

I found myself glued to the TV. Here was this priest, Father Frank Pavone, speaking about reaching out to post-abortive women and providing them a means of healing through Rachel's Vineyard retreats. This couldn't be possible. Never in the past twenty years had I heard anyone speak like this regarding post-abortive women. I began to sob uncontrollably. Still crying, I e-mailed the Rachel's Vineyard contact in my area. The next several weeks I took the first real steps towards my healing. There were many miracles and consolations along the way and I began to get a sense of just how merciful our Father is. But there was one more obstacle to face before I could make a retreat. My husband still didn't know about my past. All he knew was that I was going on retreat. Not being in the faith the details were not terribly important to him. It would have been very easy for me to go on retreat without him ever knowing the truth. That was my plan until one day, about 3 weeks before the retreat, I was overcome with this sense that I had to tell him the truth that day. I knew it was God guiding me, so while I was fearful, I placed my trust in Him. With great trepidation I spilled out my story. My husband, a man of few words, was consoling in his way and assured me of his love for me. He told me to do whatever I needed to do to get the healing I needed. Everything was now in place. The fear of the retreat was very strong in me, but my desire to find God's mercy was even stronger. I made the retreat, and while it was very, very difficult bringing back painful memories, the barrier I'd built up between God and me was completely removed. I experienced His mercy in such a profound way that words fail me. Miraculously, I discovered shortly after my retreat that the annulment I'd begun 10 years before had been approved. With those barriers gone I fell into the arms of my Heavenly Father in the Sacrament of Confession, vowing to never leave Him or doubt His mercy again. In a matter of a few minutes I was able to shed more than twenty years of bitter pain and sorrow through His mercy and forgiveness. If I'd only known where to find that, I could have dumped years ago the bitterness and pain I'd carried around inside of me for so long. My marriage was also blessed in the Church and I was able to once again receive Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, all on the very same day!

In the movie "The Passion of the Christ" there is a scene where Jesus has fallen and the Blessed Mother runs to Him. He says, "See Mother, I make all things new." That is a very personal line for me because for the longest time I thought that my innocence was gone forever. During those dark times, periodically I would look at my First Communion picture, crying, wondering what happened to that sweet innocent girl. To me she was dead,

never to come back again. But then Jesus took me by the hand and said, "See, I make all things new again." Through my general confession I was returned to my Baptismal innocence.

And He does make all things new again, through His Church here on earth. The Church that I had developed such an aversion towards because I thought the peace I was seeking wasn't within reach through her, was the very same Church that helped me let go of twenty years of sin. It was the same Church that showed me that the love of God is there and within my reach because, like the father of the Prodigal Son, He waits for us, no matter what our sins, His arms outstretched so we may take His hand and let Him lead us home. He waits, not just for me, but for all of us. His mercy knows no limits, and I can attest to that from personal experience. He never stops pursuing us, even when we want to hide away from Him, like Adam and Eve did in the Garden. Since my return to the Church, my life has changed dramatically. I think I'd forgotten what it meant to be truly alive, in the State of Grace, to be free of those horrible burdens, to be truly joyful and one with my God! Being able to receive the Sacraments, making frequent Holy Hours before the Blessed Sacrament, and discovering God through Holy Scripture and the Traditions of the Faith have deepened my love of God and my desire to serve Him. I'm now involved in the pro-life movement from the aspect of helping post-abortive women and men to find their way to healing through God's love and mercy. It's an emotionally difficult ministry, but a joyful one. I have learned that every life is precious, whether it's the child in the womb or the woman hiding in shame from her abortion. God asks us to love and serve each one equally.

Please pray for an end to abortion and for those who suffer from the experience of an abortion, that they may experience God's healing love. If you know of anyone suffering from the pain of abortion, there are many resources available for post-abortion healing. Please feel free to contact me for more information by e-mailing me at mercy@imilesjesu.com. All e-mails are treated with the utmost confidentiality.

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"Out Of The Depths O Lord, Have I Cried Unto You..."

Psalm 130:1

By a Miles Jesu Vinculum member

If you're active in the pro-life movement, you know the statistics. Over 47 million unborn children killed by abortion in the USA since it was legalized in 1972. One in four women have aborted their babies. But what is the story behind the statistics? There is so much in the numbers that it is mind numbing to hear them all.

What would lead a Catholic mother to abort her child? It seems incomprehensible and when I look back it seems almost surreal that I did what I did. I share my story with you, not because I'm proud of what I did, but because it is crucial that people understand the damage abortion does. What are left in the aftermath of an abortion are a dead child, a wounded mother, and numerous others left in the wake of this tragedy.

Mine is one of 47 million stories. It all began at age 23 when I found I was pregnant. Divorced, with a 2-year old child, I had mixed feelings. I was afraid of being unmarried and pregnant. My boyfriend and I had a seemingly good relationship so I felt it would all work out. Upon hearing I was pregnant his first reaction was "You need to take care of it." You'd think I'd said I had a cavity. Take care of it? What on earth did that mean? We were both Catholics, although not active in our faith. Surely, he wasn't suggesting I have an abortion. He pleaded his case saying it was nothing more than a blob of tissue. As a mother, I knew that was ludicrous. He persisted and even grew angry, telling me there was no way he would acknowledge our child. Our relationship would end if I insisted on continuing with this pregnancy. I was devastated. So many times, he had told me he loved me. So many wonderful moments we'd spent together with our shared interests in aviation, good food, wines, travel. Yet here he was telling me to kill my child or we were through. My next step was to see a doctor. Surely, he could help. My relationship with my parents was such that I could never tell them. I was so ashamed of being pregnant I couldn't tell even my closest friend. I felt like I had no one to turn to for help. The doctor's office

confirmed I was pregnant. I began to cry and he spoke harshly saying, "Well, did you think it was the man's responsibility to use protection?" I was stunned and didn't know where that comment came from. His next comment was worse. "You need to have an abortion." This couldn't be happening to me. Wasn't anyone going to tell me I should keep this baby? Wasn't anyone going to tell me that life is precious?

Looking back, I had no support system to tell me not to abort, yet I take full responsibility for my actions. I made the decision, feeling I had no other choice yet deep down knowing I did. No choice...how sadly ironic. The day of the abortion I checked into the hospital alone. My boyfriend was out of town on business and left me alone to deal with it. The doctor reassured me he would see me beforehand. He never did. In fact, I never saw him again after that visit where he told me to abort. God have mercy on him. I lay in bed in this large empty room. Never in my life have I felt so alone as I did then. I was crying, asking myself how did I let it get to this? I was Catholic; Catholic women don't do these things. Mothers don't kill their babies, yet that's what I did. I was knocked out during the procedure but when I came out of the anesthesia I remember how empty and sad and horrible I felt. I took a cab home to my apartment. Once inside I burst into tears, hating myself and wanting so desperately to undo the damage. But it was too late. The void in my womb screamed out at me and I felt so dirty, so vile, so evil for having done this to my child. How could I have let this happen? I would never be the same again, changed forever.

The next 20 years of my life I continued down the slippery slope living a life that was anything but Godlike. I pushed the memory of what I did down into the dark recesses of my mind but the effects were ever-present. Promiscuity and alcohol were used to dull the pain and repress the memory. Periodically I would seek out God trying to find Him, wanting so desperately to be near my Father. I'd amassed quite a collection of Catholic books. Yet, I knew so little of just how merciful our God in Heaven is. I was convinced I had committed the unforgivable sin. Occasionally I felt a consolation from Him as I would attempt to return, but soon the evil of what I'd done would consume me and drive me away from Him. Ten years later, trying to reconcile what I'd done with my desire to heal my soul, I became involved in the pro-life movement, but it was short-lived. The hypocrisy I felt being a post-abortive woman, in secret of course, was too much for me. I also felt the sting of conversations in which a pro-life activist would come down harshly on the post-abortive woman. It just reinforced what I felt about myself. I felt like I had fallen into a hole that I would never be able to climb out of again.

The day came when I met the man who would become my husband. We met when I was in my late thirties, and I was 39 when we married. The thought of having children seemed inconceivable, though I had a strong desire for them. I'd had to have an ovary removed and my husband was told by one of his doctors many years before that he would never be able to father a child again. We married civilly as I was so far from the Church and still awaiting the annulment process from my first marriage. Though a cradle Catholic, he'd fallen away some time ago. I began my new life as a wife, anxious to put my past behind me. My husband had no idea of my past and I had no plans to share it with him. So instead of planning a family, I envisioned a life of travel and adventure, as we both had those inclinations. I was just beginning to plan our trip to Ireland when I discovered I was pregnant. It was amazing! I was on the verge of turning forty and he was already in his late forties. It didn't seem possible. Physically it was an uneventful pregnancy but mentally it was full of anguish. I constantly worried that something would go wrong, that God would have His chance at retribution for what I'd done. There were many sleepless nights as I thought fearfully of the ways God could get back at me through this child. After the birth of our son, we had him baptized Catholic and I made yet another attempt to return to the Church. But this attempt, like all the others in the past twenty years, failed because I was so fearful of going to confession. I was so fearful of telling the priest what I'd done. Throughout the past twenty years the only thing I'd heard with regards to women and abortion was what I read in the Catechism regarding excommunication. Visions of being thrown out of the confessional were worrying my mind. With yet another failed attempt to come home to the Catholic Church behind me, I attempted to live as normal a life as possible. But there was something stirring within, though what, or Who, I didn't know.

Three years later we had another surprise when we discovered I was pregnant again. I had the same recurring fears with that pregnancy. When I gave birth I really desired to return to God but didn't think the Catholic Church was the right option. There was an Episcopalian church near us that I considered taking our son to have him baptized. I'd developed this strong aversion to the Church. It was too harsh, too difficult. God was unattainable through the Catholic Church. Or so I thought. Several months passed since the birth of our son and I felt that I had to make a decision because I couldn't stand that he wasn't baptized. I finally decided to have him baptized Catholic, not because of a strong conversion of heart but more out of

convenience. My parish required parents to attend a baptism class prior to the baptism and so I reluctantly signed up. My husband was unable to attend due to his job. The class was normally taught by a layperson, but because of illness, our new parochial vicar, Father John, ordained only 3 months before, taught the class. A few weeks before, I had been at a Mass he celebrated and his reverence throughout the Mass touched something within me. How I longed for what he had. Towards the end of class Father John looked at me and said he had a special message for me from God. I nearly had heart failure. Afterwards, we spoke and he mentioned how I came across as being very Catholic and would I be interested in signing up for a ministry like teaching religious education. Mumbling something about being too busy, I left the classroom, fighting back tears. "Oh dear God", I begged from deep within, "please, I want to come home". Instead of leaving the church, I went to the sanctuary where a statue of the Blessed Mother was. Kneeling before her I pleaded for her intercession. "Oh Mother, I want to come home but I don't know how", I prayed. Tearfully, I left, confused and unsure of what was happening.

That night was the first on my road back home to the Church. It would take many months, but looking back I can see the hand of God gently guiding me. One of the things I marvel at is how God reaches out to us. For, even though I'd decided I was going to try to come back, I had so many stumbling blocks to overcome. It wasn't just the abortion, but I was also in a marriage that was not sacramental. It was with deep sadness that I realized I wouldn't be in full communion with the Church. And yet, I still wanted to come home. It was like the Prodigal Son who was willing to come home to be a servant in his father's house, with all its limitations. But my dear Heavenly Father had greater plans. First, He revealed to me a prayer that was significant for sinners, especially post-abortive women, though I didn't know it at the time. All I knew was for the next several weeks I kept coming across a prayer accompanied with an image of Christ with red and white rays streaming from His heart. There was nothing familiar about this image when I first saw it. However, I kept coming across it, in books, posters in the Catholic store, holy cards at church, on TV even. Finally, I took the not so subtle hint and began to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. At first I didn't understand it, but over time I began to understand. Once I began to pray that, the next big milestone was watching the March for Life on EWTN. That had been an event I didn't pay too much attention to because of the painful memories. And yet,