

ADEODATUS

A Spiritual Field Hospital in Philadelphia

Office of Justice and Peace
Province of St. Thomas of Villanova
Augustinian Defenders of the Rights of the Poor



"I was in prison and you visited me."

Matthew 25, 16

VOICES FROM PRISON AND THE EDGE

Winter 2017

No. 25



Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord. Psalm 130:1

"Addictive Sex feels shameful.
Often it is illicit or exploitive.
Healthy sex has no victim.
It is mutual and intimate."

Dr. Patrick Cairns

Author of, *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual
Addiction* and *Don't Call it Love.*

TWO CRIES FOR HEALING

"CHRISTOPHER"

by Fr. Paul Morrissey, O.S.A.

Recently I participated in a “Circle of Healing” for survivors of sexual abuse. As a priest I was resistant at first, fearing I would be the target of anger because the survivors were abused by Catholic priests. I went anyway, and in listening to the twelve participants, many from the organization *Voices of the Faithful*, I felt healing begin—for the survivors and for myself. Below is the testimony of one participant,

“Christopher,” who occasionally wept as he spoke: *I have a very difficult time speaking to a group of people. I am much more comfortable one on one or writing. As a victim of clergy abuse, one often wonders why you were picked. Why did Father pick me? He was the assistant pastor in charge of the altar boys. Sadly he had access to many boys. I know there were*

others. How many I have no idea. One of the participants mentioned choosing vulnerable kids and I was certainly one of those. Growing up in an alcoholic family was extremely difficult. When I was eight, nine and ten, I was often awakened by my parents arguing one floor below. It was so loud and frightening that I would hide in the bedroom closet with a pillow held over my head. I prayed to God for the fighting to stop. It never did. After awhile I stopped praying...

How difficult to hear this grown man speak of his life as a child, hiding in a closet with a pillow over his head, praying to God...and after a while giving up on prayer. Yet how brave of him to speak of this now as an adult. One of the most necessary components in healing sexual abuse is being heard. The issue of sexual abuse is often hidden in society, even though it is very prevalent. It is easier to hide one’s shame than to bring out into the open that you were sexually abused. But wounds fester in the dark. Only by acknowledging them in the light, and with others who can listen and hold your pain with compassion, is healing able to begin. Christopher continues:

When I was eleven a group of boys were playing in a wooded area near our homes. One of the boys decided he needed to relieve himself and peed against a tree. Another boy followed. One of the boys who was there lived across the street from me. He was an only child. I don't know what he told his mother but when I got home, I was sent to my room. When my father got home, I was beaten for almost an hour on my bare backside with a belt. I refused to admit I had peed in the woods because I had not. At one point I remember my father saying he was going to beat the queerness out of me. I was an eleven-year-old Catholic kid. I had no idea what he was talking about.

“...my father”, he said “was going to beat the queerness out of me.” Where did his father ever get this idea? Maybe his father had this done to him. When will we stop handing on this rage? Does the Church play a part in this? Is it *spiritual* abuse when LGBT kids are taught they are disordered? Are there connections between sexual orientation and sexual abuse? I.E. from what we hear in this story, Christopher being abused physically and sexually *because* his father thought he was gay. What can you say to Christopher? And what about the priest? Can he find a place to acknowledge his demons? Christopher concludes:





It took me years to realize that the beating had nothing to do with me. My father was beating his own demons. Less than a year later, I was molested by a Catholic priest. How did he molest me? By trumping up a false charge and spanking me on my bare backside. Coincidence? I think not. When I was in seventh grade, the priest who molested me gave a class on the birds and the bees to the boys in my class. Someone was writing four letter words on the blackboard between classes. So they decided to have a sex talk. Father didn't talk about pedophilia or how some people get a kick out of spanking little boys...(The italicized portions above reprinted by permission of National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company, 115 E Armour Blvd, Kansas City, MO 64111 NCRonline.org.)

During the day of sharing I felt myself avoiding Christopher's glance. For fear of his anger? His grief? I don't know. Maybe his accusing look because I am a priest like his molester. And yet wanting to reach out to him, but how? A hug could be risky I thought, given his history and the restrictions on priests now. So I sidled up at a coffee break and thanked him, yet didn't shake his hand. Oh Lord, this mix of feelings--a paralysis even--is what stymies the Church from offering any system-wide approach to healing for our people. Anything the clergy does will be suspect, and we don't even speak among ourselves about this honestly. Instead, we hire lawyers to keep ourselves safe and it all winds up being tried in courts. But has anything really been reconciled by this? I believe that a way for the Church to move forward and build trust again--possibly discover forgiveness in God's time--is through these Circles of Healing. The healing circles could be in regard to sexual abuse, but also other sexual issues in our church and society where people are hurting. At a recent pastoral counseling conference I attended, "Healing Through Acceptance and Forgiveness," the presenters stated:

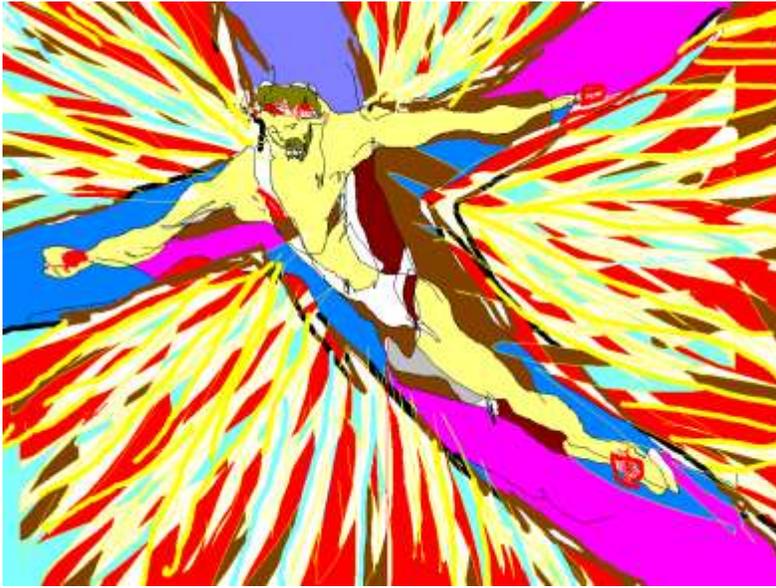
1. The first step in moving beyond hurt is to acknowledge that it happened.
2. Acceptance is about adaptation, integrating the hurt part.
3. Acceptance can co-exist with lamenting.
4. Acceptance is to experience ourselves in a new way. If not accepted/acknowledged, one is forever a victim, not a survivor.

How can we become survivors instead of remaining victims? Christopher took that step when he shared his pain in the group. The role of the group in listening to him with compassion is crucial. This newsletter offers that role to the readers. In the next story, we will encounter the step beyond acceptance...forgiveness. With his permission, I offer here some excerpts from his letters to me that show the complexity of the issue of sex addiction. You will hear in his words how God is reaching out into these people's lives. This key - a belief that God is with us, even in our pain.

"BART"

By Fr. Paul Morrissey, O.S.A.

"Bart," is an inmate whom I visit in prison. Listen to his beliefs about forgiveness. *Father Paul, you are the only person who has visited me besides my lawyer. It gets lonely here—especially after almost thirteen months confinement. My parents live a few states away and it's too far for my mom to drive. I also think she can't take it seeing me behind bars again. I try to understand but some days I just wish I could hug her or see her beautiful face. But God is good.*



He has put a couple of nice brothers here in my life. I know that God never closes one door without opening another. It's just that sometimes I stare so long at the closed door, I fail to notice an opening door! When I made the commitment to celibacy a few weeks ago, I knew it would not always be easy. Nevertheless, I look at lust as my "thorn in the flesh" that St. Paul writes about in 2 Cor. 12: 7-10. I get lonely some nights and it is those times that I have to ask Jesus to be my lover. I ask him to hold me in his everlasting arms and make me feel safe, nurtured, and cared about. My cross to bear is my sexual addiction and health issues. When I start to feel doubt about God's love, I dedicate my suffering to Jesus. Ever since I wrote you and told you that I couldn't become a deacon because of my sex

addiction, I have lost the desire to be with men. I asked God that night to let me be free from my compulsion to want to have sex with men—young and old. Fr. Paul, I believe that I have been cured of my addictions—all of them—food, sex, drugs, alcohol. I still have to practice the 12 Steps of recovery and stay sober, but I am given a daily reprieve from my addiction and my mental illness.

Cured of his addictions? As you can see, Bart has multiple addictions, including sexual addiction, and must practice the 12 Steps. In the midst of this, he has a great devotion to God and Jesus as you can see. Bart feels called to celibacy and wants to serve God in some kind of ministry. This is probably impossible in the church because of his addiction. Yet God has taken his compulsion away, he believes. What are we to make of this? How should we treat him? As mentally ill? As a danger to society? As a criminal? Just lock him up? What makes it very difficult, it seems that his addictions have developed through a connection to earlier sexual abuse. Is he a victim or a victimizer—or both? He continues...

I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse by a priest and by different male relatives. The reason I am writing is to share my experience, strength and hope. I was thirteen when the priest molested me. I'm not going to get into the sordid details. Let's just say that I was touched inappropriately by the priest. Anyway, I spent years drowning my problems in alcohol and other drugs. What I learned after I got sober was that I was a very angry, hurt individual who covered up the feelings of vulnerability and shame. The point of writing to you is to tell you that I had to forgive the men who molested me so I could move on with my life.

For the sake of this newsletter's purpose, I want to focus on Bart's experience of discovering his need to forgive. This may be the most important point for all of us to grasp from this person whom God is speaking through some way. Listen a bit further...

I feel like God let me be abused not to punish me, but to teach me. He taught me to overcome my pain and to forgive others who hurt me. The first thing I learned about forgiveness is that I have to ask others for their forgiveness of me as well as being willing to let go of my identity as a victim. I had to be willing to look at my part in the wrongs that have been done to others. Maybe God knew how strong I was and let me be abused so I could help others who have been abused. If I follow in Jesus' footsteps I will realize and accept the fact that I had to hurt before I could heal. Forgiveness is another word for "letting go." If I want to be forgiven I have to forgive others first. It really has nothing to do with the sick people who hurt me. It is all about reclaiming my power and not constantly finding others to blame for my problems.

Did God let him be abused? Did God ‘teach’ him through this? More likely, through his pain God is teaching him the enormous gift of forgiveness—of others and himself. Maybe even helping him forgive God Himself! The main point here is to notice how God is working in this man’s illnesses and addictions to bring him close in a relationship of love. He even wants to serve God some way. Surely this can make us feel empathy for someone so afflicted. Bart shows us some of the key components of moving towards healing through acceptance and forgiveness. In the pastoral counseling conference I attended, “Forgiveness Steps” were described. Forgiveness is, we were told, a choice (using Worthington’s R.E.A.C.H. model). These steps are:

Recall the hurt and the emotions associated with it. (i.e. acknowledge it, and don’t rush to forgiveness.)

Empathize with offender. (Ask: what factors contributed to their action? Tell yourself the story from the perpetrator’s perspective.)

Altruistic, look back at times you have been forgiven. Forgiveness can be seen as a *gift* you give the offender.

Commitment to forgive-Make the choice! Forgiving is an *integrative* step; it is not forgetting. It does not require reconciliation to continue a future relationship (which may involve continued abuse).

Hold onto forgiveness. We must persevere, and develop and maintain the power to forgive. Anyone who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love

That is what this newsletter is seeking...healing for all of us. Bart concludes: *By the way, I know that I can't be a deacon in a parish, but I can join a religious order that physically restrains me from having inappropriate physical contact. Some nights I like to walk in the rain, feeling God anointing my face with raindrop kisses. He is the best companion that you or I could ever have or hope to have. There is so much I want to do to answer God's call. I think he wants me to be part of a special ministry for the LGBT community in and out of prison. If I can ever do anything for you, please don't hesitate to ask. When I began reading the Catholic Catechism, I felt like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz. Instead of clicking my heels three times to return home to Kansas, I have to pray to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to return home to heaven.*

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Healing is a process, and it comes through acceptance and forgiveness. These men’s journeys show how they are going through their pain to an acceptance of it. From there we can begin to see the steps of forgiveness emerging by daily choice. They—and perhaps we by listening to them—are on the way to healing. Can society and the Church offer Healing Circles that help us confront sexual addiction and sexual abuse? For further study see Patrick Cairns books, especially, Out of the Shadows and Don't call it Love.



ADEODATUS

ADEODATUS . . . WHERE DO WE MEET?



We are Adeodatus, a support group for ex-inmates, for those struggling with addictions, and anyone who cares about their reintegration into society. We meet every Thursday night (7:30 to 9:00 P.M.) at St. Rita of Cascia rectory, 1166 S. Broad Street (at Ellsworth). Through prayer, the Gospel and Christian fellowship we offer strength to meet the challenges of life in this world. Please join us.

MARY MOTHER OF CAPTIVES PEN PALS . . . A PROJECT OF ADEODATUS

Are you trying to cope with a loved one in prison, on trial, or about to be sentenced to prison? Do you know anyone who has loved ones in prison? Join us (7:00 PM) at any of these nights and locations.

First Thursday
St. Cyprian
Parish Hall
501 Cobbs Creek Pkwy
Phila, PA 19143
484-432-5695 (Sue)

Second Thursday
St. Charles Borromeo
Parish Meeting Room
3407 Dennison Ave.
Drexel Hill, PA 19026
610-626-2304 / 484-620-1586

Third Wednesday
St. Francis de Sales
Bishop Shea Room
4625 Springfield Ave
Phila. PA 19143
484-432-5695 (Sue)

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John and Sue Killeen

VOICES FROM PRISON AND THE EDGE . . . OUR NEWSLETTER

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