



FOREWORD

Tuesday 5th May is an important day of prayer for survivors of abuse. This year's theme is Standing Together, which is vital as victims of abuse often feel isolated and indeed alienated from the church, whether the abuse arose within the church or in the wider community.

As a victim, then survivor, myself I would urge you to promote and mark that day, or if that proves too difficult then a day nearby, to show that we stand together as a community and a faith. We have included material that may be of assistance to you in putting the mass together, with this year's theme at the heart of the mass.

As you may know, not everyone can move from victim to survivor. I was fortunate, but my journey took a long time and came in two phases, firstly through the power of mass, and secondly through counselling to deal with the pain, feelings of disgust with myself, lack of self worth and what was diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The second phase, for me, would not have been as healing without the power of the first.

I must stress that this is my journey and everyone's is different. Many people cannot transition from victim to survivor because the fear and hurt is all encompassing, or because there is no one there to help them, listen to them or make them feel safe. This is why this mass and how it is structured is so important. It needs to speak to victims and survivors so they know they are not alone, that we stand with them and so they are aware that help and support is available. It also needs to speak to people in general about the support, empathy and care they should be offering, as well as the importance of not being afraid to ask 'are you ok?', 'Can I help?' or just to listen. With this year's theme of Standing Together, it is even more important to emphasise this unity.

My personal journey from a childhood victim of a friend of the family to a healing survivor was a long, painful and sometimes lonely one. I had felt abandoned by God and the church and after further pain, and not feeling acknowledged or supported, I walked away from the church.

Quite a few years later my mother asked me to go to mass with her, and I agreed. I didn't know why as I had refused before but I think now, looking back, that God was calling me back to his flock and somehow, I was ready to listen.

When I walked into church that day, everything seemed so bright, I had never seen it so bright and haven't since. The light and the warmth that emanated was so comforting and





welcoming that I felt at home after years of feeling abandoned. It is so hard to explain that wonderful feeling.

As the mass processed, every song, every reading and the sermon felt like they were talking to me personally and that God was sending me a message. The hymn that resounded the most for me that day and has been a comfort since, is 'You Are Not Alone'. My faith since that day has wavered on occasions but has continued to strengthen and grow.

I cannot emphasise enough the power of prayer and music to heal and comfort, particularly for victims and survivors. It won't always be as dramatic as in my case, and that doesn't matter, it is the power of God's pure love speaking to victims and survivors that is important, and the church being a vessel of that love and support.

I pray you will promote and celebrate this mass, whether on 5th May or a later date, so that people like me can feel the comfort of God and the Church and if they haven't already, to start to heal and transition from victim to survivor and find peace, as well as see demonstrated that the church and the community Stand Together.

By Marie

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