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## Healing After Abortion

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*Chester County's MARCH FOR LIFE was a notable success many thanks to, among others, Dr. Theresa Burke, founder of Rachel's Vineyard, Heart to Heart Outreach, our local Knights of Columbus, county Commissioner Colin Hanna, Rev. Maurice Avicollo of St. Norbert's Church, Rev. Wayne Brauning of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, and the young musicians. The theme of this years march was "Healing After Abortion." Below is an excerpt from Dr. Burke's comments on this topic at the march.*

God bless America. We've heard these words many times the past four months. Never before has America struggled so deeply to understand its wound and find a way to transform its pain through genuine grieving, sympathy, and support for all those who lost loved ones in the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup>. As I was watching the prayer service telecast from Washington's National Cathedral, one pastor quoted the verse from Jeremiah: "Rachel mourns for her children, and she refuses to be consoled – because her children are no more." I found that chillingly appropriate since that quote is so often used by the pro-life movement and post abortion ministries regarding the unspeakable sorrow and trauma of countless mothers and fathers who have suffered the loss of their child from abortion.

As I observed the many images of the Twin Towers, demolished into a smoking rubble, I reflected on the many women whose own lives have been struck by an even more personal and intimate terror and whose structure of self collapsed swiftly in the aftershock.

Our nation knows, beyond all doubts, the horror of September 11 was indeed the height of evil. Completely unaware and innocent people were literally thrown from exploding buildings that only moments before held them safely inside. As we rebuild New York after this horrific tragedy, we must also realize that an equal and very insidious horror is still occurring everyday in our country. Thousands and thousands of innocent children are literally being thrown from the safety of their mother's womb. And those mothers are absolutely crumbling

in the aftermath of the destruction – needing to be slowly and agonizingly rebuilt. I know because post-abortion healing has been my life's work.

As our country engages in the battle against terrorism, we must also bring attention to the terror which has been embraced by our own culture and has fostered the oppression of women in our own society. This tyrant has targeted the child in the womb for destruction by sudden, unspeakable violence.

Many pro-life people in our community understand this threat to our safety and our families. Many have stood outside clinics in a prayerful vigil, holding a candle of hope – offering to reconcile fears into an alternative plan for life instead of death. In the brief seconds before a woman goes in to abort her child, in the moments you have to offer her literature, some words of encouragement to keep her baby, you provide an unwelcome security checkpoint of prayer that she might not board the jetting flight to disaster and heartache.

Yet the “business” of abortion is given free reign to flourish – undisturbed by truth. There are no security guards. There are no questions as you check in. I have learned that this truth has a vile way of reappearing in the lives of many women who were denied the truth by their community and by the militant hustlers who go after the abortion dollar like wolves go after a lamb.

Can you imagine for a moment if after the attack on the World Trade Center, there was no one that the grieving victims could turn to? My friend Pat, who helps to run Rachel's Vineyard up in Newark, was on the 78<sup>th</sup> floor of Building One. She escaped. But she had to step over dead bodies and body parts before she escaped. She lost her shoes and walked through broken glass on the streets of New York City. She worked for the Port Authority and had to be the one to answer phone calls from desperate family members looking for their loved ones who would never come home. She is still grieving. You see, the pain of death lingers with us and traumatic deaths are even more difficult to integrate into our sense of self, into our personal and social histories.

We've all heard their stories. We've also read the extraordinary stories of human compassion from New York City and the surrounding area. We are comforted to know that the folks who faced such horror might in time be healed of their suffering.

Post abortive women know this trauma all too well. They know what its like to have their heart suddenly ripped out of the chest. They know what it's like to spend years trying to block out the pain and to forget. Yet we must never forget, for that's how we stop history from repeating itself. Too often, post abortive women are not able to work through their loss because it is not recognized as the desperate act it is, but tragically called a “choice”.

In the months since September 11, our country has spent billions of dollars in the effort to locate the bodies of those who perished beneath the concrete and steel of the Twin Towers. Why all this effort and expense? Because as a society we recognized the need to bring closure to traumatic situations. We recognize that apart from the clues to discover how all this could have happened, the families need a body to bury, a corpse to honor, a figure to emphasize the finality of the loss, a means to focus their grief.

Women and men who have aborted have the same need. The decision to abort is often made in fear and crisis, or it is forced by circumstances as a casualty of the situation. Like a bomb, it explodes abruptly – and there are few who want to help the victims sift through the wreckage.

I have listened to the stories of two thousand individuals – women and men whose lives have been impacted by the violence of abortion; women who suffer the repercussions of a cruel and degrading procedure which many describe as more violent and brutal than rape. Each shared bitter tears of regret as they struggled with a secret guilt and shame, grief, and anger. They learned to numb themselves with alcohol and drugs, or master their trauma through repetitions of it. Some reenact their trauma through promiscuity and repeat abortions, trapped in cycles of abandonment, rejection, a sense of helplessness, and abuse. Others stuff their feelings through eating disorders, depression, and anxiety. For many, the wound strikes at the heart of their spiritual life, killing their own trust and faith in God which is replaced with alienation and spiritual desolation.

Let us not be mistaken. We are in a war. It is a war on the unborn, the unwanted, the inconvenient, and the imperfect. It is also a war against the mother who carries a baby beneath her heart, a heart which breaks when she has been encouraged to sacrifice her body and child – all in the name of the right to control our bodies. Abortion is a fanatical suicide mission – one which promotes degrading uncommitted sexual oppression and exploitation.

The rebuilding of the self after the emotional, physical, and spiritual destruction caused by abortion often requires many years, but in the midst of this horror lies HOPE.

Longtime pro-life activist Fr. Mannion said, "When a woman is giving birth – she is the physical life line for the child to enter the world. When an abortion has occurred, the child can become the mother's spiritual lifeline to God." Rachel's Vineyard seeks to make this through a reality. We have developed a profound process of grief work with rituals and exercises that allow the soul to speak its pain – to experience Christ in an intimate and undeniable way. As we

enter the paschal mystery of our own lives, united our suffering with the passion of Christ, we travel the very path through Calvary. We reveal the buried feelings of grief and loss and experience the pain, the agony, the passion; we journey with Christ into the agony of our own Gethsemene, and we remember Good Friday when the women were betrayed at the foot of the cross to suffer their own crucifixion – the tragic and violent death of a child. And in this process we recognize the loss and grieve fully – struggling to find meaning.

Healing happens with the forgiveness of God, oneself, and one's aborted child – and with the journey to find meaning in suffering. God can turn ALL things into good and can bring us new life when we express our sorrow and open our hearts to his mercy. So too can God transform a broken heart, fractured by abortion.

Mother Theresa said, " It is the person that matters. I believe in person-to-person encounters." Let us recognize the value of each individual soul, and not become overwhelmed or discouraged by the politics, the institutions, and the laws which perpetrate this damage. For love reveals truth. Let us show God's mercy, let us reflect his forgiveness, let us reach out to those who mourn.



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