THE DAILY BREAD

The Magnificat of the Beloved



Belonging to the Church, Wounds and All

A FORMATION BOOK BY

Kendall Peterson

The Everyday Apostle

THE DAILY BREAD

Magnificat of the Beloved

Belonging to the Church

Staying, Honestly, Wounds and All

✦ ✦ ✦

A Daily Bread Formation Book

The Everyday Apostle

INTRODUCTION

The Church You Love and the Church That Has Hurt You

Many Catholic women have a complicated relationship with the Church. She is, on one hand, the community that formed them, that gave them Christ, the sacraments, and the faith, that has sustained them through the hardest seasons of their lives, a true mother. And she is, on the other hand, an institution whose members, sometimes its leaders, have at times disappointed, failed, or even wounded them, through scandal, through hardness, through the ordinary sins of the people who make her up, and some have felt the Church has failed women in particular. Both of these experiences are real, and both deserve an honest response. A woman should not have to choose between pretending the wounds do not exist and walking away from the Church she loves.

This book is about belonging to the Church honestly, wounds and all. It will offer an honest starting point that holds both the love and the hurt; it will take seriously the reality that the Church, through her members, has sometimes wounded; it will draw the crucial distinction between the sins of members and the holiness of the Church herself; it will show that a woman can be honest about the Church's failings without leaving her; it will examine the temptation the wound creates to walk away, and why that costs more than it seems; it will show how to bring the hurt to Christ, who is found within His wounded Church; and it will invite a woman to belong with her whole heart, a mature and eyes-open belonging. The aim is not to explain away the wounds but to help a woman stay, honestly and wholeheartedly, in the Church that is both wounded by her members and holy in Christ.

We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. — 2 Corinthians 4:7

The Scripture reveals that the treasure of God is carried in fragile, earthen vessels, so that the surpassing power is clearly God's and not the vessels', and this is true of the Church, a divine treasure carried by weak and sinful human beings. This book will help a woman hold that truth: facing the Church honestly; taking her wounds seriously; distinguishing the sins of members from the Church's holiness; staying honest without leaving; resisting the temptation to walk away; bringing her hurt to Christ; and belonging with her whole heart. A woman's relationship with the Church may be complicated by real wounds. This book will help her belong to the Church honestly, wounds and all, holding both the love and the hurt without letting the hurt drive her away.

CHAPTER ONE

An Honest Starting Point

Holding Both the Love and the Hurt

The place to begin is honesty, with a starting point that holds both a woman's love for the Church and her real hurt, refusing both the denial that pretends there are no wounds and the bitterness that sees only them. Understanding that honesty about both the love and the hurt is the right starting point frees a woman to approach her relationship with the Church truthfully rather than through pretense or despair.

Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. — Psalm 62:8

Honesty Is Allowed

A woman is allowed to be honest about her experience of the Church, including her hurts and disappointments, for faith does not require pretending that wounds do not exist or that everything in the Church is fine. Some women feel they must pretend, that a faithful Catholic should never admit disappointment or hurt regarding the Church, that honesty about her failings is disloyal, but this is not so, for honesty is allowed, and God, to whom a woman can pour out her heart, does not ask her to pretend, so that she can acknowledge her real experience of the Church, including its wounds, without betraying her faith. This means a woman need not suppress or deny her hurt to be faithful, for honesty about her experience of the Church is permitted and even healthy, so that she can face the truth of both her love and her wounds rather than hiding them behind a forced pretense. The woman who knows honesty is allowed can face her real experience of the Church truthfully, without pretending the wounds away. Honesty is allowed, for faith does not require a woman to pretend that wounds do not exist, so that she can acknowledge her real experience of the Church, including its hurts, without betraying her faith.

Both Things Are True

For many women, both things are true at once, that the Church has formed and sustained them and that she has, through her members, sometimes wounded them, and an honest starting point holds both without canceling either. A woman's relationship with the Church often contains both love and hurt together, for the same Church that gave her Christ and the sacraments and sustained her through hard seasons has also, through the failings of her members, sometimes disappointed or wounded her, so that both things are

true at once, and an honest account holds them together rather than denying one for the sake of the other. This means a woman need not resolve her relationship with the Church into pure love or pure grievance, for both the good and the hurt are real, so that she can hold both truths honestly, loving the Church that formed her while acknowledging the wounds she has suffered. The woman who sees that both things are true holds her love and her hurt together, honest about the whole of her experience. Both things are true for many women, that the Church has formed and sustained them and that she has sometimes wounded them, so that an honest starting point holds both without canceling either.

Neither Denial Nor Bitterness

The honest path avoids two errors, the denial that pretends there are no wounds and the bitterness that sees only them, holding instead to the whole truth of a complicated but real belonging. There are two ways to go wrong in facing the Church, by denial, pretending there are no real wounds and suppressing honest hurt, or by bitterness, letting the wounds dominate until a woman sees only the Church's failings and loses sight of her as the Body of Christ, so that the honest path avoids both, neither denying the hurt nor being consumed by it, holding the whole truth. This means a woman seeks a path between denial and bitterness, acknowledging the wounds honestly while not letting them poison her whole relationship with the Church, so that she holds both the hurt and the love in a truthful and balanced belonging. The woman who holds to neither denial nor bitterness faces the Church with the whole truth, honest about the wounds without being consumed by them. Neither denial nor bitterness is the honest path, avoiding both the pretense that there are no wounds and the bitterness that sees only them, so that a woman holds the whole truth of a complicated but real belonging.

CHAPTER TWO

When the Church Has Wounded You

Taking the Hurt Seriously

The wounds a woman has suffered within the Church are real and deserve to be taken seriously, not minimized or explained away, for the failings and sins of the Church's members have truly hurt people, and honesty requires acknowledging that hurt. Understanding that the Church's wounds are real and deserve serious acknowledgment, rather than being minimized, honors a woman's genuine hurt and is the necessary ground for any honest belonging.

It is not an enemy who taunts me, but you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. — Psalm 55:12-13

Real Wounds, Not Imagined

The hurts a woman has suffered within the Church are often real and serious, not imagined or exaggerated, for the members of the Church, including her leaders, have sometimes sinned gravely and caused genuine harm. The wounds many have suffered within the Church are real, for the people who make up the Church, clergy and laity alike, are sinners, and their sins have sometimes caused genuine harm, through scandal, through cruelty or hardness, through failures of care, through the ordinary wounds people inflict on one another, so that a woman's hurt is often real and serious and not merely imagined or oversensitive. This means a woman's wounds within the Church deserve to be acknowledged as real, not dismissed or explained away, for genuine harm has genuinely been done, so that honesty requires taking the hurt seriously rather than minimizing it. The woman who knows her wounds are real, not imagined, can acknowledge her genuine hurt honestly rather than being told to dismiss it. Real wounds, not imagined, are what many have suffered within the Church, for her members have sometimes sinned gravely and caused genuine harm, so that a woman's hurt deserves to be taken seriously rather than minimized.

The Pain of Being Hurt by Your Own

There is a particular pain in being wounded within the Church, by those who should have been trustworthy, for a hurt from one's own household of faith cuts more deeply than a wound from an enemy. The Scripture captures a particular grief, that it is not an enemy who wounds but a companion, a familiar friend, and this is the special pain of being hurt within the Church, for a wound inflicted by those who should have been trustworthy, in the household of faith, by representatives of the God a woman loves, cuts more deeply than any wound from an outsider or enemy. This means a woman's hurt within the Church carries a particular sting, the betrayal of being wounded by her own, in the place that should have been safe, so that her pain is understandably deep, deserving of compassion rather than dismissal, a wound from within the family of faith. The woman who understands the pain of being hurt by her own recognizes the particular depth of a wound suffered within the Church, deserving of compassion. The pain of being hurt by your own is particular and deep, for a wound inflicted within the household of faith, by those who should have been trustworthy, cuts more deeply than a wound from an enemy.

God Does Not Dismiss Your Hurt

God does not minimize or dismiss a woman's hurt but takes it seriously, grieving the wrongs done in His Church and welcoming her to pour out her pain to Him, so that she can bring her wounds honestly to a God who cares. A woman might fear that God sides against her hurt, that to acknowledge wounds within the Church is to complain against God, but the opposite is true, for God does not dismiss her pain but takes it seriously, grieving the sins committed in His Church and against His people, welcoming her to pour out her heart to Him, so that she can bring her wounds to a God who cares and does not minimize them. This means a woman can bring her hurt within the Church to God without fear of His rebuke, for He takes her pain seriously, grieves the wrongs done, and receives her honest lament, so that she is not alone with her wound but held by a God who cares about it. The woman who knows God does not dismiss her hurt brings her wounds to Him honestly, held by a God who takes her pain seriously. God does not dismiss your hurt but takes it seriously, grieving the wrongs done in His Church and welcoming a woman to pour out her pain to Him, so that she can bring her wounds honestly to a God who cares.

CHAPTER THREE

Members' Sins, Not the Church's Holiness

The Treasure and the Earthen Vessels

A crucial distinction makes honest belonging possible, the distinction between the sins of the Church's members and the holiness of the Church herself, for the failures of the people in the Church are not the Church as Christ made her. Understanding that the sins of members are not the Church's own holiness, that the treasure is carried in flawed earthen vessels, allows a woman to acknowledge the wounds without losing the Church.

Let both grow together until the harvest. — Matthew 13:30

The Church Herself and Her Members

There is a distinction between the Church herself, the holy Body of Christ, and her members, who are sinners, so that the sins of the people in the Church are not the holiness of the Church as Christ made her. The Church must be understood on two levels, for in her deepest reality she is the Body of Christ, holy and made so by Him, while her members, the actual people who belong to her, are sinners who fail and sin, so that there is a distinction between the Church herself, holy in Christ, and her members, who do not always reflect that holiness, and the sins of the members are not the holiness of the Church. This means a woman can distinguish the wounds caused by the Church's

members from the Church herself, recognizing that the sins of Catholics, even her leaders, are their own failures and not the holiness of the Body of Christ, so that the Church herself is not discredited by her members' sins. The woman who distinguishes the Church herself from her members sees that the sins of people in the Church are not the Church as Christ made her. The Church herself and her members must be distinguished, for the Church in her deepest reality is the holy Body of Christ while her members are sinners, so that the sins of the people are not the holiness of the Church as Christ made her.

Treasure in Earthen Vessels

The Church carries a divine treasure in weak and flawed human vessels, so that the failings of those vessels do not diminish the treasure they carry, the grace and truth of Christ Himself. The Scripture speaks of a treasure carried in jars of clay, and this is the Church, a divine treasure, the grace, truth, and sacraments of Christ, carried by weak and sinful human beings, so that the vessels are flawed and fragile while the treasure they carry is divine and perfect, and the weakness of the vessels does not diminish the treasure, which belongs to God and not to them. This means a woman can recognize that the Church carries the treasure of Christ in flawed human vessels, so that the failings of those vessels, real as they are, do not corrupt the treasure of grace and truth the Church holds, which remains pure despite the weakness of those who carry it. The woman who understands the treasure in earthen vessels sees that the Church's flawed human members do not diminish the divine treasure she carries. Treasure in earthen vessels describes the Church, a divine treasure of grace and truth carried by weak and sinful human beings, so that the failings of the vessels do not diminish the treasure they carry.

Wheat and Weeds Together

The Church in this life holds saints and sinners together, wheat and weeds growing in the same field until the harvest, so that a woman should expect to find sin within the Church without concluding that the Church is a fraud. Jesus taught that the Church in this world is like a field where wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest, when they will be separated, so that the Church contains both saints and sinners, good and bad together, and a woman should expect to find sin and failure within her, not as a sign that the Church is false but as the condition Christ foretold, the mixed field awaiting the final harvest. This means a woman need not be scandalized out of the Church by the presence of sin within her, for Christ Himself said the wheat and weeds would grow together until the end, so that finding sinners in the Church, even grave ones, does not disprove her but confirms what Christ said, the mixed field she is in this life. The woman who understands wheat and weeds together expects sin within the Church without concluding she is a

fraud, knowing Christ foretold the mixed field. Wheat and weeds together describe the Church in this life, saints and sinners growing in the same field until the harvest, so that a woman should expect to find sin within the Church without concluding that the Church is false.

CHAPTER FOUR

Honest Without Leaving

Faithful Critique Is Not Abandonment

A woman can be honest about the Church's failings, even critical of real wrongs, without leaving her, for there is a difference between faithful critique offered in love from within and the abandonment that walks away. Understanding that a woman can be honest and even critical about the Church while remaining faithfully within her distinguishes loving honesty from abandonment and frees her to stay without pretending.

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. — Ephesians 4:15

You Can Name What Is Wrong

A woman is free to name what is genuinely wrong in the Church, to acknowledge real failings and even to work for their correction, for honest truth-telling in love is not disloyalty but a service to the Body. Faithfulness to the Church does not require silence about her real failings, for a woman can name what is genuinely wrong, acknowledge the sins and failures of her members, desire and work for their correction, and speak the truth in love, so that honest truth-telling about real wrongs is not disloyalty to the Church but a service to her, a love that wants her members to be better. This means a woman need not choose between loyalty and honesty, for she can be loyal to the Church and still name what is wrong within her, speaking the truth in love for the good of the Body, so that her honesty is a form of love and not a betrayal. The woman who knows she can name what is wrong speaks the truth in love about the Church's failings, loyal and honest at once. You can name what is wrong, for a woman is free to acknowledge the Church's real failings and work for their correction, so that honest truth-telling in love is a service to the Body and not disloyalty.

Critique From Within, in Love

The right way to address the Church's failings is from within and in love, as a member who belongs and desires the good of the Body, rather than from outside as one who has abandoned her. There is a crucial difference in how a woman addresses the Church's failings, for critique offered from within, by a faithful member who loves the Church and wants her good, is constructive and rooted in love, while criticism from one who has abandoned the Church is often corrosive, rooted in grievance rather than love, so that the faithful way is to address the wrongs from within and in love, as one who belongs and desires the Body's good. This means a woman addresses the Church's failings best not by walking away and attacking from outside but by remaining within and speaking in love, as a member who wants the Church to be holy, so that her critique serves the Body rather than tearing it down. The woman who offers critique from within, in love, addresses the Church's failings as a faithful member who wants her good, not as an abandoner. Critique from within, in love, is the faithful way to address the Church's failings, offered by a member who belongs and desires the good of the Body, rather than corrosive criticism from one who has abandoned her.

Staying Is Not Approving

To remain in the Church is not to approve of her members' sins, for a woman can stay faithfully while grieving and opposing what is wrong, so that staying and disapproving are not in conflict. Some imagine that to remain in the Church is to condone whatever is wrong in her, but this is false, for a woman can stay faithfully while grieving the sins committed, opposing what is wrong, and longing for reform, so that staying in the Church is not approving of her members' failings but belonging to the Body of Christ while honestly disapproving of the sins within it. This means a woman need not leave the Church to register her disapproval of what is wrong, for she can remain faithfully while grieving and opposing the sins, so that her staying is not a complicity in the wrongs but a belonging to Christ's Body that is compatible with honest disapproval. The woman who understands that staying is not approving remains in the Church faithfully while grieving and opposing what is wrong, belonging without condoning. Staying is not approving, for a woman can remain faithfully in the Church while grieving and opposing her members' sins, so that staying and disapproving of what is wrong are not in conflict.

CHAPTER FIVE

Where the Wound Tempts You to Go

The Cost of Walking Away

The wound a woman has suffered within the Church creates a real temptation to walk away, to a private faith or away from faith altogether, but this path costs more than it seems, for leaving the Church means leaving behind what only she holds. Understanding where the wound tempts a woman to go, and the true cost of walking away, helps her weigh the temptation honestly rather than acting on the hurt alone.

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. — John 6:68

The Temptation to Leave

A real wound within the Church naturally tempts a woman to leave, whether to a private faith without the Church or away from faith altogether, as a way of escaping the source of her pain. When a woman has been wounded within the Church, there arises a natural temptation to leave, to withdraw from the institution that hurt her, perhaps to a private, churchless faith, perhaps away from the faith entirely, as a way of protecting herself from further pain and separating from the source of her wound, so that the temptation to leave is a real and understandable response to genuine hurt. This means a woman should recognize the temptation to leave for what it is, a response to real pain, so that she can face it honestly rather than being swept along by it, understanding that the impulse to walk away flows from her wound and deserves to be weighed rather than simply obeyed. The woman who recognizes the temptation to leave can weigh it honestly, seeing it as a response to her wound rather than a clear conclusion. The temptation to leave arises naturally from a wound within the Church, drawing a woman toward a private faith or away from faith, so that she should recognize it as a response to pain to be weighed rather than simply obeyed.

What Leaving Would Cost

Walking away from the Church costs more than it seems, for it means leaving behind the Eucharist, the sacraments, the fullness of the faith, and the Body of Christ, the very treasures the wound did not touch. The temptation to leave often hides the true cost, for to walk away from the Church is to leave behind not merely the institution that wounded her but the Eucharist, the sacraments, the fullness of truth, the communion of the Body of Christ, all the treasures the Church holds, which the wound did not touch and which a woman would lose by leaving, so that walking away costs far more than it first appears. This means a woman should weigh the full cost of leaving, recognizing that to walk away is to forfeit the treasures of grace and truth the Church holds, the very things she needs most, so that the wound, real as it is, does not warrant the loss that leaving would bring. The woman who counts what leaving would cost sees that walking away forfeits the treasures of the Church that her wound never touched. What leaving would cost is more

than it seems, for walking away from the Church means forfeiting the Eucharist, the sacraments, the fullness of faith, and the Body of Christ, the treasures the wound did not touch.

The Church Still Holds Christ

The decisive reason not to leave is that the Church still holds Christ, who has the words of eternal life, so that whatever the wounds of her members, there is nowhere else to go for what He alone gives through her. When many were tempted to leave Jesus over a hard teaching, Peter answered, Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life, and this is the decisive reason a woman does not leave the Church despite her wounds, for the Church still holds Christ, still gives His Body and Blood, still teaches His truth, so that there is nowhere else to go for what He alone provides through her, whatever the failings of her members. This means a woman stays not because the Church's members are faultless but because the Church holds Christ, who has the words of eternal life, so that the wound of her members cannot outweigh the treasure of Christ she still finds only in the Church. The woman who knows the Church still holds Christ stays despite her wounds, finding nowhere else to go for what He alone gives through His Body. The Church still holds Christ, who has the words of eternal life, so that whatever the wounds of her members, there is nowhere else to go for what He alone gives through her, the decisive reason not to leave.

CHAPTER SIX

Bringing the Wound to Christ

Healing Within the Wounded Church

The way through a wound suffered within the Church is not to flee her but to bring the hurt to Christ, who is found within His wounded Church and who heals the brokenhearted, so that healing comes from the very Lord the Church still holds. Understanding how to bring the wound to Christ, finding healing within the Church rather than by leaving her, shows a woman the path from hurt to healing without abandoning the Body of Christ.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. — Psalm 147:3

Christ the Healer

Christ is the healer of the brokenhearted, who binds up wounds, so that a woman wounded within the Church can bring her hurt to the Lord who heals, finding in Him the healing her wound needs. The Scripture reveals Christ as the one who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds, so that a woman wounded within the Church has, in Christ, a healer for her hurt, one who does not ignore or minimize her pain but heals it, binding up the wounds she has suffered, so that her healing is found in the Lord who draws near to the brokenhearted. This means a woman need not carry her wound unhealed or flee the Church to escape it, for Christ the healer can bind up her hurt, so that she brings her wound to the Lord who heals the brokenhearted and finds in Him the healing her pain requires. The woman who brings her wound to Christ the healer finds in Him the binding up of her hurt, healing for the brokenhearted. Christ the healer binds up the wounds of the brokenhearted, so that a woman wounded within the Church can bring her hurt to the Lord who heals and find in Him the healing her wound needs.

Found Within His Church

The Christ who heals is found within His Church, in her sacraments and life, so that a woman seeks healing not by leaving the Church but by drawing nearer to the Christ she holds, who heals even the wounds suffered within her. The paradox of healing is that the Christ who heals a woman's wound, even a wound suffered within the Church, is found within the Church herself, in the Eucharist, in Reconciliation, in prayer, in the sustaining life of grace she offers, so that a woman finds healing not by fleeing the Church but by drawing nearer to the Christ she holds, who can heal even the wounds inflicted by her own members. This means a woman seeks healing for her wound within the Church, not outside her, drawing near to Christ in the sacraments and life of the very Church where she was hurt, so that the place of her wounding becomes, through Christ, the place of her healing. The woman who finds Christ within His Church seeks healing by drawing nearer to the Lord she holds, not by leaving the Body where she was hurt. Found within His Church, the Christ who heals is present in her sacraments and life, so that a woman seeks healing by drawing nearer to the Christ the Church holds rather than by leaving her.

The Saints Who Suffered and Stayed

Many saints suffered deeply from within the Church, at the hands of her own members, and yet stayed, loved her, and even worked to reform her, so that they model for a woman a wounded but faithful belonging. The history of the Church includes many saints who suffered greatly within her, misunderstood, opposed, or wronged by her own members and leaders, and yet who did not leave but remained faithful, loved the Church, bore their wounds with grace, and often labored for her reform from within, so that they model a belonging that is wounded yet faithful, staying and loving despite real hurt. This means a

woman wounded within the Church has companions and models in these saints who suffered and stayed, who show that it is possible to be deeply hurt within the Church and yet remain faithful, loving her and working for her good, so that she is not alone in her wounded belonging. The woman who looks to the saints who suffered and stayed finds models of a wounded but faithful belonging, who stayed and loved despite real hurt. The saints who suffered and stayed, deeply wronged within the Church yet faithful, model for a woman a wounded but faithful belonging, showing that it is possible to be hurt within the Church and yet remain, loving her still.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Belonging With Your Whole Heart

A Mature and Chosen Belonging

The goal is not a grudging, half-hearted belonging but a whole-hearted one, a mature and chosen belonging to the Church with eyes open to her wounds and heart open to her as the Body of Christ. Understanding what it means to belong with a whole heart, a mature belonging chosen with eyes open, reveals the fullest and most freeing way to belong to the Church, wounds and all.

O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. — Psalm 26:8

Eyes-Open Belonging

A mature belonging to the Church is one with eyes open, holding no illusions about the failings of her members while loving her as the Body of Christ, so that a woman belongs not naively but knowingly. The deepest belonging to the Church is not a naive one that pretends she is perfect but an eyes-open belonging, one that knows and acknowledges the real failings of her members, holds no illusions, and yet loves the Church as the Body of Christ and belongs to her fully, so that a woman belongs maturely, with clear sight of the wounds and clear love for the Church. This means a woman is called to an eyes-open belonging, neither naive about the Church's failings nor driven away by them, but belonging knowingly and maturely, loving the Church as she really is, holy in Christ and wounded in her members. The woman who belongs with eyes open holds no illusions about the Church yet loves and belongs to her fully, a mature belonging. Eyes-open belonging is mature, holding no illusions about the Church's failings while loving her as the Body of Christ, so that a woman belongs knowingly rather than naively.

A Belonging You Choose

A whole-hearted belonging is one a woman freely chooses, deciding to belong to the Church as an adult with full knowledge, so that her belonging is not merely inherited or endured but embraced. The belonging that holds through wounds is one a woman chooses, for having seen the Church's failings and felt her wounds, she decides freely and knowingly to belong, to remain in the Body of Christ, to love the Church as an adult who has counted the cost, so that her belonging is not a passive inheritance or a grudging endurance but a free and whole-hearted choice. This means a woman's mature belonging to the Church is something she chooses and embraces, a deliberate decision to belong despite the wounds, so that her belonging is owned and whole-hearted rather than merely inherited or endured, a choice renewed in full knowledge. The woman who makes her belonging a choice embraces the Church freely and knowingly, her belonging owned rather than merely inherited. A belonging you choose is whole-hearted, freely embraced by a woman who decides as an adult to belong to the Church despite her wounds, so that it is owned rather than merely inherited or endured.

Loving Her as She Is

The fullest belonging loves the Church as she actually is, holy in Christ and wounded in her members, so that a woman gives her whole heart to the real Church rather than to an idealized one or none at all. The mature and whole-hearted belonging loves the Church as she truly is, not an idealized Church free of all fault, nor rejecting her for her faults, but the real Church, holy in Christ and wounded in her members, so that a woman gives her whole heart to the actual Body of Christ, loving her as she is, with her treasure and her earthen vessels together. This means a woman's deepest belonging is to love the real Church, the one that is both holy and wounded, giving her whole heart to the actual Body of Christ rather than withholding it for an ideal that does not exist, so that she loves and belongs to the Church as she really is. The woman who loves the Church as she is gives her whole heart to the real Body of Christ, holy and wounded together. Loving her as she is marks the fullest belonging, a woman giving her whole heart to the real Church, holy in Christ and wounded in her members, rather than to an idealized Church or none at all.

CONCLUSION

Stay, and Love Her

The woman whose relationship with the Church was complicated by real wounds now has a way to belong honestly. We have seen that honesty about both the love and the hurt is

the right starting point; that her wounds within the Church are real and deserve to be taken seriously; that the sins of members are not the holiness of the Church, the treasure carried in earthen vessels; that she can be honest and even critical without leaving; that the wound tempts her to walk away, at a cost greater than it seems; that she can bring her hurt to Christ, the healer found within His Church; and that she is invited to belong with her whole heart, a mature and chosen belonging that loves the Church as she is.

Through all of it runs a single invitation: stay, and love her. Do not let the real wounds you have suffered drive you from the Church, nor pretend those wounds away, but stay, honestly, bringing your hurt to Christ and belonging to the Body of Christ with eyes open and heart whole. For the Church that has sometimes wounded you is also the Church that holds Christ, and there is nowhere else to go for what He gives through her.

So stay, and love her. Be honest about both your love and your hurt, neither denying the wounds nor being consumed by bitterness. Take your real wounds seriously, and bring them to the God who does not dismiss them. Distinguish the sins of her members from the holiness of the Church herself, the treasure from the earthen vessels. Be honest and even critical, but from within and in love, for staying is not approving. Weigh the true cost of leaving, and remember that the Church still holds Christ. Bring your wound to the Lord who heals the brokenhearted, found within His Church, as the saints who suffered and stayed did before you. And belong with your whole heart, choosing the real Church with eyes open and loving her as she is. She has sometimes wounded you, and she has given you Christ. Stay, and love her, wounds and all, for she is the Body of Christ, and she is yours.

✦ ✦ ✦