



## **Good Friday for Survivors of Abuse**

**by T. Pitt Green**

**Spanish translation by Adlin deCardi**

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Good Friday can be a difficult day for men and women who have been sexually abused, especially when their abusers were priests or others who have authority in the Church. Yet, Good Friday is also a day when all Catholics, including those who have been abused, are drawn together as children of God. It is a good time to be a humble, grateful family.

Good Friday is a day when all Catholics share a sense of unworthiness. We watch our Savior suffer great agony to save us. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by His love. Sometimes it is like we are each a little cup, overflowing with the vision of His great love.

Seeing Jesus suffer for love of us, we draw close to our own suffering. We know He suffers with our sins. We know He suffers with the sins of the world. But we also know He is carrying all our suffering, our illnesses, our trials, and our losses. He carries our painful memories. There is nothing on our hearts Jesus does not carry to Calvary so we may live.

On Good Friday, Jesus lifts up all our guilt on Calvary. Our pain and sorrow is there. Our sadness and loss are there. Our guilt is all there on His dear shoulders. Yet, He carries another guilt some of us carry in secret. This is the guilt victims of sexual abuse feel. We victims often feel at fault. For victims of someone with authority in the Church, it can as if someone who looks very holy must be closer to God than we are. We decide we are the guilty one. We too often feel guilty. Some of us were even told it was our fault. And we feel shame for what has happened in secret. We feel guilty for keeping secrets about that happened. This is a very terrible guilt. It is the guilt only the innocent feel. We are innocent of what happened to us. Yet, we still carry a burden of guilt.

Our Beloved Jesus understands this kind of guilt, too. He is God. He is without any sin at all. Yet, He is carrying the sins of all. We, who suffered abuse by adults with authority, are carrying their sin and their guilt in our hearts when we hang our heads in shame or guilt. We hide their sins, not our own. What

happened was not our fault. We were innocent then. We are innocent now. Jesus keeps carrying that burden with us, waiting patiently until His healing Love can break through our sorrow.

This Good Friday is a chance for victims who carry the burden of others' sins to be healed by Jesus in a special way. He lifts the cross of another's evil off our shoulders. He reminds us we were always innocent. He assures us we are innocent. He wants to set us from the sins of others.

This Good Friday let's take a special look at the Cross Jesus carries. It is all our sins, and our shortcomings, and things we failed to do. His Cross is the injustice and evil in our world. But His Cross also holds the wounds that hurt our hearts. Our hearts carry harm from others like lashes, too. Jesus knows. His walk to Calvary shows us how far He will go to set us free from the pain of childhood trauma. He is waiting to hear a child's voice laughing and singing in our hearts. Jesus knows that is a sound that will make Our Father smile.

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**Teresa Hartnett** founded and works with Spirit Fire, which promotes collaboration with survivors in Christ-centered restorative justice for adults, families and faith communities wounded by child abuse. Spirit Fire offers spiritual mediation, pastoral training and survivor partnerships to inspire and energize Catholic and all other Christian ministries. For our resources and services, see [SpiritFire.Live](http://SpiritFire.Live) today.