

Merciful Discipline 4: Hopeful, We Rebuild Trust

This is the fourth post of six in the *Merciful Discipline Series*. A complete list of available posts will be at the end of each article as they are made available.

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We do not want you to grieve...as those who have no hope. (1Thes. 4:13)

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. (1Cor. 4:2)

Cursed is the man who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord...He will dwell in the parched places of the earth. (Jer. 17: 5, 6)

One struggles to consider a more profound violation of trust than priestly abuse of children. Based on the trust Catholic parents grant the Church, they have entrusted their children to a handful of priests who used that trust to abuse.

Diabolical—the disintegration of young lives and long after, the disintegration of trust in the Church itself. What greater victory could the enemy of our souls achieve than the scattering of the sheep through such a violent abuse of trust?

We overcome evil through good. And that good comes through acknowledging the mistrust that remains and choosing to begin a process of forgiveness. Our wounds united with Christ's, we have access to the antidote: Mercy. We can apply that Mercy to both abusing priests and those who unwittingly sustained the abuse through its mishandling.

Forgiveness is neither weak nor a set up for 'revictimization'. Forgiveness is power. In the Spirit of Jesus, we entrust all involved in the abuse, including our own damaged hearts, 'to Him who judges justly.' (1P2:23) We choose to place the hemorrhaging mess into the only Wounds that can heal it;

we gratefully remove ourselves from the role of Redeemer and Judge. In forgiving our captors, we begin to be released from an unbearable weight. Little by little, we chip away at the burden of another's sin until Jesus alone bears it. Forgiveness is the power by which we triumph over beloved enemies.

Forgiving spiritual leaders means that we are growing up. As the laity, we have authority to name a leader's sin against us or loved ones and to do something about it. In that process, which includes forgiveness, we strike a death blow to clericalism. We refuse to grant Catholic leaders the magic of perfection. We cease to be children and become discerning, engaging colleagues with clergy.

We can disagree with them. And we can go directly to Christ ourselves—to trust more in Him than in the priest or bishop. Jesus always wanted it this way. God wants to use the sexual abuse crisis to free the laity from childish reliance upon mere men, and to mature into wise and helpful members of Jesus' body.

Trust must be earned. We forgive our offenders in obedience to Christ and to free our own hearts. Yet reliance upon those we have forgiven is wise only when their trustworthiness is evident.

There is evidence that the Church is repenting of her lack of transparency in failing to protect her young. Pope Benedict has championed reform here. He has repeatedly acknowledged the Church's scandalous track-record and has exerted enormous energy in insisting on strict measures of accountability, discipline, and prevention in the world-wide Church. (He would be wise to keep doing so!)

The US Bishops have established arguably the highest standards for transparency and accountability and victim-care for the US Church than any other branch of the RCC. For that to become a living reality, 'all diocesan leaders must be committed to transparency about their actions, ensure that immediate and appropriate responses to abuse become routine, and ensure that all such actions are adopted by all church leaders.' (John Jay Report, p.93)

Having stumbled recently, the Kansas City Diocese under Bishop Finn has set up a new and solid system of checks and balances that line up entirely with recommendations from the Graves Report. Instead of alleged abuses going to the Vicar-General, an Ombudsman receives them and reports them directly to the police and the DFS, while initiating an investigation, which includes a Victim's Advocate. An Independent Review Board operates as well, investigating whether alleged perpetrators should continue in ministry.

Jennifer Valenti, the new and apparently dynamic Ombudsman, urges all of us to do our part as faithful, discerning members of the one Body. She implores us:

In order for the safety net to be effective, you must take a stand. You cannot stand in silence when you suspect abuse. It takes courage, but you must report it.

If we discern any possibility of abuse, we are to call DFS at (800) 392-3738.

Our hope is in God, the Author and Finisher of His Church. To love the Church and to be whole-hearted in our service of her, we must forgive her grievous failures even as we discern her repentance. In so doing, we destroy the will of the evil one with good. Evidence of change in the 'system' still requires that we keep growing, learning how to trust others with a new maturity. That maturity requires that we do our part to ensure that the Church is a safe place for children.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water, that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has now worries in a year of drought, and never fails to bear fruit. (Jer. 17: 7, 8)

Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. We have renounced secret and shameful ways. We do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. (2Cor 4: 1, 2)

O Blood and Water, that flows from the heart of the Savior as a fount of Mercy for us, we trust in You! - St. Faustina

MORE:

The *Merciful Discipline Series* of Posts (updated with each new post as they become available):

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- [Merciful Discipline 2: Broken, We Repent for the Church's Mishandling of Abuse](#)
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- [Merciful Discipline 4: Hopeful, We Rebuild Trust](#)
- [Merciful Discipline 5: Hopeful, We Fight for the Dignity and Integrity of Our Priests](#)
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