

# **7 EFFECTIVE WAYS TO RESPOND TO THE SEXUAL CRISIS IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

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## **1. Pray and fast for those directly and indirectly wounded by the sins of others.**

To the victims: You are our first concern; you who have suffered the most. We love you, we believe you, and we stand with you and for you in seeking justice and reparation for these horrors you have endured.

To our good priests and bishops: We know this is a particularly painful time for you. Although you are innocent of these crimes and horrors, because you are a priest, in the minds of the indiscriminate, now bear a certain "guilt by association." We love you. We are grateful to you for your life of sacrifice. We pray that you will find solace in communion with Christ who, though innocent, freely bore the guilt of others in his priestly heart.

To the rest of the faithful: Beyond merely "saying prayers" for those most wounded by the sins of others, which is certainly fine and good, we should be willing to enter deeper levels of intercession. Deep intercessory prayer involves a willingness to feel and carry in some way the burden of those for whom we are interceding. What better posture can there be for us right now than that of standing at the foot of this cross with those who are suffering most? What more fitting offering can we make than the gift of tears and compunction of heart? Compunction literally means "to be pierced with those who've suffered." We can ask for the grace to stand at the foot of the Cross with the abused Christ, just as Mary and St. John did, and to feel the great piercing He felt, and to offer that piercing for those whose lives have been shattered.

## **2. Recollect ourselves and trust that God has a plan to bring good out of this evil.**

For faithful Catholics who love this beautiful, broken, human and divine Church, the past number of weeks have been a tsunami of pain. So much is happening and so rapidly. We need to recollect ourselves, and, as St. Paul says, not allow ourselves to be overcome by evil (Rom 12:21). Keeping properly informed is one thing, but rummaging about on the internet, reading every article and social media post about the crisis will leave you drained, distracted and despairing. Consider the lilies, as

Jesus says; watch the birds; read Matthew 6:26-27. Remember who you are and Whose you are, and that God has a perfect plan to bring great good out of these horrors.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) observes that God permits evil "because he respects the freedom of his creatures and, mysteriously, knows how to derive good from it: 'For almighty God ... would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in his works if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself'" (CCC 311). With complete trust in God's promise to bring a greater good out of this evil, we should be grateful that these horrors are coming to light.

Imagine you're one of the Apostles. It's Holy Saturday, but of course you wouldn't have called it holy. If anything, you would've called it hell. Everything just fell apart. The Body of Christ has been broken, beaten, abused and crucified. Members of your own religious leadership have actually been the perpetrators of this atrocity. But in this act, their lies, hypocrisy, cover-ups, greed for power and abusive actions, have all been exposed. The Temple veil is torn and true intentions revealed. Soon, though you still can't see it, grace will flow through these wounds. Behold, He will make all things new!

### **3. As difficult as it is, we must seek the grace to forgive those who have committed these evils.**

Abusers and those who protected them must be removed and brought to justice. And righteous anger has its role to play in fueling that quest. It is more than okay to be furious at those shepherds who have mislead the sheep. But we must also allow our fury to become a fire of divine love that changes the Church from within. Integral to that fire of God's love is the power of forgiveness.

While many of us may not be ready to forgive at this moment – and that's okay – eventually, we must seek the grace of forgiving those who have sinned against us. Christian forgiveness never means brushing evil under the rug or skirting justice. Rather, it means surrendering those who have hurt us to the justice and mercy of God. For our own sake, when the time is right, we must make this surrender. For if we only cling bitterly to our pain, our anger, and our resentment, the healing we need will not be possible.

In its teaching on our need to forgive, the Catechism says plainly: "It is not in our power not to feel or to forget an offense..." What, then, are we to do with the pain others cause us? The Catechism goes on to say that "the heart that offers itself to the Holy Spirit turns injury into compassion and purifies the memory in transforming the hurt into intercession" (2843). This means that in order to forgive, we must open our hearts to a love that does not originate in us. We must open our pain to the very love of God. If we do, that divine Spirit of Love promises to transform our injury into compassion. Compassion means to "suffer with." Why do people cause us pain? One

reason is because they are in pain. This means we now know that person's pain – because, in a very real way, we feel it ourselves. And knowing just how pained the person is who caused us pain can lead to the miracle of having our injury turned into compassion.

Furthermore, when we open our hearts to the true Spirit of forgiveness, he purifies the memory. It's not that the memory disappears, but it no longer "stings" in the same way. When the memory presents itself, it need no longer be a re-wounding or a rehashing of anger and resentment. The pain itself, offered and opened to God, just as Christ did on the Cross, becomes intercession for the person who wounded us: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). This is how our own sufferings can further Christ's redemptive power in the world. Jesus, grant us the grace to open all of our pain to this power. Amen.

#### **4. Overcome evil with good!**

In our fight against evil, it is critical to understand what evil is (and what it is not). Evil does not exist in its own right. Evil is the corruption of what is good. And this means that the devil doesn't have his own clay. All he can do is take God's clay and twist it, distort it, corrupt it.

What is coming to light within the Church is, indeed, one of the greatest evils precisely because it is the diabolic corruption of one of the greatest goods: human sexuality. The very purpose of our creation as male and female and the call of the two to become "one flesh" is to reveal the Eucharistic mystery of Christ's marriage to the Church (see Eph 5:31-32). This is precisely why the Enemy is after our bodies and our sexuality. He hates our bodies with a hellish rage because they reveal the divine mystery. And he wants us to hate them, too.

In the face of such overwhelming sexual sin and evil, it can be very tempting subtly (or not so subtly) to distance ourselves from or otherwise reject or disdain sexuality itself. But we must never blame the good things of God for people's abuse of them. This would be to fall right into the Enemy's trap. How do we overcome evil? With good, St. Paul boldly proclaims (see Rom 12:21). In the face of the terrible abuses of sexuality within the priesthood, we must recognize and proclaim from the rooftops the divine goodness of human sexuality and how it illuminates the very purpose and meaning of priesthood.

Priesthood is spiritual fatherhood, and that flows from and through the masculinity of a celibate priest no less so than physical fatherhood flows through the masculinity of a husband in a marriage. The priest, like Christ, takes the Church for his bride. In this way, as St. John Paul II wrote in his *Theology of the Body* (TOB) "spousal love... finds its expression in celibacy 'for the kingdom of heaven'" and "must lead in its normal development to 'fatherhood' or 'motherhood' in the spiritual sense..." (TOB 78:5).

So many of the sins, the horrific scandals, and the crimes perpetrated by some of the clergy are the rotten fruit of having absorbed a diabolic/pornographic vision of the body and of sexuality divorced from the priestly call to self-sacrificial love. Tragically, like the wider Church, few priests have been formed in an authentic "spousal vision" of their humanity and their vocation. Few priests even know what their masculine bodies mean for the sacrament of Holy Orders. In our pornified world, there has been an eclipse of the meaning of our bodies. For such a time as this have we been given St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body, which brings us to our next point.

## **5. Immerse yourself in St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body and help others do the same.**

Church history demonstrates that whenever the Church faces a crisis, the Holy Spirit raises up great saints to respond to it with effectiveness and power. Without a doubt, the crisis of our day is of a sexual nature; we have substituted pornographic lies and distortions for the splendor and beauty of the divine plan. But God has not abandoned us to these evils. He has given us the theological antidote to the crisis of our times in St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body.

But antidotes do us no good if we do not inject them into our bloodstream. While there is, to be sure, a growing movement of enthusiastic interest in the TOB, the percentage of Catholics that even knows that this TOB exists is still minimal. Here are some ways you can learn more yourself and help spread the good news.

If you are new to the TOB, you can [get a free copy of Theology of the Body for Beginners](#) by using the code **DESIRE** at checkout (we only ask that you cover the shipping and handling costs).

[Check out a free short film](#) on the power of TOB to change lives.

If you already know the value of TOB, please (please!) share it with as many people as you can. [Click here to order Theology of the Body for Beginners in bulk](#) to share with friends, family, parishioners, and your priest and bishop.

[Click here for more specific resources for priests.](#)

## **6. Seek ongoing healing of our own wounds and brokenness.**

The media is a frenzied place where blame can fall on everything and everyone but ourselves. Anger regarding the sins of others and the tragic pain it causes is entirely understandable, and the cry for justice is indeed a righteous one. However, if we want to experience the healing of this sexual wound in the Body of Christ, we must be willing to look honestly at our own lives as well. Venerable Bishop Fulton J. Sheen once gave a talk to inmates in a prison. Standing before them in his Roman collar and cassock he humbly acknowledged, "There's one difference between all of you and me.... You got caught, and I didn't."

I don't think his point was an admission that he was actually guilty of crimes that deserved prison time. Rather, he was admitting that no one is without sin in his or her life. No one can claim that he or she is not desperately in need of God's mercy.

Certainly there are varying depths of sin and depravity. However, if we're honest, we will realize that we all have some degree of disordered desires for love and union in this life, and we try and fill that space with all sorts of things. Behind it all, this is what we really yearn for: eternal love and union with the God who has revealed himself as eternal Love and Union. The healing of disordered desires can happen when we discover how, as Father Jacques Philippe observes, "one passion can only be cured by another – a misplaced love by a greater love, wrong behavior by right behavior that makes provisions for the desire underlying the wrongdoing, recognizes the conscious or unconscious needs that seek fulfillment and ... offers them legitimate satisfaction" (Interior Freedom).

This is what happens in a genuine life of prayer: we "let our masks fall and turn our hearts back to the Lord who loves us, so as to hand ourselves over to him as an offering to be purified and transformed" (CCC 2711). This, says John Paul II, is "a journey totally sustained by grace, which nonetheless demands an intense spiritual commitment and is no stranger to painful purifications (the 'dark night'). But it leads, in various possible ways, to the ineffable joy experienced by the mystics as 'nuptial union' [with the Lord]" (Novo Millennio 33).

If you are serious about seeking healing in your own life, here are two trustworthy organizations that can help:

[John Paul II Healing Center](#)

[Desert Stream: Living Waters](#)

## 7. Devote yourself to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

In 1917, when Mary appeared to three children in Fatima, Portugal, she spoke of great sufferings that the Church would endure. She also promised the children: "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph." This means that purity of heart will triumph. As Cardinal Ratzinger explained in his official commentary on the third secret of Fatima:

*"According to Matthew 5:8 ['Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God'], the 'immaculate heart' is a heart which, with God's grace, has come to perfect interior unity and therefore 'sees God.' To be 'devoted' to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means therefore to embrace this attitude of heart, which makes the fiat—'your will be done'—the defining center of one's whole life."*

To learn more about how the Triumph of Mary's Immaculate Heart as the victory over the sexual crisis of our day, read the short booklet **Eclipse of the Body**: How We Lost the Meaning of Sex, Marriage, Gender, and Family and How to Regain it.

IF YOU FOUND THIS RESOURCE TO BE HELPFUL, PLEASE  
**LET US KNOW BY LEAVING A COMMENT HERE.**