I possess one last beat of hope, which I trust you will draw out from me. It is your presence, here and now, suffering for me and with me on your timeless cross.

Somehow I know that you see my eternal beauty within you right now, and it sparks a flame inside of me that grows into an unquenchable fire. And by the warmth of this grace I feel you breathe life back into me, because of the power of your resurrection. May your memories of my life be always in my heart. Amen.

THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

Questions for the Dark Night of the Soul:

- 1) Am I going through the Dark Night of the Soul?
- 2) Am I distracting myself with a million things, or do I sit voluntarily in silence with you, Lord?
- 3) Is it difficult for me when I feel out of control? What should I do when I try my hardest but I still can't make things better on my own? What did St. John of the Cross do?
- 4) When God's healing rays fill my entire being, will I be able to 'leave all my cares, forgotten among the lilies?'

St. John of the Cross- Perseverance through Faith Wounds

Growing up in poverty, fatherless at a young age, St. John of the Cross knew his fair share of hardships. Despite life's difficulties, he decided to walk through Christ's narrow gate, and when he did, his life was never the same. He met a friend, St. Teresa of Avila, who encouraged him to help her reform the Carmelite order in Spain. Soon after, he began a small foundation for Carmelite friars. Their reformation was greatly resisted by other Carmelites, but they persevered through it all (6).

On the night of December 2, 1577, John was imprisoned by the superiors of the Carmelite friars, who stuck him in isolation in a cell barely big enough for his body, and lashed him publicly every week (7). They derided him and despised him for his efforts to reform their lax monasteries, and wanted him to renounce his activities in the reform.

In the grace and strength of Christ, John managed to escape after nine months of imprisonment, although never fully regaining his health. During his imprisonment, he wrote one of the most beautiful pieces of literature, *The Spiritual Canticle* (8). The poem is too long to quote here, but I believe this work is a profound cry of the soul who is searching for the love of God after being abused and wounded.

St. John of the Cross also wrote *The Dark Night of the Soul*, which narrates the journey of a soul through all the difficulties and limitations of faith-wounds to arrive at union with God. As he describes, first, we must start out on the road of darkness by leaving behind all that is not of God; we must then enter the 'night.' Within the hidden chambers of the soul, God works and heals, although most of his movements are 'disguised' and are impalpable to the soul, or can even be very painful. It is then that a soul will understand that the greatest gift God can give it is to purify it and heal it of all that is not of Him, who is its gladness and goodness (9).

When the soul enters the darkness, there is nothing to fall back on. And because there aren't any distractions, God's light alone illumines the soul, although his light is imperceptible to the soul at that time. Through this process, the soul learns that it is better to be lost to oneself and one's abilities to arrive at healing and holiness, because it is best to draw from God, from his memories, his thoughts, and his love. Then the soul can totally 'assimilate and appropriate the reality of Christ's Incarnation and Redemption, (10), which leads to a participation of the things of Heaven and an anticipation of the resurrection of one's own body and soul into eternal glory. At that point, the only response to God's

love is a total forgetfulness of self, of one's sufferings, because the only movement the heart can make is a cry of thankful praise:

"One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
- ah, the sheer grace! -
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.

In darkness, and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
- ah, the sheer grace! -
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.

On that glad night,
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything,
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.

This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
- him I knew so well -
there in a place where no one appeared.

O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.

Upon my flowering breast
which I kept wholly for him alone,
there he lay sleeping,
and I caressing him
there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.

When the breeze blew from the turret,
as I parted his hair,
it wounded my neck
with its gentle hand,
suspending all my senses.

I abandoned and forgot myself,
laying my face on my Beloved;
all things ceased; I went out from myself,

leaving my cares
forgotten among the lilies”

-St. John of the Cross (See 9)

When the light of God’s truth shines inside a soul that has been darkened by abuse, it can be extremely painful. It must be noted though that the pain is not caused by God, or his presence in the soul, but instead by the false imagery of God that their abuser forced upon them to accept as truth. But the experience is as if God himself torments the soul.

From a very young age, I struggled with PTSD in my faith and prayer life, because my father had misused Christ and the Church to abuse me. My father was a very active lay minister at our parish. He helped with RCIA classes and sponsored many people into the Church. He was an usher, scripture study leader, marriage enrichment leader and Eucharistic minister. He even played the part of Jesus in the passion play. To this day I can still remember how many of the people at our parish considered my dad to be a real "saint." No one knew about the abuse, or the faith-wounds he was etching in my soul.

This presented me with two very different options: run away from God when I suffered from my PTSD, or run to God when I encountered moments of grace and healing. I did both. When I was afraid, I experienced profound agony in the depths of my soul. I wondered why God didn’t protect me from my father, especially when I turned to him and begged him in prayer. God seemed either powerless, or as monstrous as my father. The concepts of redemptive suffering and abandonment to God's divine providence in those moments didn't sit well with me. It seemed to mock my pain, “Offer it up,” I heard many people say at our parish, about sacrifices and undesired realities they experienced. Could they have imagined the depths of my ‘sacrifices?’ Could they have known the conditions and ‘undesired realities’ I faced? Probably not. My hell was masked with the face of a ‘saint.’ I wondered if they’d still say the same thing to me if they understood my experience. Perhaps there was something better to be said. I wondered, and began to hunt for the answer to this question, “What am I supposed to do with my faith, nailed to the cross?”

As a child, there was always something mysterious, something unknown behind Christ’s marred and bloody face on the cross. But I was afraid of him. Christ terrified me. Then, in a high-school religion class, I encountered Christ through St. John Paul II’s *Veritatis Splendor*, (The Splendor of Truth). In this papal encyclical, I found God’s beauty, hidden behind the lies of my father. My heart was set on fire by God’s objective goodness and beauty. This encounter inspired me to pursue a deeper dialogue with Christ, as objective Truth and beauty, and I eventually found my way into a Carmelite monastery. I cannot do justice here to the events that led to my vocation, but I can share with you what I found along my spiritual journey as a Carmelite nun.

During my time in Carmel, my father was arrested for abuse. That phone call tore me apart from the inside out. After that day, I lived in constant torment. The beauty I found in God as a teenager seemed to vanish into thin air. All that seemed to remain was the lie. I experienced pain every time I approached God in prayer. It became painful for me to participate in Mass and to go to confession. God seemed to wound me, and be exactly the kind of God my father told me he was. Without any worldly distractions, I acted fast to come up with my own distractions, which was really hard to do. I’m sure I made some sort of Carmelite history for all the creative ways I tried to distract myself, in a place that had NO

distractions! I worked extra hard at my duties and took on extra ones. I tried to think about soccer during prayer time, which wasn't too hard because there was a soccer field not too far from the chapel and sometimes I could hear shouts and cheering and whistles blowing. I tried as hard as I could to remember every movie and every song I ever heard before I entered the silence. But after a couple days, then weeks, then months, nothing seemed to work! I couldn't block God out, and it felt like he was killing me!

Like Elijah's experience up on Mount Carmel, God engulfed my father's idols with flames of burning fire! It's too bad I held these idols in my heart. I thought I was going to die in the flames. But I didn't. I was left in a pile of ash and soot, not knowing who I was. Then God's Spirit moved, and in a tiny whisper, cut between "the bone and the marrow" of my spirit and soul. Purged and shaken down to my smallest self, I didn't recognize my own being. I was out of my comfort zone; and had nothing left of my own constructing to fall back on. I literally fell into the unknown. It was very chaotic. There was absolutely NOTHING I could do. Yet mysteriously, St. John's words became deafeningly clear:

"This guided me more surely than the light of noon to where he was awaiting me- him I knew so well - there in a place where no one appeared. I abandoned and forgot myself, laying my face on my Beloved; all things ceased; I went out from myself, leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies."

Prayer

Dear Hidden God,

I have been wounded in the sacred place of my soul, where you alone are meant to appear. And those that have wounded me seemed to bear your face. But I cannot settle for this. There must be more to you.

Therefore, I am reaching out my arms so that I can feel your true presence when you draw near. I am looking for your face, even when I have to hide mine. I am searching for your embrace when I am frightened. And I am longing to hear your voice when I am wrapped in silence.

Although I do not know you as I should, I believe that you will somehow reveal to me your true self. The unexplainable hope that I possess testifies to this, so I await your coming, with joy. Amen.

THE MEMORIES OF GOD

Questions for the Memories of God:

- 1) Have I ever felt alone or trapped because of a memory?
- 2) What will I find in the memories of God?
- 3) Am I ready to discover the hidden joy of Christ's presence within my memories?
- 4) Do I believe that Christ can heal, restore, and transform my life if I draw close to him "with my unrest, uncertainty, and even my weakness, my sinfulness, with my life and my death?"

Through the dark night, I lost my identity as I wanted to have it, and as I was comfortable with. What I gained instead was God's understanding of who I really was. What a surprise!

I first encountered the memories of God through reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church: *"To God, all moments of time are present in their immediacy,"* (11). From there I understood that in order to ascertain God's view of our memories, I first had to do one thing: join myself to the very memories of God. And the memories of God are very different from my own memories. When God "remembers" something he is not simply recalling an event that happened in the past, like I do, in Chronos, "in time." No. When God "remembers" something he is completely present to them, in Kairos, "in eternity." His view of me is perfect and whole, because it not only encompasses my present, but my past and my future as well. It is a living memory.

The Church also teaches that Christ took on the humanity of each one of us, and united himself with every human being who ever lived. One aspect of his union with us is that he "remembers" every memory of every person. For a long time, I thought that I was the only one who remembered what I remembered and felt exactly what I felt. But the moment Christ entered the scene, a change took place, like a great cosmic shift. All of the sudden, I was no longer alone, Christ had come.

As Pope Benedict XVI said, *"Advent's intention is to awaken the most profound and most basic emotional memory within us, namely, the memory of the God who became a child. This is a healing memory; it brings hope"* (12).

When I encountered Christ's memories of my life a new advent came, Christ came, and shattered my darkness. I saw for the first time that I was never really alone. With this advent unfolded the entire mystery of salvation: namely that when the "fullness of time had come," Jesus took upon himself the sins of the world and died on the cross, conquering sin and death forever. The sin and death that he conquered also included the sins of my father, and all the abuse. God was there. Christ took the horror of sin and abuse to the Cross and transformed it into a life-giving power, namely grace. He was there, suffering with me and for me on his timeless cross. He cried every tear, endured every wound, and answered every prayer: in his time.

Looking with Christ, at the whole of his memories of my life, I found my true identity and the fullest healing. Glancing at myself, in and through Christ, in and through his memories, gave me a complete picture of what happened to me, of who I am now, and of who I am called to be. As Saint John Paul II so beautifully wrote:

“Consequently, the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly—and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial and even illusory standards and measures of his being—must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ” (13).

As children of our heavenly Father we are called to “draw near to Christ,” to “enter him with all of ourselves,” to “appropriate and assimilate the whole reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find ourselves” (14). Uniting myself to the very person of Christ, and to his memories of my life, I began to understand His Paschal mystery. In a new light, I saw that the wounds he suffered, the scourges that were rent, the crown of thorns that pierced, and the cross he carried, were his way of drawing close to me, because these were my memories, my pains, my wounds, my sufferings, and my cross.

Within God’s memories, he is suffering with me and for me, doing absolutely everything he can to show me the true beauty of his face. He did not abandon me during my abuse...He was right there, actively participating in my suffering, doing something with my pain, at the exact moment of my abuse. He was at my side, and always holding me, just as he held his cross...it was one and the same event:

“With creation, God does not abandon his creatures to themselves. He not only gives them being and existence, but also, and at every moment, upholds and sustains them in being, enables them to act and brings them to their final end” (15).

Ultimately, the most important reason for drawing close to Christ and his memories of my suffering is that my suffering and pain are only a part of Christ’s memories. There is much more, which I was inhibited from experiencing, and not able to see. For the very next thing that Christ did after his death and burial was rise from the dead!

“The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross:

*“Christ is risen from the dead!
Dying, he conquered death;
To the dead, he has given life”
(16).*

Through His resurrection, Christ beholds and brings about in me the healing that will take place in my body, mind and soul, the healing that has already taken place and will continue to take place throughout my life, even the healing of my sexuality, and finally my rising from death, which we will all experience on the ‘Last day,’ just like Christ’s body was risen from the grave.

Christ “remembers” how I will be put back together, created a new, risen from my grave, given new life, and glorified in Heaven. He “remembers” my joy and happiness in discovering His great love for me, and all the many experiences I will share with him in eternity. His memories never negate the truth,

pain, and horror of the cross. But they always open up to the glory of resurrection!

Through this I have learned that the broken, abused, shattered, dark, suffering aspects of my memories and of myself cannot be ripped, peeled, cut, or severed without losing Christ in the process. If I am ever discouraged that my wounds are so horrifying that no one would ever want to draw close to me, or could bare to see me, all I need to do is draw close to Christ crucified. He is the only person who knows how to love in this space.

Prayer

O Lord, please help me encounter your memories of my life, and fill my entire being. I have never had an opportunity to experience your love in such a real and positive way. Sometimes I am able to sense the awesomeness of your presence, and sometimes I am not. But I am not satisfied without knowing you better. I must go further, chase after you if I must, in order to know why you are still present even in a heart that has been crushed. You are so mysterious to me. Therefore, I pray that you reveal yourself, so that I can respond with my life. Amen.

THE MEMORIES OF THE CHURCH

Questions for the Memories of the Church:

- 1) Have I been wounded in a manner that makes it difficult or painful for me to draw near to Christ?
- 2) Have I turned away from Christ or the Church because of my pain and difficulties?
- 3) How do I respond to Christ when he draws 'dangerously' near?
- 4) Can I trust Christ's plan for my personal and unique healing in the sacraments?

Now that we have discovered God's memories, we must look for a way to unite ourselves to them, which means to LIVE them. The Christian's life is strewn with difficulties, dangers, obstacles, and wild circumstances, all converging on the cross. In God's plan for us he has room for our pain, suffering, and physical death, because even these harrowing factors do not limit his love and goodness. It's not easy following a God who doesn't fear danger, but by all means it's certainly possible. Countless saints and great lovers of God have pointed this out for hundreds and thousands of years.

For anyone healing from sexual abuse, one of the greatest difficulties is approaching their wounded sexuality with God's view as the focus. Through my personal experience of drawing close to Christ, I've discovered that what seemed to be the most extreme and dangerous approach to marriage, love and sexuality, has actually united my husband and me to the Triune-God who created all of heaven and earth. Christ has upheld, defended, and protected the deepest aspect of my life, in the sacrament of my marriage.

Christ is not calling my husband and me to a superficial and illusory sexuality. He is calling us, by name, to enter through his narrow gate, and to walk the 'uncomfortable' path of authentic love. His price is high, but he does not expect us to do it alone. In fact, he has given us his own strength and power to overcome all difficulties, and face the greatest dangers. Christ's secret, is really no secret at all. He told us himself that he would send his Holy Spirit to "teach us all things," and call to our remembrance all that he has said to us:

"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14:26).

On the birthday of the Church, the feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and anointed the apostles of Christ and sent them forth with the "power of God" (17). And it is precisely through the Holy Spirit that the memories of God became the memories of the Church:

"The gift of the Spirit ushers in a new era in the 'dispensation of the mystery'- the age of the Church, during which Christ manifests, makes present, and communicates his work of salvation through the liturgy of his Church, 'until He comes' (18).

It is therefore through the sacraments of the Church that humanity is offered a real, deep, unhindered encounter with Christ, which gives us the strength to live as his followers. The sacraments of the Church are "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit" (19). The Holy Spirit works through the

sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, The Holy Eucharist, Marriage, Holy Orders, and the Anointing of the Sick, in order to give us the divine life of God and to recall to each one of our memories the 'unique Revelation brought by Christ:'

"What was accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit 'in the fullness of time' can only through the Spirit's power now emerge from the memory of the Church...The Spirit, in fact, makes present in the Church of every time and place the unique Revelation brought by Christ to humanity, making it alive and active in the soul of each individual" (20).

The Holy Spirit is the one who will make God's memories "alive and active in the soul of each individual." He will dispense to each one of us the 'Wisdom and Knowledge of God.' And that is because *"The Holy Spirit is the Church's living memory"* (21). By participating fully in the Church's sacramental life and liturgy, we access the very memories of God, which are the source of God's healing and grace for each one of us:

"The Son of God heals the whole man, soul and body, through the sacramental life" (22).

But what if we were wounded by someone who is intimately connected with the sacraments of the Church? What if we experience PTSD and pain when we try to draw close to the sacraments? This is a very valid question for anyone who has been sexually abused or molested by Catholic clergy, religious or lay ministers in the Church. I'll get straight to the point. If we look at the very nature of the sacraments, and especially of the Holy Eucharist, which is the "Sacrament of Sacraments," here we will find an amazing discovery. In the sacraments, the Holy Spirit recalls to each recipient their very creation, redemption and sanctification. And it is in the very fact that the sacrament is celebrated, by a valid minister of the Church, that the sacraments retain all their fruitfulness, regardless of the holiness or the sinfulness of the minister:

"The Sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God.' From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister" (23).

Because of this mysterious dynamic, the Holy Eucharist and the sacraments are the deepest sources of healing for victims in the Church. Victims will most likely experience interior martyrdom when they approach Christ in the sacraments. It is truly the "Way of the Cross." An abused soul who approaches Christ in the sacraments with their "unrest, uncertainty, and even weakness, sinfulness, with their life and their death," sets out to be a living dialogue with Christ crucified.

Approaching the altar with streams of tears might be a reality, just like Our Lord approached Calvary. Sometimes we might seriously feel like we are even going to die, just walking up to receive communion, standing in line for confession, or opening the door to our RCIA or Natural Family Planning classes. The difficulties of practicing our Catholic faith will be a bitter-sweet fact of life. Yet, a great mystery lies hidden here. In the last place anyone would think to be possible, God has carved out a way of deep comfort and healing for the entire Church.

Christ has promised to give strength to his martyrs, so they can live out their baptismal calling as sons and daughters of God within the community of believers. By faith, perseverance, and the living

martyrdom they experience, these martyrs are building up the Church with boundless spiritual treasure for the entire body of Christ.

Prayer

O God of Martyrs,

Give me the strength to battle through every obstacle that keeps me from you. I cannot come to you in comfortable ways, but I see now that you come to me in ways that were far from comfortable. Our meeting place is the cross. You hold on to me, and I hold on to you. For brief, terrifying moments, I am unarmed by your love. I would like to speak with you now about the things that are waiting for me and your Church, beyond the cross, "Lord, remember me, when you come into your kingdom."

May the tears I shed sprout life and healing for the whole Church. Amen.

FORGIVENESS

Questions for Forgiveness:

- 1) What is forgiveness?
- 2) Does forgiveness contradict justice?
- 3) Have I struggled with forgiving my abuser, or myself?
- 4) How do I respond when I am the one who needs to be forgiven?

What is forgiveness? I didn't really understand what forgiveness was until I really needed it. When I became a mother for the first time, I saw how important it would be for me to truly forgive my father for what he had done to me. Seeing my husband hold our first child moved my heart. If I was going to love and embrace my husband's fatherhood, I would have to get over my anger and contempt for my dad. I couldn't do this on my own, so I asked God what his memory and understanding of fatherhood and motherhood were. His response was, "Let me show you."

Those words were terrifying because they didn't give me a simple answer like I wanted. Instead, God was proposing to reply in, and through my life. He would answer my questions about motherhood and fatherhood *in* my motherhood and Justin's fatherhood. He wasn't just going to tell me what he thought, he was going to *show* me! Painters speak through their paintings, writers express themselves through the written word, and the Lord, God Almighty, works through flesh and blood.

I held onto my new baby, and experienced motherhood with white knuckles, and a heaping amount of fear of failure. Since I wasn't shown what it was like to be a good parent, I didn't know how I was supposed to be one. I relied heavily on my husband, and on those around me who were successful parents. It was like riding a bike for the first time. I felt a lot of frustration in the little things I did for my child, not because I didn't want to do them, but only because I was doing them from an empty emotional bank. It hurt. I later discovered that those moments of emptiness and pain in my early motherhood were growing pains, as new roots sank in.

Forgiveness was an open invitation for me to actively participate in God's version of my life, and to start each day anew. I realized very quickly that I'm not a perfect mom, as much as I wish I could be. I strive each day to reflect God's glory in my home, and in our world, but every day I fail in many ways. It's very humbling to discover that "I'm failing as a mother." I've never abused my children, and I've fallen very far from my dad's tree. But God knows I'm not perfect. Where would we all be without the power of forgiveness? Each one of us would be lost.

Thank God we have forgiveness. Forgiveness was how I got past my dad's version of things, and forgiveness is how my children can get past my mistakes and failures. We are all called to live out God's love, and not to settle for counterfeits or illusions. We can only choose one version for ourselves, our own version, or God's version:

"Faith teaches us to see that every man and woman represents a blessing for me, that the light of God's face shines on me through the faces of my brothers and sisters," (24).

When God's light doesn't shine through mine, or someone else's face, forgiveness is the light of the heart that will reach God's face anyways. One simple phrase sums it up:

"And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The more we forgive, the more we will see the face of God.

Prayer:

O, Lord, you have shown me what it truly means to forgive. Believing in your goodness, beyond my own sinfulness, and the sinfulness of others, frees me from the burden of bitterness and despair. Through forgiveness my heart is correctly directed towards you, and will be free to reach out towards you with everything I've got! I want to forgive completely so that I never miss an aspect of your glory, or one glimpse of your face. May your glorious face be the face that shines through my face and through every face I see, with healing and with hope for all. Amen.

SPIRITUAL POVERTY

Questions for Spiritual Poverty:

- 1) Do I feel spiritually poor? In the Sermon on the Mount Our Lord called the "poor in spirit" blessed. He says, "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Am I willing to accept God's kingdom in my heart, even if it comes to me in small, hidden ways?
- 2) Oftentimes, healing from sexual abuse can be a very "loud" process. The need for our personal pain to be recognized can easily get out of control. Do I only desire the acknowledgement of others, or most importantly, do I desire the quiet presence of God?
- 3) Do I take the time to pray in my littleness, even if it is only for a few minutes every day?

St. Therese- The Greatest Little Saint

A big misconception I had was that God's healing would take away my wounds completely. I would have never guessed that God's idea of "perfect" could still include my weaknesses, failures, limitations and sins. It wasn't until I realized and accepted the fact that I was "spiritually poor" that I finally had peace of soul. Once again, I learned this lesson through the example of a great Carmelite saint, St. Therese of Lisieux.

St. Therese came from a very devout Catholic family (her father and mother, are now Saints Louis and Zellie Martin). She had four living sisters, all of whom became consecrated religious, like Therese. Therese entered the Carmel of Lisieux when she was only fifteen years old, and recounted her life in her autobiography, *The Story of A Soul*, for one of her sisters who was the prioress of the Carmelite monastery. She was drawn to live a hidden life in Carmel and devote herself to prayer and to small, ordinary tasks which she did "with extraordinary love" (25).

St. Therese didn't travel the world; she didn't start her own religious movement, or set up convents while battling religious dissenters, like St. Teresa of Avila did. Therese had her own mission in the Church though, one that is very simple and universal. She saw her life as a little hidden way of loving God. In all of her duties, from cleaning and taking care of elderly sisters, she saw an opportunity to be faithful to God. In short, St. Therese of Lisieux learned to travel the spiritual path in a very simple and sure way. Instead of becoming discouraged by her imperfections and her own inability to make great spiritual things happen in her soul, she chose to simply be whatever it was that God wanted her to be, even if that meant having spiritual poverties:

"Instead of being discouraged, I concluded that God would not inspire desires which could not be realized, and that I may aspire to sanctity in spite of my littleness. For me to become great is impossible. I must bear with myself and my many imperfections; but I will seek out a means of getting to Heaven by a little way—very short and very straight, a little way that is wholly new" (26).

St. Therese adopted the spirituality of a child, who is content with being little. She found her true identity outside of the great identity-shapers of our fallen world: money, sex and power. She thought

God was the greatest thing in the whole universe, and became great as a result. She didn't see her hidden life in a monastery causing any problems to her world-wide vocation.

Along the spiritual road of healing from sexual abuse, God wants us to find our identity like St. Therese did, outside of money, sex and power. If our healing process relies on any of these three things, it will end up only another illusion, another lie. We must become impoverished of all other identities other than the one God has for us. Remember, God sees us in our fullness: in our past, present and future, and will heal us with eternity in mind, not just with what we want at the moment.

Finding our true identity is not one clear-cut avenue, but God is constantly working things out. He is the God of the universe and will work as he sees fit. Yet we must learn to persevere in our journey towards him, even when we seem to fail constantly:

"That I fall asleep so often during meditation, and thanksgiving after Communion, should distress me. Well, I am not distressed. I reflect that little children are equally dear to their parents whether they are asleep or awake; that, in order to perform operations, doctors put their patients to sleep; and finally, that 'The Lord knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are but dust'" (27).

Every human is completely unique, and so is their spiritual journey. We may all have things in common, and landmarks in the spiritual life, like the Carmelite mystics have shown us. But every person will need to travel their own road of sanctification. What we can do is not to give up, and not be discouraged when all hope seems lost. Even when we are feeling at our lowest, one thing we must do is trust. It is truly up to God to move us where he will:

"I have often observed that Our Lord will not give me any store of provisions, but nourishes me each moment with food that is ever new; I find it within me without knowing how it has come there. I simply believe that it is Jesus Himself hidden in my poor heart, who is secretly at work, inspiring me with what He wishes me to do as each occasion arises" (28).

I must be honest with you, sometimes I feel discouraged by my sins and my faults, but through St. Therese's example, I feel I can march right into spiritual poverty with courage and confidence. She has taught me that perseverance is our greatest weapon against falling into doubt and despair. We must have confidence, like St. Therese, and trust God in the depths of our souls. We must remain like a little child who is content to sleep wherever our Father lays our heads. The best response we can make to our spiritual poverty is to embrace it, like St. Therese, and let Our Heavenly Father know that we are content with whatever he sends us.

Prayer

O Lord, I cannot go any further on my own. I have tried my best to cooperate with your will because I love you. I do not possess the strength to reach you by my own means. I see that I cannot. You will have to do the rest. And if you are obliged to leave me here in this state until the day I die, then I understand that to live the rest of my life in this place would not be a fault of mine, but a poverty that you will not despise. I am little and powerless, but for some mysterious reason, you have such pleasure to dwell in a heart that is poor. Therefore, I am content to remain with you here. Amen.

SPIRITUAL FRUITFULNESS

Questions for Spiritual Fruitfulness:

- 1) Am I willing to lay aside my ideas of perfection, in order to discover God's vision for my healing and my life?
- 2) Do I believe that miracles can happen in my own life? Am I praying for healing every day?
- 3) Do I believe that God loves me in every way, and that he can embrace me, and sustain me, in every sorrow, in every joy, in sickness and in health, in death and in life? Or does my image of God leave him and me powerless in the face of death and suffering?

Our Lord's goal for our spiritual journey towards healing and holiness is to one day be fully united with him in Heaven. God desires for us to experience his love in every aspect of our humanity: in our hearts, minds, bodies and souls. This is what we were created for and what we are moving towards. Therefore, spiritual fruitfulness begins to blossom and grow the more we become united with God in our personhood. Once we come to know Christ, and his Truth, the splendor of his light will begin to shine through our own humanity, like little transfigurations.

A powerful witness to the fruitfulness of the spiritual life are the many lives of the saints. From Carmelite mystics, to martyred missionaries, from Popes, to lay faithful, the Church's treasure has always been the beauty of Christ radiating from the faces and lives of these men and women who have dared to trust Christ with their lives and deaths. Many suffered tremendously, and some of them even suffered the wounds of sexual crimes, like St. Maria Goretti. But they have all attested to God's goodness through miracles and healing. In fact, miracles have occurred throughout salvation history and they certainly continue to occur daily throughout the world. The sick are healed, the lame walk, the deaf speak, and the blind see. God is present, and he loves us.

And since God is never outdone in his generosity, I cannot even begin to tell you how deeply God the Father is moved when one of his children is determined to find him after suffering abuse and scandal. He has a very special place in his heart for those who come to him with this suffering. And he will offer them great love and great spiritual graces so they can be with him forever.

And what's more, our gracious Father not only wants to heal our wounds, but he desires to raise us far beyond our best attempts to raise ourselves from our broken past. There is much we can and should do to move on and grow from past hurts. But even our best attempts will fall short of God's greatest plan for us. What he wants for us is the ability to believe in and trust his fatherhood, despite our fears. He wants to raise us up from our shattered experiences into his arms. He wants to give us his view of us, and plant within us the healing and integrity that is ours. All that we thought to be lost, he can and will restore, in ways that we could never imagine.

God, Our Father, is the creator of the universe and of all living things. What is truly amazing is that he has never stopped creating. He has not abandoned creation, but is ever sustaining it and active within it, whether we have the eyes to see it or not. He is the God of miracles; the God of wonders; the God of

new possibilities; if only we have the faith to believe. Sometimes I think we all fail by asking for too little.

I've had my fair share of bad days, which I thought were ruined, either by tragedy, misfortune, or great suffering. But somehow, whenever I turned to the Lord for help, he has filled me with even more than I thought was possible. Strengthened with this confidence, I know Christ can make every day a new start, a new possibility, no matter what the conditions may be.

The last part of spiritual fruitfulness is spiritual forgetfulness. Let me explain. Counselors, therapists and mentors have all told me, it is a very healthy step in the healing process to help others. The desire of the heart to love is very powerful, and it takes a certain amount of 'forgetfulness' of oneself in order to encounter another person, their wounds, their life story. Ultimately, standing before another means "*leaving my cares, forgotten among the lilies,*" as St. John of the Cross wrote. But we don't have to fear the loss of a single memory, because we are remembered by God. Our scars will always be there, just like the nail marks on the body of Our Risen Savior, as God will always know and remember the depths of our suffering. But our act of self-forgetfulness in this sense, is the only thing that will free us to plunge into the depths of Christ's love, mercy and forgiveness. Our Heavenly Father will always hold each one of our memories, but we must be free, and unhindered, to accept his, and to encounter those around us.

Prayer

Dear Lord, you have made the impossible possible. You have mended my broken heart; you have healed my wounds; you have shown your face. And it is my greatest joy to respond to you through all of this with love and with gratitude.

Beyond the edge of myself I have found you and the beauty of all of your creation. I have found my true identity and my purpose in the plan of your love.

The only movement my heart can make after such an encounter is to welcome your presence and your ever-creating existence, in every aspect of my being, you are always welcome. I do not wish to miss one aspect of your glory, or one glimpse of your face. Yes, Lord. Your truth, your light, your life, and your love are always welcome, now and forevermore. Amen.

OUR FINAL END, MARY'S EXAMPLE FOR OUR HEALING

Questions for Our Final End:

- 1) Do I realize that through my baptism I am made a member of the entire "Body of Christ," the Communion of Saints?
- 2) Do I think about Heaven, and the resurrection on the last day?
- 3) Am I willing to say "Yes" to God, like Mary did, even if what he is asking seems to be impossible?

Thinking of our final end, and purpose for our existence, we must turn to the anticipation of our own resurrection in order to find our motivation and our purity of intention for the healing that Christ offers each one of us:

"The Christian Creed---the profession of our faith in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and in God's creative, saving and sanctifying action---culminates in the proclamation of the resurrection of the dead on the last day and in life everlasting" (29).

If our bodies and our souls were made to just disappear into nothingness when we died, then there would be no reason to work so long and so hard at being put back together and "healed." But because we believe that our bodies will be rejoined with our souls in the resurrection on the last day, we also believe that we have a whole eternity to look forward to and hope for. If this is so, then it is imperative that everything we do should be done with this end in mind: Heaven is our goal.

To make this hope a reality, God gives us the Church to heal and restore our broken minds, bodies, and souls, including our sexuality. The seven sacraments lead us to encounter Christ in the deepest way possible. And one of the most profound and comforting aspects of the Church is *the Communion of Saints*. All the saints that have gone before us belong to us, as brothers and sisters. And all those who are still being purified and healed from the wounds they left earth with are joined to us from Purgatory. Together we all make up one family, one body, which is Christ's body:

"The life of each of God's children is joined in Christ and through Christ in a wonderful way to the life of all the other Christian brethren in the supernatural unity of the Mystical Body of Christ, as in a single mystical person" (30).

What's more, we have a mother, Mary. As the mother of Christ's body, the Church, Mary takes great care of us, as an earthly mother would---and then some. She loves each one of us, and works diligently from Heaven to help us love Jesus (31). Mary was the first person in human history who deeply encountered God, in his Trinity of persons, on every level of her humanity. Mary lives forever in Heaven, body and soul, because she was assumed there entirely, by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit:

"Finally, the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory...The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son's Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians" (32).

Mary is the perfect example of how our bodies, minds and souls are being prepared here on earth for Heaven's eternity. Our vocation, whatever it is: married life, single life, or religious life, is supposed to

enable us to choose Christ. If we say “Yes” to God, in whatever way we are called, we will actively participate in the entire Body of Christ; we will be acting on the same "wave-length" as Heaven, and we will be able to accept the purification of purgatory's blessings while on earth. Our lives will then take on the deepest meaning possible, as all of time and eternity converges in our souls, in Christ who lives and breathes within us, just like Mary, who proclaimed:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior” (Luke 1:46-47).

Mary's 'Magnificat' is her union with the memories of God. With her words, she relates to us what God has done for her, throughout time, history and eternity. We are also called to proclaim our own 'magnificats,' to proclaim the wonders of God in our own lives.

Prayer

Dear Lord, I believe that you will raise my earthly body on the last day, and that you will reunite it with my soul for all eternity. But since I cannot yet experience the fullness of this joy, I humbly ask that you deepen my union with you, through the Communion of Saints, that I may belong to you always. May Heaven's breeze blow through my soul. May the prayers pouring from the hearts of those you are healing in purgatory be ever on my lips. And may I act and move in rhythm with your ever-creating hand throughout time and eternity. Amen.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Questions for the Holy Spirit:

- 1) What is the new life you have in store for me?
- 2) How can you be the living memory in my life?

“Through his grace, the Holy Spirit is the first to awaken faith in us and to communicate to us the new life, which is to ‘know the Father and the one whom he has sent, Jesus Christ’” (33).

In coming to know the Father through the Son, our relationship with the Holy Spirit is one of son-ship, and communion. He is the one who elevates our hearts, minds, bodies and souls to love the scriptures; to live the Traditions of the Church; to stand behind the Magisterium of the Catholic Church; to embrace the sacramental life; to pray “in season and out of season;” to live our charisms and devote ourselves to ministry within the Church; to be apostles and missionaries for Christ; and to eventually become saints--manifesting the very holiness of God (34).

Being recreated by the Father, and redeemed by the Son, the “Breath” of the Holy Spirit is in every part of this and continues our sanctification on into eternity:

“It belongs to the Holy Spirit to rule, sanctify, and animate creation, for he is God, consubstantial with the Father and the Son...Power over life pertains to the Spirit, for being God he preserves creation in the Father through the Son” (35).

It is by trusting the movement of the Holy Spirit, in sustaining and preserving our lives that we will begin to experience the effects of our healing. It is through his help that we will no longer think of ourselves with shame and embarrassment; for we will begin to “remember” as God does. We will not practice the habits of a victim, because we will have followed the path of virtue. We will not harm or abuse anyone else, including ourselves, because Christ will have revealed us to ourselves and we will have found our true identity. Plus, we will live integrated, fulfilling and happy lives, together with persecutions and the cross, but the Holy Spirit will lead us into all joy:

Prayer

*“Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest,
and in our hearts take up Thy rest;
come with Thy grace and heavenly aid,
To fill the hearts which Thou hast made.*

*O Comforter, to Thee we cry,
Thou heavenly gift of God most high,
Thou Fount of life, and Fire of love,
and sweet anointing from above.*

*O Finger of the hand divine,
the sevenfold gifts of grace are thine;
true promise of the Father thou,
who dost the tongue with power endow.*

*Thy light to every sense impart,
and shed thy love in every heart;
thine own unfailing might supply
to strengthen our infirmity.*

*Drive far away our ghostly foe,
and thine abiding peace bestow;
if thou be our preventing Guide,
no evil can our steps betide.*

*Praise we the Father and the Son
and Holy Spirit with them One;
and may the Son on us bestow
the gifts that from the Spirit flow.*

*V. Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created.
R. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth."*

Let us Pray

O God, Who didst instruct the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Ghost: give to us, in the same Spirit, to know what is right, and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who with Thee livest and reignest in the unity of the same Holy Spirit, God. World without end. Amen.

(Traditional prayer to the Holy Spirit)

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, I don't have all the answers regarding my personhood, especially my sexuality. I don't even have the comfort of having integrated emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Sometimes everything about myself seems to tell me something different about you and about me, and they are often contradictory. But I am willing to fight against my doubts and insecurities for your sake. I am willing to draw close to you and your thoughts about your and my identity because I have seen for myself that you alone know best. I want to listen to your voice and your Word. After all, you are here now to guide me along the sure and right path towards healing. Therefore, I am leaving my identity and all my capabilities in your all-creative hands. And I have a feeling that what I am about to discover is more beautiful than I ever imagined. Amen.

Bibliography

All Bible passages in this material are taken from *The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition*, Ignatius Edition, 2006.

The Beginning

1. Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, Chapter 50.
2. Peers, E. Allison, *The Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, Doubleday, 1960.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. St. Teresa of Avila was made a Doctor of the Church in 1970 by Pope Paul VI.

The Dark Night of the Soul

6. Peers, E. Allison, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Triumph Books, An Outline of the Life of St. John of the Cross, pg. xxv. 1991.
7. Goodier, Alban, S.J., *Saints for Sinners*, Image Books, 1959.
8. Peers, E. Allison, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Triumph Books, An Outline of the Life of St. John of the Cross, pg. xxvii. 1983.
9. Peers, E. Allison, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Triumph Books, Books I, II, & III, 1983.
10. Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 8.

The Memories of God

11. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 600.
12. Pope Benedict XVI, *Seek That Which Is Above*, Ignatius Press, 2007.
13. Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 8.
14. Ibid.
15. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 301.
16. Ibid. 638.

The Memories of the Church

17. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 737-747.
18. Ibid, 1076.
19. Ibid, GLOSSARY, pg. 898.
20. Pope John Paul II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 44.
21. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1099.
22. Ibid, 1065.
23. Ibid, 1128.

Forgiveness

24. Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 54.

Spiritual Poverty

25. Beevers, John, *The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux, The Story of a Soul*, Doubleday, 2001.
26. Ibid. Chapter 9.
27. Ibid. Chapter 8.

28. Ibid.

Our Final End, Mary's Example for Our Healing

29. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 648

30. Ibid, 1474.

31. Ibid, 963.

32. Ibid, 966

The Holy Spirit

33. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 684.

34. Ibid, 688.

35. Ibid, 703.