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## **Who We Are is How We Heal**

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If St. Thomas Aquinas was correct when he stated: "Grace builds on nature," then we can learn much about the journey of healing for those suffering from the aftermath of abortion.

When personality types are matched with Christian schools and traditions of spirituality, a "healing guide" can be developed as a significant resource in walking with one who is broken in the journey toward wholeness.

Recognizing that our goal is psycho-spiritual, we seek not just to help the post- abortive individual return to pre-abortive attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and commitments, for they might have actually predisposed and facilitated the abortion decision. Instead, we seek to help the individual integrate the wound of abortion into his or her life in a true Paschal Mystery sense, identifying with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

*Christ has died. My baby has died.  
Christ is risen. My baby will rise.  
Christ will come again. And when he does, He will carry my baby in His arms and  
hand  
him/her to me.*

The healing process is not just one of reconciliation, but reunion and healing as well.

Perhaps the post-abortive woman or man is one who especially values tradition and is inclined to "connect the dots" between past, present and future. This is a person who would seek to commemorate events in the life of Jesus and also to entrust her/his child to the Child Jesus., the Healer Jesus, the Merciful Jesus, the Consoling and Compassionate Jesus. This is one whose healing process or journey, in a sense, parallels an Ignatian spirituality, in the spirit of St. Ignatius Loyola.

St. Ignatius was the sixteenth century soldier who experienced a profound religious conversion while recuperating from a severe leg wound, and later, after

a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, gathered together a group of "companions in Christ," later to be known as the "Society of Jesus" - Jesuits. The seeker of healing would do well to learn more about the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola, for it would complement her/his journey to Jesus and His loving embrace.

Perhaps the post-abortive woman or man is drawn to action and opportunity – a life centered in actively seeking to do God's will. Spontaneous prayer, informal prayer, and a special openness to the Holy Spirit, as well as acts of loving service, are all parts of this person's "spiritual profile" and inclinations. All these characteristics are common to a Franciscan spirituality. Compassion for the "lepers" of our day and a deep appreciation for the beauty, gift and goodness of God's creation, may lead a mournful mother or father to plant a flower or a tree in memory of their aborted child. This is a gesture, when combined with a sacramental and prayerful experience, that may contribute significantly to healing.

St. Francis of Assisi felt that one's experience of the Eucharist was so visible and tangible that it was akin to the apostles' experience of the Jesus who walked the earth with them. In other words, in the Eucharist, we see the Lord. Be it in the humble babe of Bethlehem, the common bread of the Eucharist, or the sacrifices Christ of the cross – in other words: from crib to cross – Jesus is real and it is His presence and purpose that will heal the mother and father of a lost child.

Augustinian spirituality may provide a comfortable context of healing for those who find themselves drawn to prayer and retreats, reflections upon what Jesus would say or do today, especially in light of their loss to abortion. This is particularly true because through the abortion they lost not only the baby but also a part of themselves. These are people of hope who, despite their pain, tend to believe that their days will get better and that the experience of God's love will daily grow stronger as they, in turn, believe in His love. They see the words and spirit of the Scriptures as valuable and very relevant to their current struggles. St. Augustine, in his sermons, often spoke of Christ the Physician: if we are humble enough, Christ will heal us. The broken heart will find rest only if it responds to the invitation of the Divine Physician to "Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart." A reflection on that reality could easily lead the broken to compose prayer or poem to the Divine Physician acknowledging His healing call and the fact that the more one loves others, the more one loves God. That knowledge and love together marks the path to Jesus the Healer.

St. Benedict established his monasteries in the wilderness in a world of solitude and silence. Yet, many historians recognize that fifteen centuries ago the only institution capable of maintaining any aspect of western civilization was the Church, through its monasteries and its spirituality. Benedict's monks balanced

manual labor and spiritual exercises: *orare est laborare*, and were known for their hospitality toward the poor, sick, and oppressed. To the Benedictine, the heart of Christianity is love, reflected in mutual respect, selflessness, patience, mutual respect and obedience. This obedience is directly related to the will of God, through several channels: scripture, tradition, Magisterium, abbot and the community.

Many who seek healing after an abortion seem to need and hunger for a specific structure as a path to healing. The call to surrender oneself to the Lord through discovering and discerning the depths of His unconditional love and healing through a strong commitment to seek God's truth is a critical part of that healing as well. In many of our institutions today, however, though few seem willing to admit it, the search is not for truth but for power. The spirituality of St. Benedict teaches us that we can "speak the truth in love" rather than in condemnation. In fact, in the healing process, the authentic search is for the ultimate truth of God's unconditional love, and the authority that truth conveys, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The purpose of this truthful love is not only to embrace God's love but also to forgive one's self. Thus, as the old adage expresses, we seek not the "love of power," but the "power of love."

Many schools or traditions of spirituality have emerged in the 2000-year tradition of the Catholic Church. In studying them, one can easily see a beautiful "tapestry of life and faith," where many colors and threads intermingle with each other. The soul who hungers for healing may, in the last analysis, draw eclectically from aspects of many spiritual traditions. We have looked, briefly, at only a few in the preceding paragraphs. Though we are all certainly made in God's image and likeness, there is a uniqueness and individuality to each of us that can help heal all of us, especially those who carry the wounds of abortion in the memories of their lives. At the center, there is always a loving Jesus, ever seeking to lead us to the Father, through the gentle power and presence of the Holy Spirit.



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