

Year of Mercy an opportunity for those wounded by abortion to be ‘truly healed’

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Messenger Contributor

A few years ago while attending a pro-life conference I had the fortune to meet a wonderful young woman, Anna. After I introduced myself as being from the Diocese of Covington, Kentucky, Anna lit up. She told me she was at the conference because of a priest from the Diocese of Covington. She went on further to tell me her story that, because a priest had the courage to talk about abortion and post-abortion healing, she had the faith and courage to return to her Catholic faith and the Catholic Church. Because of this priest she was the recipient of God's divine love, mercy and forgiveness.

When Anna was 15 she had her first abortion. She was a frightened teen who was taken to an abortion clinic by her mother. In her heart Anna knew this was wrong but she was afraid and obediently followed her mother.

Years later when Anna was married and having difficulty becoming pregnant she and her husband turned to in vitro fertilization and became pregnant with multiples. For the sake of having a healthy baby, she and her husband were advised to have a pregnancy “reduction.” Two babies were aborted through the reduction, and Anna gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

For many years Anna suffered from these decisions. She said she felt unworthy of being loved because she had committed the most unforgivable sin in taking the life of her children. Anna stopped going to church and she alienated herself from God. She felt that God could not love her and she excommunicated herself from the Church.

Anna told me that as a little girl she loved her Catholic education, she loved learning about her faith and that it brought her great comfort in knowing about the saints. When she stepped away from the Church because of her shame she felt an ache in her heart.

After giving birth to her first child, she was able to conceive a child naturally and two years later gave birth to a daughter. Her living children were always reminders to her of the children she had aborted.

Fifteen years from the time of her pregnancy “reduction,” Anna was traveling in Northern Kentucky with her son's soc-

cer team. On the Saturday evening of the tournament Anna and her son had planned to go out to dinner with another family. Prior to going to the group announced that they needed to get to Mass. As Anna did not have a car, she and her son tagged along to a local church for Mass. During the homily the priest spoke of the sin of abortion and how abortion takes the life of an innocent child. Anna immediately felt overwhelmed with grief and said she could barely breathe. She felt that everyone was looking at her and knew of her great sin.

As the priest continued, he mentioned that God has great forgiveness for those who have had an abortion experience. He continued to talk of God's great love and that he wanted anyone who was involved in any way with abortion to seek his incredible love, mercy and forgiveness. The priest went on to mention the Project Rachel ministry. As Anna listened she felt some hope and made the decision to see if Project Rachel was available in her area.

Anna located a Project Rachel post-abortion healing ministry in her area through the Hope After Abortion website. She said she made several calls, each time hanging up before she could leave a message. After about five calls she found courage to leave a message. A return phone call came the next day from a Project Rachel leader who was also post-abortive. The woman offered her compassion and understanding. After the phone call Anna felt more hope and decided to attend the next retreat weekend.

As the retreat weekend drew near Anna found herself praying for courage to overcome her shame. She found a rosary that she had from childhood and learned once again how to pray. Through her prayer she felt she was ready to seek forgiveness and peace.

At the retreat Anna remembered the words of the priest back in Northern Kentucky, that God wanted her back, and that he would forgive her and that his love was unconditional. These words carried her through the pain that surfaced as she encountered her abortion experiences and shared them during the weekend. It was through the leaders on the retreat, the involvement of the priests in the sacrament of reconciliation, and the other women and men in attendance that she discovered God's great love, mercy and forgiveness.

It was this healing that led Anna back to her Catholic faith and helped her forgive herself, her mother and her husband



and her doctors that led her to abortion. This forgiveness gave her much peace and helped her lead her husband and children through the RCIA program at her church. She began working for a pregnancy care center that counsels women and men considering abortion. She has also become involved in her area Project Rachel ministry.

Anna feels that the Holy Spirit led her to that Mass in Northern Kentucky. She said that every chance she gets to speak to a priest about her experience, she mentions how important it is to talk about abortion and how God wants those who have been involved with abortion to come back to him and experience his love and mercy.

As I listened to Anna's story I felt that the Holy Spirit played a role in our encounter. Anna is a true witness to me of how one's life can be touched profoundly through our priests.

At that same conference Archbishop Naumann of Kansas City talked about the Project Rachel ministry being essential to the Church and its pro-life ministry — it's not an extra or a nice elective. He said that as part of the New Evangelization it is essential to reach out to those alienated or inactive from the Church. He went on to say that Project Rachel ministry was at the heart of the Church itself, as mercy and forgiveness are at the heart of the Lord's ministry.

Especially during this Year of Mercy my prayers are that those who have left the Church can return to be welcomed with the love and compassion that God bestows to all. I also pray that those who are wounded by abortion may be truly healed and may fully participate in the mission of the Church and proclaim the Gospel of Life.

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