

The Grace of Shame

Shame is not necessarily a bad thing. It can be signal of a wrong doing and a motivating factor for those impacted by abortion to seek help.

Celebrating the Feast of St. Ignatius with fellow Jesuits, Pope Francis said, “*We look at the wisdom of Christ and our ignorance, at his omnipotence and our weakness, at his justice and our inequity and at his goodness and our badness ... We ask for the grace of shame, the shame that comes from a continuous conversation of mercy with him, the shame that makes us blush before Jesus Christ.*”

The remedy for shame is *humility*. An admittance of what we have heard over and over in the scriptures. A deep acknowledgment that without God, we are all capable of any sin and that it is Him and His love and mercy alone that brings us out of the darkness, that of ourselves we are nothing, but through Him all good things come.

If we truly believe this, we would see the “grace” of shame for we would know that each and every one of us, no matter what the sin, is saved only through the grace of God. Our sinfulness would not surprise us, but instead humble us knowing our need for dependence on Him. Then, the brilliance of the light of His glory will surely outshine this shame leaving us gazing at the goodness of the Lord instead of ourselves.



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Shame on You!

If any of us have had those words spoken to us as a child; most likely we would have recoiled in horror. Our eyes downcast in a gesture of hiding, we were certain that the entire world could see the act we did to bring on such a statement and that shame found its permanent dwelling in neon lights above our head. It would be a while before we ventured out before our accuser, hoping the lights had burnt out, or at least dimmed so as not to draw attention to ourselves. We would watch their reaction to see, if, in fact, the shame was lifted and we could go on with our lives or if we needed to continue, half-alive for a while longer.

Many women and men who are post abortive live every day of their lives with shame. They can never get away from the accuser and the “neon” light never dims because the accuser and accused are one and the same... themselves.

Hidden shame is projected on all of their relationships, causing them to live in the fear that they will be “found out” and that everyone will see the neon light shining down on them.



Post abortive women and men draw a connection to this shame even when there is no connection to be made.

One woman I know expressed this in a recent trip to a cemetery that has a tomb for the unborn. “I wanted to pray before the tomb but, it is right near the cemetery office. I just could not bring myself to let anyone see me there.” When I asked her if she thought everyone who prayed before that tomb was post abortive, that in fact, many people who are not probably stopped to say a prayer, she expressed that she had never thought of that. For her, it was a sure admittance of the death of her unborn child, the neon light pointing to her shame.

*“We ask for the grace of shame,
the shame that comes from a
continuous conversation of mercy
with him, the shame that makes
us blush before Jesus Christ,”*

Pope Francis, (Feast of St Ignatius 2013)



Snuffing Out the Light

Until the post abortive person opens up and shares their feelings with an appropriate person, whether a mental health professional, ministry, or trained lay person, there is little chance of freedom from the bondage of shame they are living with.

They need to “face it honestly” as Pope John Paul II reminds us in *“The Gospel of Life.”*

“The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so give yourself over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you His forgiveness and peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child who is now living in the Lord.”

They need to understand what has happened to them and the impact it has had on their thinking and actions. They need to learn that most always; it is they who are shining the neon light on themselves.