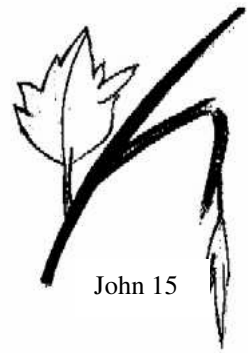


BROKEN BRANCHES



John 15

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Welcome to Anne's Page!

We have reached the end of another year. How fast it seems to have passed and so much has happened. As I reviewed the past year I experienced mixed emotions. To me it seems that the year was filled with anguish, suffering and regret. It would be very easy to fall prey to pessimism if not for the grace filled moments, which also accompanied the sadness.

As I reviewed this year I concluded that in the grand scheme of things perhaps I didn't achieve an awful lot I only counselled (one on one) 47 men and women (about 400 hrs) and indeterminate hours of phone counselling (mostly in the evenings). This past year I spoke publicly on 11 occasions did two one-hour radio interviews and wrote about half a dozen articles for publication. Still, when we consider that in Victoria alone there would have been over 30,000 abortions my figures appear paltry.

However, what does encourage me to continue is the very real fact that out of those 47 individuals counselled nearly all of them were able to be reconciled with their decision, with God and with their baby. Indeed we celebrated many Masses in memory of their baby and in loving relinquishment of that child that was aborted. A Mass or religious service for the aborted child concludes the counselling and the individuals are usually able to move on. I must admit to a lot of excitement when this time arrives (usually after many tears) because it means that the individual in question has made a commitment to living their life to the very best of their ability and I believe that this is all that God asks of us. By the time we have reached the service stage many hours of painful disclosures, tears, regret, guilt and shame have been faced and come to terms with. The baby is no longer a "blob of tissue" but their son or daughter who has a name, an identity, and a mum, dad, and at times grandparents who have accepted them as part of the family and who remember them with love. I have also witnessed a turning back to look into the face of Jesus and the peace, forgiveness and contentment found there.

As I said in the ultimate scheme of worldly things not much was achieved. I cannot boast 100%

success rate, but then again no one can. I cannot boast that I achieved the few successes that were achieved, because the Lord Himself achieved those. Perhaps the only boast that I can make is perseverance especially in the face of the many difficulties, which *were* and *are* encountered.

There were many times when I wanted to stop and made the decision to do so, and then someone would write me a lovely letter to thank me for being there and for helping them – and down the tube went my resolve to quit. I saw this as the Lord giving me little pep talks and I continued. So I arrive at the end of the year and Christmas time carrying a mixed bag of feelings. Perhaps it is also a time of reflection and remembrance of babies who should have been the angel on the Christmas tree – and are not! Babies and parents who should have celebrated together as a new family – and are not! Parents who should not have had to remember a dead child but hold a living wiggling squealing one. It is important to remember the babies – even if their own parents cannot remember then at this time, we should remember them because it would seem to me that if we forget, then those babies designed in His Image were disposable commodities. More and more as I continue in this work, I recognize the importance and uniqueness of every new creation and its intrinsic worth for the completion of the tapestry.

The message of Christmas is conducive to remembrance of the babies and their parents. The birth of that special child (2000 years ago) from the womb of a woman, should lead us to an understanding of the sacredness of the womb. He (Jesus) deemed it worthy to be born in the way of the creature. The womb of the creature (Mary) contained the creator for nine months and gave birth to Him with great joy. God could have chosen any means by which His Son would be born, but He chose the way of creatures. The Lord and Giver of Life chose a womb, as a sacred tabernacle. A womb to be the container and sustainer of life, as His resting-place for a time. Life Itself chose to enter human life through the medium of a womb. The womb means life. Sadly today the womb also means the tomb for millions of babies. Today it is

no longer considered a sacred place where humans and God work together to bring to life a new citizen for earth and heaven. It has become a place of death. It is not because God does not take up residence there but because the human refuses His presence there. The creature tells the creator He is not welcome. The clay tells the potter what to do, and with the very limited vision of the clay, the outcome is monstrous.

As I write this I am reminded of something I read in a book many years ago when I was studying for a Bachelor of Religious Studies at a University in Western Australia. I cannot remember the author, or the name of the book, however, I do remember that I was most impressed with what I read. At the time I was studying a unit called Judaism and whilst looking through the university library, I came across a book of Jewish folklore. In this book I remember reading that the Hebrew word for *womb* and the Hebrew word for *compassion* have the same root and it is only the vowel points which differ and further that the womb is a place a learning. Indeed according to this folklore, during its stay in the womb an infant is instructed about divine matters by its guardian angel. So that as its body is knitted together in its mother's womb, the spirit is instructed about heavenly matters. This folklore further says that at the time of birth, the guardian angel touches the lips of the child so that a temporary forgetting occurs and the person, as it goes through life, has a sense that there is something more to his/her life story and constantly seeks that which is tantalisingly missing. This of course reminds us of St. Augustine's quote "you have created us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they come to rest in you." This restlessness is the seeking for that something which is deeply known and then forgotten. It is the long journey back to the Father.

I find it most interesting that "*womb*" and "*compassion*" come from the same root word. Perhaps we are to understand that real genuine *compassion* should be akin to the bond or feeling that a mother has for the infant in her womb. *Compassion* should be likened to an eternal life giving emotion. Knowing this, it then becomes a tragic travesty that the womb, today, does not denote *compassion or mercy* but violence and hatred. This then might explain many of the ills which have befallen our society. When a mother forgets and has no *compassion for* the baby in her womb then indeed it has become a society peopled by lovelessness.

POST ABORTION GRIEF & POST ABORTION SYNDROME ARE THEY THE SAME?

I have been asked this question many times over the last few months. There appears to be a confusion of

meaning so perhaps this might be a good time to explain.

My understanding is that post abortion grief or distress and Post Abortion Syndrome are different aspects of the same trauma. Post abortion grief or distress usually manifests either prior to the abortion or immediately following but Post Abortion Syndrome is delayed development of symptoms as a result of the abortion. It is important to understand the difference because successful treatment is dependent on correct diagnosis.

With post abortion grief (distress) the sufferer knows the root cause of his or her distress. The individual is able to pinpoint the moment of suffering and knows that his/her emotional distress is related to the decision to abort. Any feeling of regret, anxiety, depression, weeping is understood to be related to the abortion decision itself and then to the abortion experience. This type of depression, if well handled, is much easier to deal with and healing is more easily possible because the abortion has not been denied or suppressed. Whilst it is still a complicated mourning process, because this grief is generally not acknowledged or supported, the sufferer can, with help, be successfully helped to return to a state of some "normality." Not a state pre abortion, this can never be, but a state post abortion, but having grieved and then be assisted to move on.

Post Abortion Syndrome (PAS) is different and more insidious. PAS is understood to be a type of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). It is slow developing and utterly destructive. PTSD develops when a traumatic event outside the range of normal day to day experiences is encountered. This event was perceived as threatening to self, friends or loved ones. The intensity of the feelings at the time (even if unacknowledged) has resulted in deep psychological, long lasting trauma which requires long term professional care. Typical features of PTSD are reliving the event, sleep disorders (nightmares) depression, suicide ideation, loss of interest in life and others. Reexperiencing the abortion is usually a clear indicator that Post Abortion Syndrome is present.

Post Abortion Syndrome is insidious because it works silently. The trauma of the abortion is actively suppressed from the conscious memory, however at the unconscious level this trauma continues to work its deadly poison. Post Abortion Syndrome symptoms will persist and recovery will not occur naturally or spontaneously until the trauma is acknowledged and dealt with. PAS is triggered by some connected event.

Studies into Post Abortion Syndrome clearly indicate the reality of its existence however, there is still dispute over its intensity and prevalence. Although

most studies do find and accept that a number of women do experience negative reaction to their abortion. Guilt, shame, anxiety, depression, are sequelae associated with an abortion.

From my own experience over the past two and half years Post Abortion Grief is more common, those who have come for counselling know that their distress is the result of their abortion. However, I have also encountered women who manifest symptoms of Post Abortion Syndrome. These particular women have sought help from mental health professionals (over many years) usually for depression or self destructive behaviours. However, their condition has continued because their psychologist or psychiatrist has not addressed the abortion issue. The mental health professional has usually addressed other self destructive behaviours but has *not* seen the abortion as the root cause. I have encountered many, many women who have told me that their specialist has avoided the abortion issue.

As I listened to their story, it became very clear that their abortion (at times many years earlier) was/is the root cause of other behaviours. Of course by the time that they have come for counselling much suffering and at times attempted suicides have been experienced so not only is there a need to deal with the abortion itself but also other self defeating events which they have engaged in since the abortion. Indeed, as I continue I am also confronted with a lifetime of psychological suffering (even pre abortion) and all these issues have to be addressed. However, my experience is that when the trauma of abortion has been isolated, and dealt with, there is confidence and belief that the other issues in their lives will also be successfully dealt with. I have been fortunate and blessed to see really psychologically and spiritually unwell women, who have been under mental health care for many years, recover their equilibrium, and their joy of life. I have watched men and women come, bowed down in pain, on heavy medication, leave with their heads held high and ready to face and live life again. It has not been easy or short term but it has happened. Many hours of pain remembering had to be experienced. Much self forgiveness, and forgiveness of others had occur before any difference was seen.

Post Abortion Grief or Syndrome is ultimately about unexpressed grief which becomes complicated grief due to its being hidden and unsupported. Grief is the human's response to the loss of a loved one. Grieving, when supported and acknowledged, runs its course and in due time the individual is slowly re integrated into the community. Complicated grief responses occur when an individual cannot openly express their sadness, sorrow, regret openly. The death of a baby through abortion, because of its hidden nature, cannot be openly grieved for, therefore

the natural process of mourning is thwarted leading to constant diffusion of energy to suppress the feelings of anguish. We know that suppression and denial do not make "something" disappear, but actually strengthen the power of the event so that in due course the painful event will develop a destructive life of its own. Denial and suppression are like band-aids over a cancerous ulcer, they cover the ulcer but do nothing for the cancer. The cancer must be dealt with with the appropriate remedies.

Today we know that over the last twenty years there has been a marked increase in mental health problems of women and men. We know that there has been a horrific increase in youth suicide. We know that drug addiction has reached epidemic levels. We know that family breakdowns are at tragic levels. We know that young people appear to want to self destruct. We know that sexually transmitted diseases are rampant. We know all these things – yet there is a fear in society to say NO to abortion. NO to contraception. No to anti life proposals. Indeed it appears that a pervasive death wish has overtaken all of us.

I would like to conclude with this, Post Abortion Grief and Post Abortion Syndrome are real. There is nothing illusory about them. Living with these as a form of atonement is not what the Lord God asks. Jesus atoned for our sins (including abortion). The atonement of the aborted individual is a false atonement. It is satan's ploy to destroy the individual just as surely as the baby was destroyed. The Lord God asks for recognition and repentance of the sin and a reconciliation and return to Him and to the baby. Healing is absolutely possible. I have seen it. The Lord awaits for the moment of return, however, He will not force the return it must come freely from the individual and it must be sincere.

This will be the last newsletter till February 2000, I hope to take four weeks off and spend time with my children so that I can enter the new year and new millenium with zest and not with totally flattened batteries. Remember we are also entering the year of the Great Jubilee and Jubilee means a return to origins. Reconciliation and renewal. I pray that in this privilege that we share we may all contribute to the making of the type of people and society desired by God.

I would like to say thank you to all those people who have supported me in any way this year. Especially thank you to Gail Instance for rescuing me quite a few times and her untiring emotional support. Thanks to the Helpers for allowing me to have space in their newsletter. Thanks to Pauline Stoll and her staff at the Pregnancy centre, for the use of a room for counselling. Thanks to those 14 people who responded to my call for funds to pay the bills. You know who you are, bless you. Thanks to those who

have commented, it has been appreciated. Thank you to my close friends Carole Hegarty, Wanda Skowronska, Father Brendan Walters Msc, Kathy Hawkins (Perth) These people have always known when to ring. A special thank you to the many people who have supported me through prayer, I think it was this that kept me going against all odds. Thank you to Dr. Michael Casey and Father Anthony Fisher I have appreciated your support in the ways it was possible. You have no idea how much it has meant. Thank you to Tony Rowlands, you know what for. Thank you to my husband, Andrew, and children Luke and Nicholas who tolerated my weird hours, sometimes weirder moods, and weeping individuals coming through the house (office). Thank you to those men and women who trusted me with their life and story and who believed that I could help them. I have learned a lot from you and I hope that the Lord will continue to bless you and I further hope that your new relationship with your babies will lead one day to a joyous reunion with them. And finally thank you to my Jesus who has trusted me again and has entrusted others to me, please pray that I will continue to honour that trust.

Before I finish, I would make one final request. As you spend lots and lots of money (and rightly so) for family, children, friends, feasting, for this Christmas

and new Year, please, please, consider making a donation for the continuing of this work next year. At this moment I cannot even afford the stamps let alone other expenses for the office. The financial aspect of this work (technology breaking down, meaning dud fax, a computer which has tantrums, stamps, phones, travelling, printing materials, ink cartridges and paper, advertising etc) is quite large and I have not always been able to meet them without my husband's or friends' help. I do not charge any fees for counselling, or the many hours spent doing what I do, so there is no in-come except for donations. Please help make next year's office expenses easier to bear and for the moment please help to meet a very hefty phone bill.

I wish for you and yours a happy and holy Christmas, A New Year filled with joy and contentment. The new millenium to be filled with blessings and the Jubilee year – a year of grace.

May The Lord Bless and Keep you.

Anne Lastman
Founder – Victims of Abortion.

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Victims of Abortion
National Office
PO Box 6094, Vermont Sth, Vic, 3133.
Ph/Fax: (03) 9887 7669 Mobile: 0408 175 033

