



INCONTRO
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PREPARED TEXT

WORKING TRANSLATION

Good evening. I wanted to tell you about when I was a child. But there's no point, because when I was 11 years old, a priest from my parish destroyed my life. Since then I, who loved coloring books and doing somersaults on the grass, have not existed.

Instead, engraved in my eyes, ears, nose, body and soul, are all the times he immobilized me, the child, with superhuman strength: I desensitized myself, I held my breath, I came out of my body, I searched desperately for a window to look out of, waiting for it all to end. I thought: "If I don't move, maybe I won't feel anything; if I don't breathe, maybe I could die".

When it did end, I would take back what was my wounded and humiliated body, and I would leave, even believing I had imagined it all. But how could I, a child, understand what had happened? I thought: "It must have been my fault!" or "Maybe I deserved this bad thing?"

These thoughts are the worst wounds that the abuse, and the abuser, insinuates into your heart, more than the wounds that lacerate your body. I felt I wasn't worth anything anymore. I felt I didn't even exist. I just wanted to die: I tried to... but I couldn't.

The abuse went on for 5 years. No one noticed.

While I did not speak, my body did: eating disorders, various periods in hospital: everything screamed that I was sick. While I, completely alone, kept my pain to

myself. They thought I was anxious about school where, suddenly, I was performing really badly.

Then, the first time I fell in love... My heart beating with emotion and struggling against the same heart that palpitated remembering the horror it had experienced; gestures of tenderness against acts of force: impossible comparisons. Awareness becomes an unbearable reality! So as not to feel the pain, the disgust, the confusion, the fear, the shame, the powerlessness, the impotence, my mind removed the facts as they happened, it numbed my body by putting emotional distance between everything I was living. And this provoked enormous damage.

When I was 26 I gave birth for the first time. Flashbacks and images brought everything back to me. My labour was interrupted, my child was in danger; breastfeeding was impossible because of the terrible memories that emerged. I thought I had gone mad. So I confided in my husband, a confidence that was used against me during our separation, when, citing the abuse I had suffered, he asked that I be denied parental authority because I was an unworthy mother. What followed was the patient listening of a dear friend, and the courage to write a letter to that priest, which concluded with the promise never again to concede to him the power of my silence.

From then, until today, I continue to go through a very difficult process of re-elaboration that has no shortcuts, that requires enormous perseverance in rebuilding my identity, dignity and faith. It is a journey undertaken mostly alone, and with the help of a specialist, if possible. Abuse causes immediate damage, but not only that: what is most difficult is dealing daily with that experience that attacks you, and presents itself in the most unexpected moments. You have to live with it...forever! All you can do, if you can, is learn how to hurt yourself less.

Inside you, there are endless questions you will never be able to answer, because abuse makes no sense!

"Why me?" I used to ask, and not because I would have preferred it to happen to someone else, because what I suffered would be too much for anyone else! Or: "Where were you, God?"... How I cried over this question! I no longer trusted Man and God, in the good Father who protects the small and the weak. As a little girl, I was certain nothing bad could come from a man who had the "odor" of God! How could the same hands, that had dared touch me like that, offer blessing and the Eucharist? He was an adult and I was a child. He had taken advantage of his power as well as his position: a true abuse of faith!

And last but not least: "How was I to overcome my anger and not leave the Church after such an experience, especially in the face of such terrible incoherence between what my abuser preached and what he did? And what about those who, before these crimes, belittled, hid, silenced, or worse still, failed to defend the little ones, evil-mindedly limiting themselves to moving priests so they could cause harm somewhere else? In the face of this, we innocent victims feel the pain that killed us, even more intensely: this too is an abuse of our human dignity, of our conscience, as well as of our faith!

We victims, if we can find the strength to speak out or expose, must find the courage to do so, knowing that we risk not being believed, or seeing our abuser getting away with a small canonical penalty. This cannot and must not be the case anymore!

It took me 40 years to find the strength to speak out. I wanted to break the silence that nourishes every form of abuse; I wanted to start again from an act of truth, acknowledging that this act also offers an opportunity to the person who abused me. I experienced the process of speaking out at a very high emotional cost: talking to six very sensitive people, but all of them men, and all of them priests, was hard. I think that the presence of a woman is a necessary and indispensable gesture in order to welcome, listen, and accompany, us victims.

Being believed, and knowing him sentenced, gave me a reality check: that part of me that always hoped the abuse never really happened, had to admit defeat, but at

the same time, it received a caress: now I know I am something else. I am not just the abuse I suffered, and the scars I carry.

The Church can be proud of being able to proceed despite the statute of limitations (a right that is denied by the Italian justice system), but not of the fact of recognizing as a mitigating factor, for the abuser, the length of time between the offense and the accusation (as in my case). Victim are not guilty of their silence! The trauma and damage they suffer are all the greater the longer the period of silence: the victim spends that time between fear, shame, denial, and a sense of helplessness. Wounds can never be prescribed. On the contrary!

Today I am here, and together with me are all the abused boys and girls, all the women and men, trying to be reborn from their wounds. But, above all, there are also those who tried and did not make it. It is from here, with them in our hearts, that we must start again, together.