

Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse

Resources | Passion of St John

Introduction

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM) has highlighted the importance of prayer and suggested to Pope Francis that the worldwide Catholic Church should join together in a day of prayer. The Holy Father has welcomed this initiative.

In the Cycle of Prayer for England and Wales, this day is marked every year on the Friday of the fifth week of Lent.

On Friday 12 April the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is encouraging the Catholic community to take part in a day of prayer for survivors of sexual abuse.

Reflection on the parts of the Passion of Christ in the Gospel of St John

Introduction

As the period of Lent draws to a close, and we approach Holy Week, we have a National Day of Prayer for Survivors of Abuse. We come in a spirit of deep sadness and repentance, to participate together in this time of prayer. Turning towards God's supreme love and goodness, we lament the ways in which we, the Church, have failed in our calling to be instruments of God's love. We come to repent of the ways in which some of our most trusted members and leaders have so damaged the path of God's love for those they have abused. We recognise as the Body of Christ, the people of the Church, that when one part of the Body is wounded, and another part of the Body has inflicted these terrible wounds, that we are all caught up in this appalling failure to sustain and be accountable for our life together. We want to come close to those who are in such profound pain, to acknowledge and condemn with sorrow and shame what has happened to them. We come before our God, who alone can lead us together in a path towards healing for all our brothers and sisters who have suffered so grievously as a result of our failures as Church.

Crowning with thorns

Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." [John 19: 1-6]

The words of a survivor: 'I would like to speak about myself as a Catholic. For a Catholic, the most difficult thing is to be able to speak about sexual abuse. But once you have taken courage and start telling, the first thing I thought was "I'm going to tell everything to Holy Mother Church, where they will listen to me, and respect me. The first thing they did was to treat me as a liar, turn their backs and tell me that I and others were enemies of the Church.'¹

Pause for thought: What is your internal response to hearing this? Being attacked as an 'enemy', a trouble-maker. Despised. Rejected. A refusal to see or hear the truth? Wanting to get rid of 'them' saying 'Go away!'

Invitation to pray: Let us pray together, acknowledging before our wounded brothers and sisters, the deep shame that no-one was seeing, no-one was listening, no-one was believing.

R: Lord by your Cross and Resurrection, set us free. You are the Saviour of the world.

¹ Source: Holy See Press Office, Testimonies of Survivors speaking at Rome Summit, 21 February 2019

Jesus is condemned to death and crucified

Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. [John 19:14-18]

The words of a survivor: "False forgiveness, forced forgiveness does not work. Victims need to be believed, respected, cared for and healed. You need to repair what has been done to the victims, be close to them, believe them and accompany them. As physicians of the soul, some have become murderers of the soul, murderers of the faith. What a terrible contradiction. I wonder, what does Jesus think? What does Mary think - when she sees that it is her own shepherds who betray their own little sheep?" ²

Pause for thought: What is your internal response to hearing this? The treatment of Christ? The treatment of the survivor? How do you respond to the survivor's questions, "What does Jesus think?"

Invitation to pray: Let us pray, acknowledging with deep sorrow the sins of many trusted leaders in the Church, the errors, the crimes, the unspeakable suffering inflicted in the past that continue to affect the victims of abuse, ruining their lives. Victims have been turned away or reprimanded or silenced. May we in this present day become more open and committed to overcoming a thirst for power that helps perpetuate the evils of abuse.

R: Lord by your Cross and Resurrection, set us free. You are the Saviour of the world.

Jesus and his mother

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home. [John 19: 25-27]

The words of a survivor: "Jesus had his mother nearby when he faced suffering and death. But my mother, the Church, left me all alone in my time of pain" ³

Pause for thought: What is your internal response to this?

In his final moments of incarnation, fully human and suffering, Jesus looks down from the cross on his mother, and says: "This is your Son. Look, here I am. Your beloved son whom you carried in your womb, gave birth to and nurtured. Your precious child.

As the community of faith, can we as disciples hear the words of Jesus from the cross for ourselves as an invitation to see Him in the victim: this suffering victim of terrible abuse is your child. This dear person who is so much a part of you has suffered so greatly.

Invitation to pray: Let us pray for our children, our brothers and sisters, who have suffered so greatly. We entrust them to the loving heart of Mary who sees and understands their suffering. May we like Mary choose to stand at the foot of the cross, firmly at the side of those who suffer, with the commitment of a loving mother.

R: Lord by your Cross and Resurrection, set us free. You are the Saviour of the world.

Pause for thought: For a moment, now hear Jesus speaking the same words spoken to his mother and to his beloved disciple, within a traditional 'frame'. From this moment, beloved disciples, the Church, you are Mary's children, and Mary, is now the mother of us all, the Body of Christ. Jesus is forming the future community of the Church.

² Source: Holy See Press Office, Testimonies of Survivors speaking at Rome Summit, 21 February 2019

³ The Spiritual Wounds of Sexual Abuse, Hans Zollner SJ Rome Summit Feb 2019, Article download available from <https://www.pbc2019.org/media/articles-and-interviews>

As a community of saved people, we are all 'one' in the Body of Christ. Our suffering is hidden in Christ's and His is ours. We belong to each other, and are given to each other to love and care for one other.

Invitation to pray: As we halt before the suffering of the innocent, let us pray, to grow in the gifts of compassion, seeking with our brothers and sisters, the victims, the justice and reparation they need, and offering them our love and fidelity with no excuse or cowardice.

R: Lord by your Cross and Resurrection, set us free. You are the Saviour of the world.

The death of Jesus

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced." [John 19:28-37]

The words of a Survivor: There's still pain in my family relationships. There's still pain with my siblings. I still carry pain. My parents still carry pain at the dysfunction, the betrayal, the manipulation ...that is what has wounded me the most and what I carry with me today. I am doing well now, because I have found hope and healing by telling my story, by sharing my story with my family, my wife, my children, my extended family, my friends, and because I can do that I feel more comfortable with myself and how I can be myself. And I want to ask the bishops for leadership and vision and courage. ⁴

Pause for Thought: What are we as a community, with survivors very much part of us, what are we thirsting for?

Jesus knew that everything had been completed, 'It is accomplished', and he bowed his head, and gave up his spirit – Jesus breathes out his last, giving his Spirit to the community who for generations to come will follow him.

Invitation to pray: We come to this moment, seeking wisdom, truth, healing. We ask for courage to enter more fully into the new life that flows from the blood and water coming from the side of Christ, pierced on the cross. May the healing, restoration and fulfilment that we long for help us together to accomplish this work.

Closing Prayer

Father of hope and consolation,
be the guardian of all who suffer abuse.
Send healing for their wounds,
deepen our respect for the dignity of every human life,
heal the brokenness of all victims of abuse,
and renew the spirit of all who lament this sin.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.⁵

These resources have been prepared by the Liturgy Office and the Marriage and Family Life Team of the Bishops' Conference with assistance from Wellsprings [<http://www.wellsprings.org.uk>]. Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Other material and layout © 2019

4 Holy See Press Office, Testimonies of Survivors, given at Rome Summit, 21 February 2019

5 *'Let's be Honest' A service of sorrow and acknowledgement of Abuse.* Andrew Browne

