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**“And the Light Shines in the Darkness”**

**Talk No. 29**

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**“That they may have life, and have it abundantly: Project Rachel”**

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Abortion wounds the soul of those involved in it. Abortion not only takes the life of the unborn child, but also leaves a trail of pain and desperation, of broken lives and broken spirits, of damaged families and relationships unequaled by any other injustice in contemporary society. While abortion is promoted as a safe choice, a way to control the family with a simple medical procedure or to prevent the challenge of a child with a disability, in fact abortion radically alters the life of the woman. Abortion denies the father his fatherhood. Abortion denies the grandparents a grandchild and the siblings their brother or sister. No one is unchanged by an abortion. We need to be prepared to minister to all who are touched. Abortion leaves a soul wound in all that it touches!

The Church which has so boldly and unequivocally defended the sanctity of all life from conception to natural death has an equal obligation to minister to the multitude of walking wounded left behind in this slaughter of the innocents. In keeping with the call of the Scripture, the Church must continue to preach the healing power of our God, His mercy and tender compassion for those whose lives are broken and filled with sin. Jesus always ministered to those who came seeking forgiveness and healing with gentleness and tenderness. He sought out the sinner like Zacchaeus and the woman at the well. The sin of abortion has become so pervasive and overwhelming today that it is imperative that the Church not only continue its prophetic stance in protecting unborn human life, but also call to healing the millions who have been drawn into the evil of abortion, willingly or under duress, knowledgeable or ignorant of the reality, extending to them God's forgiveness and healing. The brokenness caused by abortion keeps millions of people from fully entering into their faith journey, from fully experiencing the God-life within. Those involved in abortion believe they have committed the unforgiveable sin and are afraid to approach the church if they had once been churched. The Church has always been a hospital for sinners and not a hotel for saints and yet in our humanness, we forget that at times. Because of the enormity of the abortion problem it is imperative that the Church throughout the world address this issue.

The World Health Organization estimates for 2006 indicate approximately 46 million abortions worldwide per year, keeping in mind that every abortion procured involves both the mother and the father. Additionally grandparents, siblings of the lost child and siblings of the parents as well as friends may be impacted. A report published by the Guttmacher Institute from October, 2009 on the worldwide incidence of abortion, states that one in five pregnancies in the world end in abortion. According to them most abortions (35 million) occur in developing countries due to population disparity. In light of the American policy change regarding supporting organizations that promote abortion around the world, I believe the rates of abortion may grow more even more rapidly now.

Women who experience healing through God's mercy and love do not have more abortions. Men who are restored after abortion, work diligently to end abortion as do the women. Indeed, these healed people become the cornerstones of the Culture of Life.

The inherent reality of abortion, the rejection of the invitation to create a new life in cooperation with the Creator of all Life, results in the profound existential wound. The wound of abortion is both spiritual and human and must be resolved in both realms to be healed. It is truly a soul wound. *Project Rachel* addresses both the spiritual and human wounds.

In 1975 The Catholic Bishops of the US addressed the issue of the need for healing after abortion as part of their document “**Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities**”. They said “*The Church is both a means and an agent of reconciliation. As a spiritual entity, the church reconciles men and women to God. As a human community, the Church pursues the task of reconciling men and women to one another and with the entire community. Thus all of the faithful have the duty of promoting reconciliation.*” The document continued “*Sacramentally, the church reconciles the sinner through the Sacrament of Penance, thereby restoring the individual to full sacramental participation. The work of reconciliation is also accomplished in celebrating and participating in the Eucharist. Finally, the effects of the Church’s reconciling efforts are found in the full support of the Christian community and the renewal of Christian life that results in prayer, the pursuit of virtue and continued sacramental participation.*”

*Granting that the grave sin of abortion is symptomatic of many human problems, which often remain unsolved for individual women, it is important that we realize that God’s mercy is always available and without limit, that the Christian life can be restored and renewed through the sacraments and that union with God can be accomplished despite the problems of human existence.”*

And in 1985, the Bishops of the United States reiterated “*Christ’s redeeming act, the Paschal Mystery of His death and resurrection, is the cause of human reconciliation in its twofold aspect: liberation from sin and communion with God. The whole church has the mission of proclaiming this reconciliation. Priests have the privileged opportunity to serve others by offering the unconditional and efficacious love of Christ in the sacrament of penance and fostering conversion and healing in woman and men who have been involved in the destruction of the innocent human life. Clergy education should reflect this reality, especially by training seminarians and priests to understand the painful experience of women who have had abortions. Many lay people, by God’s grace, also serve directly or indirectly in this process of restoration in spiritual, mental and emotional health. Effective pastoral programs of reconciliation will draw upon these God-given resources to rebuild the penitents’ bond with God, with the child, with the family and with the community.*”

It is interesting to note that the future Pope, John Paul II first wrote about abortion and its consequences in 1960 in his book *Love and Responsibility*. He said “*Leaving aside its moral aspect, the act of artificially terminating pregnancy is in itself highly “traumatic”, and in every respect comparable with those experiments which are designed to produce neuroses. It is indeed an artificial interruption of the natural biological rhythm with very far-reaching consequences. There is no analogy for the enormous feeling of resentment which it leaves in the mind of the woman. She cannot forget that it has happened and cannot get rid of her grudge against the man who has brought her to it. Apart from its physical effects, artificial abortion causes an anxiety neurosis with guilt feelings at its core, and sometimes even a profound psychotic reaction. In this context we may note the significance of statements by women suffering from depression during the climacteric(menopause), who sometimes a decade or so after the event remember a terminated pregnancy with regret and feel a belated sense of guilt on this account. There is no need to add that morally termination of pregnancy is a very grave offense.*”

*Project Rachel* embodies the mercy and compassion Pope John Paul II spoke of at World Youth Day in Denver, Colorado, in 1993. He said “*this personal tragedy (abortion) must be met with concrete interpersonal acts of love and solidarity.*”

Pope John Paul II, went further when he wrote in Section 99 of *Evangelium Vitae*, “I would now like to say a special word to women who had an abortion. The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people, and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone’s right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become promoters of a new way of looking at human life.”

Pope Benedict XVI reaffirms this teaching. In his 2007 Ad Limina address to the Bishops of Kenya, he said “When you preach the Gospel of Life, remind your people that the right to life of every innocent human being, born or unborn, is absolute and applies equally to all people with no exception whatsoever. This equality ‘is the basis of all authentic social relationships which, to be truly such, can only be founded on truth and justice’ (*Evangelium Vitae*, 57). The Catholic community must offer support to those women who may find it difficult to accept a child, above all when they are isolated from their family and friends. Likewise, the community should be open to welcome back all who repent of having participated in the grave sin of abortion, and should guide them with pastoral charity to accept the grace of forgiveness, the need for penance, and the joy of entering once more into the new life of Christ.” At the audience with the Holy Father, Benedict XVI on April 5, 2008 as part of the congress “Oil on the Wounds”, which dealt with the children of divorce and abortion loss, he further challenged “The Church’s ethical opinion with regard to divorce and procured abortion is unambivalent and known to all: these are grave sins which, to a different extent and taking into account the evaluation of subjective responsibility, harm the dignity of the human person, involve a profound injustice in human and social relations and offend God himself, Guarantor of the conjugal covenant and the Author of life. Yet the Church, after the example of her Divine Teacher, always has the people themselves before her, especially the weakest and most innocent who are victims of injustice and sin, and also those other men and women who, having perpetrated these acts, stained by sin and wounded within, are seeking peace and the chance to begin anew.

The Church’s first duty is to approach these people with love and consideration, with caring and motherly attention, to proclaim the merciful closeness of God in Jesus Christ. Indeed, as the Fathers teach, it is He who is the true Good Samaritan, who has made himself close to us, who pours oil and wine on our wounds and takes us into the inn, the Church, where He has us treated, entrusting us to her ministers and personally paying in advance for our recovery. Yes, the Gospel of love and life is also always the Gospel of mercy, which is addressed to the actual person and sinner that we are, to help us up after any fall and to recover from any injury. My beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II, the third anniversary of whose death we celebrated recently, said in inaugurating the new Shrine of Divine Mercy in Krakow: “Apart from the mercy of God there is no other source of hope for mankind” ([17 August 2002](#)). On the basis of this mercy the Church cultivates an indomitable trust in human beings and in their capacity for recovery. She knows that with the help of grace human freedom is capable of the definitive and faithful gift of self which makes possible the marriage of a man and woman as an indissoluble bond; she knows that even in the most difficult circumstances human freedom is capable of extraordinary acts of sacrifice and solidarity to welcome the life of a new human being. Thus, one can see that the “No” which the Church pronounces in her moral directives on which public opinion sometimes unilaterally focuses, is in fact a great “Yes” to the dignity of the human person, to human life and to the person’s capacity to love. It is an expression of the constant trust with which, despite their frailty, people are able to respond to the loftiest vocation for which they are created: the vocation to love.

On that same occasion, John Paul II continued: "This fire of mercy needs to be passed on to the world. In the mercy of God the world will find peace" (*ibid.*, p.8). The great task of disciples of the Lord Jesus who find themselves the travelling companions of so many brothers, men and women of good will, is hinged on this. Their programme, the programme of the Good Samaritan, is a "'heart which sees'. This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly" ([Deus Caritas Est](#), n. 31). ...These strong and passionate words of the Holy Father are a mandate to provide care for those wounded by abortion, while recognizing the grave moral issues associated with abortion.

The name *Project Rachel* came from the Old Testament, Jeremiah 31:15-17 where Rachel is mourning for her children who are no more, where she is assured by God that "there is hope for your future." This is a critical message for the millions of Rachels who are mourning. They walk in the valley of despair, convinced that abortion is unforgiveable and that recovery is impossible. The message of hope and possibility invite her to begin the journey of healing. She is often frightened to approach the Church for help because all she knows is the strong prophetic voice of the Church that defends the life of the unborn.

The woman wounded by abortion experiences her spirit as dead and her conscience numb, though it is the reawakening of her conscience that brings her to seek healing. She realizes she has victimized an innocent human being and she must take responsibility for the choice and the outcome.

If we as Church do not reach out to those wounded by abortion, we are allowing the Culture of Death to flourish. If she is not able to heal from my abortion experience, she will continue to support and promote abortion. Her life will remain in chaos. The woman who is ministered to through Project Rachel, no longer supports abortion as an option for herself or others. She actively defends life. The Culture of Life is being built one heart and soul at a time through post-abortion healing ministry.

Additionally, it is important to know that being involved in this work as a priest supports and sustains the priesthood in a very real way. Priests see the healing power of the sacrament of Reconciliation in a concrete way, when they personally experience women and men being set free from the bondage of sin and made new. The experience of caring for women and men provides the clergy with a way to speak about abortion in a compassionate but truthful manner. Many priests have shared with me that through this ministry they personally rediscovered the gift of their priesthood. Many have said to me "This is what I was ordained to do—to set the captives free!"

The ministry of post-abortion healing has changed the face of the abortion debate in freeing women and men to speak openly about the tragic consequences of abortion in their lives. The growing awareness of the impact of abortion on the broader culture is changing the debate. It is the truth of their experience brought to the public square that will set us all free from the scourge of abortion in our world. *Project Rachel* opens the merciful arms of God through the compassionate pastoral concern and care for those wounded by abortion. It has brought people to the Church and back to the Church. It has healed individuals and enabled the restoration of families. Many women have said to me "I regret my abortion with all my heart, but I would never have come to know God in such a powerful and personal way. When God forgives you and restores you, you are changed forever by God's love." Those who heal from abortion never become supportive of abortion. Many become advocates for life, supporting other pregnant women who need care, praying for and supporting healing ministries and engaging in activities that promote life. Some become activists, speaking out about their abortion experience. Others quietly make a difference in their families, parishes and the world at large by a silent witness of love. When enough are healed the Culture of Death will crumble. These healed women and men become the cornerstones of the Culture of Life!

"The punishment already inflicted by the majority on such a one is enough; you should now relent and support him (her) so that s/he may not be crushed by too great a weight of sorrow. I therefore beg you to reaffirm your love for him (her.) (2 Corinthians 2:6-9).