

Dear Friends,

There are some weeks and months that really are difficult and then there are times, which are a joy. This past month has been the former. I seem to be receiving (still) a spate of callers (a serial caller too!) which are difficult and different and most definitely challenging. This past month has also been difficult because I have received criticism over the last newsletter. Indeed I have had cancellations of the newsletter and cancellation of financial support as a result of the last three newsletters. My understanding is that the last three newsletters have probably been the best (I think) that I have written; yet the readers found them hard to read. The topics covered (suicide, mothers taking daughters to abortion clinic and this last one, self harm) appear to have distressed some of the readers. For this I am sorry. However.....

I have over time thought and re thought about the topics to write about and how graphic to make them. I have come to the conclusion that if I am writing a newsletter about a certain topic, then surely the topic must be covered as I find it and understand it. If I have to sanitize it then what I am doing is remove from it its gravity. I need to re iterate that post abortion grief and trauma is not something like a “yuppie flu” that it will be an inconvenience for a time and then go away. Post abortion trauma and grief offers at best a lifetime of regret and at worst possible suicide. For those who come to an understanding of what exactly was done (a baby was killed intentionally) the remorse is deep and permanent. There is of course hope for peace but the memory always remains. The memory of both the event and the child that might have been are part of the person’s history and the memory of the child, at least by the mother (and me) are all the history that that infant will ever have.

It has been suggested by well meaning friends that I don’t write so explicitly and instead write some “feel good stories” or even some personal stories about those who come to me. However, I don’t think this is such a good idea. “Feel good stories” are just that. They make us all feel good but hide the reality. It is of course good to hear about the successes because this encourages the “fight” to go on. However, hidden within those successes there are also failures, disappointments, abandoned appointments because he/she couldn’t go on for now. Stop start situations, and then please God finally some “success.” The journey to the end is slow and painful and at times it doesn’t even reach its desired destination.

I find that in this type of work there are moments of grace and moments when all seems futile however when the moments of grace come they are so strong that it makes the journey worth continuing.

PROMISCUITY AND ABORTION

I would like to say something about this particular issue. There appears to be a connection between abortion and ensuing promiscuity even where this did not exist in the past. I have thought at length about the reason why this might be so and the only answer that I can possibly see is that the woman in question is either (a)

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attempting to become pregnant again. At least unconsciously she is trying to become pregnant again in order to replace the aborted child or (b) it is a sign of self-loathing. A sign that her own opinion of herself is so low that she abuses her body in order to punish herself. By doing this, she confirms and affirms her opinion that she is not worthy of respect or love.

I have encountered both types, and I would like to say something about both aspects of this type of self-punishment.

I have encountered many an instance where the woman (girl) after the abortion has immediately attempted to become pregnant again. This desire to become pregnant again seems to me not only a sign of deep regret but also an unconscious attempt to complete a process (pregnancy) begun but terminated prematurely. Indeed Anna a mother of two young children, had abortion because she is a single supporting mother, proceeded (4 days after her abortion) to begin buying layette items for the "future" baby which she was going to have. The layette was made up of newborn items (quite a number of them) because she was sure she was going to have another baby "soon." Anna decided that as she is a single mother and limited in finances she would begin buying items weekly (eg baby singlets, nappies, bath items etc) these were to be held in readiness for her baby which was to be born "soon." What emerged from our sessions is that Anna aborted because she did not have support of the infant's father and was afraid of what others "might think" if she continued and had the child. Her grief is deep and unrelenting because she appears to have a deep love of children and despises herself for not being stronger. Her constant comment is "please I want my baby back" and she becomes involved in wrong relationship after wrong relationship in the hope of getting pregnant again. Her behaviour brings terror to me because she is jeopardizing not only herself but her children by bring into her family undesirable elements.

The second reason for promiscuity following abortion is low self-esteem. Lynne (1 little boy, 2 yrs) is involved in such self-destructive behaviour that it also brings terror to me. Since her abortion she not only drinks to excess (other substance also I suspect) but also picks up undesirable elements and takes them home. In fact her inclination appears to be towards violent men, and with the combination of drink and violence I fear for her safety and her little boy's safety. When not inebriated she can see that what she is doing is dangerous but appears powerless to stop. The interesting thing is that before her abortion she appears to have lived a different life. However, I am not convinced. As I enquire further into her life there is much abuse, sadness and sorrow and these together with the abortion set into motion a desire to self-destruct. One of the things which is very obvious is that she never looks at anyone in the eyes her head is always bowed. There is much work to be done here.

Today we understand, and research confirms, that depression is present in large number of aborted men and women, and low self esteem if not brought about by the abortion itself, and already present, is however, exacerbated by the abortion. "The damage abortion inflicts on a woman's sense of confidence and self respect is even worse when these traits are already weak." (D. Reardon, *Aborted Women Silent No More*, p127)

SELF ESTEEM – WHAT IS IT.

Attempting to describe what is self –esteem is difficult because there are so many interpretations, however it is important to understand it if we are to understand why a woman’s and man’s own understanding of self is changed following an abortion. So here goes this is my understanding of it.

Self-esteem is the recognized and spontaneous feeling of my own self worth which is constant yet fluid and changes as development and experiences occur. This knowledge and feeling has been mediated by the significant others in the life of an individual and form part of the individual’s persona and history. Damaged or wounded self-esteem is linked to major psychological and behavioural difficulties and can in part (or wholly) be responsible for actions, which are self-defeating.

The understanding of self is important because within that understanding of “self” will be found ideas about right and wrong. Knowledge about the deeper things of life. Questions about life and death itself. The “self” is nurtured by life events and legitimised by our existence and progress. The “self” is strengthened and fed by God, life, others, acts, events, and rites of passage which involve words and rituals and which express, seen and unseen realities and an acknowledgement that the person has passed through time. Following the processes right through then leads to completion and growth. However, interruption of a life process renders the psychology and spiritual aspect of the person in a state of confusion indeed in a state of interruption. Hence, the monstrous character of abortion is that it abruptly interrupts a divine and human process, begun and which should have had a certain conclusion, but has in fact had a forced and false conclusion imposed upon it. Abortion cannot but change the “self” It is an aberration or in computer language a virus designed to destroy the person.

I have spent some time on “self” and self-esteem because it is my contention that self-esteem and sexuality are closely linked. Human sexuality is a reality that is at the same time precious and painful. Precious because in this area we co-operate with God in the creation of a new person and painful because it is such a delicate area and when separated from its purpose and from design it becomes distorted and a tool for exploitation. A person then who has deep wounds of the heart is affected also in the area of sexuality. Therefore a wounded heart and wounded sexuality lead to a lacerated self, which experiences depression, fear, low self-esteem, violence, and isolation. Ultimately this person “self” rejects life and settles for any compromise.

LETTER:

I share this letter with you because it in part keeps this work going. I have the author’s permission to reprint it.

*Dear Anne,
I am writing to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your monthly newsletter over the last two years. They have helped me so much as a grieving grandparent over the loss of our first two grand children. In turn I*

feel I have been able to talk with my daughter and help her come to terms with her tragic loss, and find the courage to try again.

Today is (daughter and son in law) fourth wedding anniversary and they are celebrating with joy and thanksgiving the birth of a healthy 8 lb baby boy (baby's name). Born 8 days ago. You might remember (daughter & son in laws names) story when I first wrote to you after seeing an article in the Catholic Weekly. Daughter was suffering severe grief and depression after the loss of two babies one in May 99 and the second in November 99.

The first pregnancy was an INDUCED birth at 19 weeks as the baby had died in the womb and the doctors could offer little explanation. The second pregnancy scan showed Turner's Syndrome which they were told affects only female babies. They were advised AND FELT PRESSURED TO TERMINATE WITH THE result that daughter's health and quality of life suffered terribly. However last Easter she went to Mass and had a good talk to our Parish Priest. I could see a visible change in her after that. She was much stronger and knew exactly what she wanted.

When her third pregnancy scan at 12 wks showed signs of Spina Bifida she refused to believe it and sought second opinion after making up her mind and telling her doctor that she was going to have the baby come what may. The second scan at 18 weeks showed the pregnancy as normal after this they refused other tests.

She eventually had a natural birth with all her family around her. She gave birth to a healthy son. It was 11.00oclock at night and all quiet and I felt a Holy presence. I can't explain.....

We have much to be thankful for. You have my permission to share my story. I will pray for your work. Love and heartfelt thanks.....Maureen.

Thank you Maureen for both the letter and your permission. These are the moments of grace, which I spoke about earlier. Thank you also to my friend from Sydney who responded to my email for urgent help. It arrived so quickly. Thank you to the other four friends to also contacted me. Thank you to my friend Margaret for the extra names. Please pray for, Allan, Therese, Sharon, Robyn, Leanne, Maria, Lynne, Belinda, John, Narelle, Roger, Angela, Josephine, Vincent, Paul Michael, Sheryl. Thank yours Frs. Conroy and Walters. Please, please keep your support going.

May the Lord Bless and keep you.



Anne Lastman

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