

Our Sunday Visitor



“My Conversion Story”

Teresa Pitt Green, Pseudonym

My conversion was catalyzed by a Franciscan priest who refused to absolve a sin I confessed. “It’s not your sin to confess,” he insisted, clearing the way, over thirty years ago for my return to Catholicism. He was the first Christian witness to my innocence as a victim of child abuse by clergy.

Like most victims, my love for God was steadfast. I believed in God’s sovereign and wondrous identity, but that made His apparent abandonment of me to abusers even worse. What could I conclude except that I was worthless to Him? My recovery would require me to reject all such lies planted by abusers in my psyche and to claim, instead, my dignity as a child of God.

The sacraments, however, were erratically available. I could partake only when the disturbing emotions triggered by Catholic settings were minimal. Other times, I would resort to sitting in an idling car, following in the missal as Mass was offered inside a church just a few feet away.

My return to the faith of my childhood is joyful only to me, and God. But, for you it shows how many survivors venture home—in outreach to a priest. And, that is why I work in my diocese to help priests (along with sisters and others) learn practical ways to help survivors integrate their faith into the arduous process of recovery. Despite popular misconceptions, priests are not just the opposite of men in Roman collars who harmed me. Priests are the antidote.

Originally published as part of a series on conversions in Our Sunday Visitor. Copyright © Teresa Hartnett (Teresa Pitt Green, pseudonym). For conditions on which this article may be reprinted and distributed for free, please see SpiritFire.Live/reprints. Individual copies for survivors of abuse, their family members, priests, sisters, deacons and other ministries may be made for free provided they are not resold.

Teresa Hartnett founded and works with Spirit Fire, which promotes 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 today.