THE SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS

LIBBY: Hi, I'm Libby.

KAI: And I'm Kai. Welcome to Catholic Central.

LIBBY: Today we'll be talking about the sexual-abuse scandal, one of the most painful chapters in Church history.

KAI: Those outside the Catholic Church frequently point to the abuse scandal as evidence of hypocrisy, betrayal, and abuse of power. And they're right.

LIBBY: No one has felt this more than Catholics themselves, especially those that were victims of abuse.

KAI: Instead of following Christ and choosing to spread peace, hope, and charity, some Catholics, including those in leadership, made choices that are downright evil.

LIBBY: It's undeniable and indefensible that priests and clergy sexually abused children. And those in power failed to respond effectively, sometimes making the situation worse by moving the priest from parish to parish rather than handing them over to secular authorities. The heartbreak, pain, and outrage is still felt all over the world. So how could something like this happen?

KAI: In the mid 1980s the first reports of priests who sexually abused children surfaced, many from events that happened decades prior. Over the next several years reports of abuse were filed all over the globe.

LIBBY: Church leaders, from the local scale all the way up to the popes, have been criticized for failing to act swiftly, minimizing or denying fault, and essentially protecting and enabling abusers.

KAI: In early cases, cultural norms which deterred exposing abusive priests and poor standard of reporting made the problem worse. Church accountability is a complicated issue due to the global nature of the problem, local laws, and a wide range of factors that apply to each individual case. Unfortunately, the Vatican doesn't have an organized system, like the FBI, to deal with problems.

LIBBY: Of course, that doesn't justify the bottom line. In some of the cases, victims in their parishes were abused not just sexually but spiritually, then blamed and shamed into silence while their abusers were not held fully accountable.

KAI: For some Catholics, love of the faith and its importance to their identity made them want to protect and defend the Church at all costs.

LIBBY: When sin is especially egregious, some cope by trying to minimize or deny it, and their denial re-victimizes the ones who are hurt most.

KAI: There can be an additional stigma for survivors who live in communities where they're not believed or supported.

LIBBY: Rather than focus on the victims, some disproportionately worry about innocent priests being falsely accused. However, research shows that in 96% of reports of all forms of child abuse, victims are telling the truth. Yet, sadly, many victims and their advocates don't feel seen, heard, validated, or respected.

KAI: Because Christ is our perfect example of holiness, those who claim to follow Him as leaders should be held to a higher standard, as referenced in Luke 12:48.

LIBBY: Which is why any scandal, in any parish, hurts everyone.

KAI: It's understandable that the unspeakable acts would shake the faith of so many people.

LIBBY: So how can Catholics better love and serve those who have been hurt?

KAI: One way is to lean in closer to the topic whenever it comes up. When someone expresses hurt and betrayal, listen with your whole heart. What happened to the victims was unacceptable, Catholics can prevent further damage by engaging with and supporting those who have been hurt.

LIBBY: Weep with them, pray with them. Jesus offers wisdom when He said, "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me."

KAI: Even though the coverage of the abuse scandal was painful for many in the Church, exposing it and dealing with it was absolutely what it needed.

LIBBY: Even regular Catholics who are willing to shine light on the topic in their own communities and talk about what happened help to establish an environment where future abuse is less likely to take root.

KAI: Another thing that might be useful is to take a few steps back, which helps us gain perspective on the effects of sin, its destruction, and the possibility of reformation and reconstruction.

LIBBY: As long as there are humans on earth there will be sin. The events are tragic, and it's important not to deny the impact they had, but they challenge us to reform. Hope, healing, and redemption are possible. The great hope is that everyone will be safer and better cared for from the changes that result. Throughout the history of the Church, there have been moments that have challenged the status quo, awakened the people to evil, called on Church leaders, and even the whole community, to open their eyes and admit the ways they have gotten off track.

KAI: Catholics then can seek healing, reconciliation, and reformation. Jesus called for Church reform when He cleansed the temple in John 2:13-15. Jesus' direct approach provides a model for us, of dealing with corruption in religious leadership.

LIBBY: For example, as a response to the sex-abuse scandal, legal and psychological experts and panels of laypeople have developed standards that are used in every diocese to prevent abuse. Those programs cover establishing boundaries, creating a safe space for children, how to recognize abusive patterns, and standards of reporting suspicious activity.

KAI: Victims’ assistance and advocate offices have been established to listen to potential victims, help them file cases, make reports, and get resources for healing. All credible accusations are required to be reported to law enforcement. All of this accountability is a start to changing the culture, but there's room for even deeper reform, especially when it comes to attending to those who have been hurt the most.

LIBBY: So where do we go from here?

KAI: The abuse crisis teaches all of us to be vigilant when it comes to signs of abuse.

LIBBY: Many unfortunate examples from all kinds of settings show us that abuse isn't just a Catholic problem, it's a human problem, and we all can play a role in stopping and preventing it.

KAI: Stay vigilant everywhere. While child abuse anywhere is absolutely unacceptable, it's a common reality.

LIBBY: That's not to deflect from it happening in the Church.

KAI: No. The number of priests involved in sexual abuse should be zero, and if you suspect that someone is suffering abuse you can call local law enforcement.

LIBBY: Although many have been reluctant to talk about child sexual abuse, collectively we have an opportunity to bring healing and new commitment to our deepest values, which were so egregiously betrayed.

KAI: I'm Kai.

LIBBY: And I'm Libby. Check out our website at CatholicCentral.com for more resources for victims and on reporting abuse.

KAI: Thank you for joining us for this difficult episode of Catholic Central.

© 2018 Family Theater Productions. All Rights Reserved