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Holy anger and what you can do about it

Nicole Sotelo | Apr. 15, 2010

When Jesus saw abuse happening, he did not shrink from challenging even the most powerful institutions; he was outraged and then got strategic. He had what I call "holy anger."

When Jesus saw the commercial desecration occurring in the temple, he "overturned tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves." (Mark 11:15) He didn't resort to physical violence, but rather used his righteous anger to stop the mechanisms that were defiling the sacred structure.

Would that we would do the same to the hierarchical church systems that are responsible for the physical and sexual abuse of thousands of children globally.

There is growing outrage about the sexual abuse crisis evident among Catholics today -- from Maureen Dowd's scathing columns in *The New York Times* to the receptionist at my doctor's office. Two-thirds of people in the United States now feel that the Vatican is not doing enough to deal with the sexual abuse crisis, according to an ABC News poll.

People are angry and our anger is justified. But now what?

Anger's transformation into agency has been a key precept in faith traditions across the globe. Martin Luther wrote, "I never work better than when I am inspired by anger; for when I am angry, I can write, pray, and preach well, for then my whole temperament is quickened, my understanding sharpened, and all mundane vexations and temptations depart."

We should be outraged at anything that destroys the holy temple of the body and, like Jesus, do what we can to overturn the structures that permit the sexual abuse crisis to continue. Thich Nhat Hanh said, "When someone stands up to violence, a force for change is released."

Thousands of survivors have already stood up to the violence they experienced. Here are four simple things you can do to transform your anger and be a force for change, as well.

1. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or comment on an online news story. The more comments or letters a news outlet receives, the more editors take notice and will continue to report on the sexual abuse crisis. It is telling that the Vatican has gone on the offensive against *The New York Times* and other media outlets, a clear recognition of the power of the Fourth Estate.

2. Ask your bishop to publicly release the names of all credibly accused perpetrators in your diocese. Many dioceses still do not participate in full disclosure. Secrecy is what led us into this crisis and it is only truth that will lead us out.

3. Make a donation to SNAP, the Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests, at www.snapnetwork.org [1]. It takes money to keep the phone lines open and the staff paid.

4. Pray. Because prayer incites action. An African proverb says, "When you pray, move your feet." The poet Marge Piercy says "What we want to change we curse and then/pick up a tool. Bless whatever you can/with eyes and hands and tongue. If you/can't bless it, get ready to make it new." This is holy anger. We can curse that which needs changing if we then pick up a tool, or a phone, or a pen. The children of our faith family depend on it. It is time to make what is broken new. If you are a survivor of abuse by a religious leader, contact SNAP, the Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests, at 877.762.7432.

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[1] http://www.snapnetwork.org/