



PRAY

Merciful God, find us when we are lost; forgive us our sins against you and each other. Keep us in your love. Amen.

SPIRIT

I was late, maybe a week, no big deal. Taking the pregnancy test was a fluke. A friend had a test left over from a package of two.

“It’s two lines,” I called to my friend in the other room. “What does that mean?”

“No, it’s not,” I remember her saying. “It’s not. It’s not. It can’t be.”

Her tone said it all. I looked again. There they were—two tiny, soft pink lines that would change my life. I was pregnant.

I was 17 years old. I attended Catholic school. My parents were strict and disapproved of the troubled boy who was now the father of my child.

My initial thought was to make the pregnancy go away. For the first time in my life, abortion seemed like the right choice.

My friend and I did some research. If I wanted an abortion, she would help me schedule the procedure and hide it afterward. I thought I had made my decision, but she advised to let time guide me.

The next day I walked around like a zombie. Signs started screaming at me through the static. I saw a pro-life billboard and heard someone excitedly talking about her sister’s new baby. I saw mothers walking kids in strollers. Everything around me was speaking, tugging.

That night I was lying sleepless in bed when my brother popped his head in to say goodnight. It was late and he wasn’t living at home at the time. I heard myself telling him we needed to talk. Then he just knew.

“Are you pregnant?” he asked.

The story started spilling out. Although he promised not to say anything, he leaked a hint into a conversation with my father. Then my dad knew, and soon my mom.

When my brother told me he had shared my secret with the two people that I most wanted to hide it from, I panicked and left. I sat for hours crying and thinking, less about the baby growing inside me than about the shame and anger my parents must surely feel toward me.

When I got home, I knew I had to face them. I went to my parents’ bedroom. When my mom saw me, she got up and came toward me. Instead of yelling, she reached out her arms to hold me. Then we cried.



NOT FOREVER

by Sarah Horner

In that moment I knew I would have my baby, but not forever. I would give him up for adoption.

The support from my family, particularly my mother, gave me the freedom to own my decision. They never judged me, never pushed me, and never doubted me. They are largely the reason I can look back on my story with pride.

The decision wasn't easy. I was just beginning my senior year. I wanted to go to college, to travel, to stay out late at concerts. I was caught in an extremely unhealthy relationship with a boy anything but ready for fatherhood. Our relationship needed to end, and I knew that raising our baby would tie our lives forever.

But it would be dishonest to say it would have been impossible to keep my baby. My family would have helped me figure out a way. I didn't want to.

My mom put me in touch with an adoption agency about a month into my pregnancy, and I began to pursue the path of choosing parents. I flipped through profile books of parents and had to decide from one-page descriptions if these people were right to guide my child through life.

I looked at my own life and pulled what I valued into the decision. I wanted my child to grow up in a home with siblings. I wanted a couple that chose to have one parent stay at home. I wanted spiritual people that valued nature, reading, art, and family. I also wanted the parents to be financially comfortable, so they could give my child opportunities I couldn't.

When I first found out I was having a little boy, the reality of my decision and deep sadness started to set in. I was no longer giving away a stranger. I was giving up my baby boy.

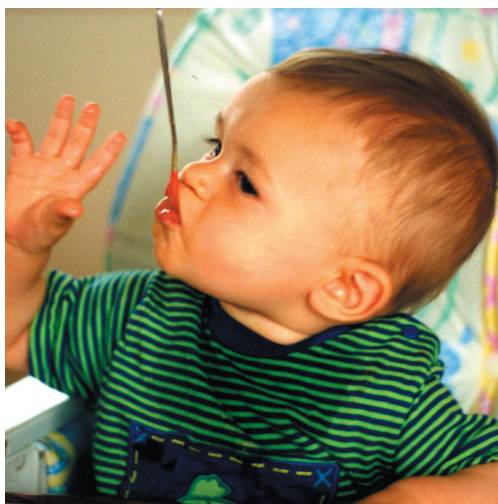
I started talking to him, reassuring my little someone that it was not lack of love but deep love behind my decision to let him go. Maybe our one-sided conversations were more for me than him.

I chose the moon as our bridge and spent night after night sitting beneath it, telling my baby that we would always share the same sky and moon. I cried and cried, holding him in my belly. When I wasn't crying, I sang.

I also prayed. I asked a God I had long been out of touch with to give me strength of mind and heart.

Slowly I started to narrow the list of potential parents. My boyfriend and I began interviewing couples. He pored over lists of names for our child until he chose the name Michael, followed by his own name.

When we chose the couple and told them the name we chose, careful to



explain they did not need to honor our choice, they surprised us by saying they had also selected a name—the same name.

The adoption was open. My boyfriend and I would receive pictures and letters every other month. As we worked out details, my sadness grew, but I had the happy faces of my baby's new parents to weigh against my pain.

My mom gave me a quote by Kahlil Gibran. **“Your children are not your children, they are the sons and the daughters of life's longing for itself. They come through you,**

but they are not from you. Though they are with you, they belong not to you.”

That message carried me through many doubting hours. I was bringing my child into the world, and I could give him that. The rest the world would determine.

As the end of my pregnancy inched closer, so did my fear. I knew my choice was right, but I was scared that when they put my little baby on my stomach after he was born, I would never be able to let him go.

I went into labor early in the morning as my sister was saying goodbye before school. I ignored the pains at first, but when they grew in intensity and frequency, I knew it was happening.

I waited at home for my dad to pick up my boyfriend. He was already crying when he arrived at my house and didn't stop through the entire delivery. By the time we got to the hospital I was seven centimeters dilated. My mom, boyfriend, and midwife surrounded me in my hospital bed.

The birth went quickly. I could have been lying in the middle of a stampede and wouldn't have known the difference. I went inside myself and my body took over.

At 1:30 p.m., they placed Michael on my stomach. I remember every tiny thing about him. His tiny fingers, his pink feet, the precious way he sounded when he yawned, the way his little body felt in my arms, the way his skin tasted. I wanted to show him to the world. I was so proud.

When our last day in the hospital arrived, my boyfriend locked himself in the bathroom and played “Let it Be” by the Beatles for hours. I sat with my little baby on the corner of the hospital



SUNDAY GOSPEL

4th Sunday of Lent

What relationships give life?

NARRATOR: Tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around Jesus to hear him. The Pharisees and the scribes murmured.

PHARISEES, SCRIBES: This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

NARRATOR: Jesus told them a parable.

JESUS: A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father—

YOUNGER SON: Father, give me the share of your property that will fall to me.

JESUS: So the father divided up the property. After a few days the younger son, having gathered together all his things, went away to a far-off country, where he squandered his money in wild living. After he had spent his money, a great famine began throughout that country and he began to suffer terrible need. He attached himself to one of the citizens there, who sent him to feed his pigs. The son longed to fill his belly with the pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him any. Finally he came to his senses.

YOUNGER SON: How many of my father's hired hands have more than enough bread, while I am perishing in famine? I will get up and return to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son. Make me one of your hired hands."

JESUS: Getting up, the young man set off for his father's house. While he was still far away, his father caught sight of him and was moved with compassion. He ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him.

YOUNGER SON: Father, I have sinned against God and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.

FATHER: Servants, bring out the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Take the fatted calf and kill it. Let us eat and rejoice because this son of mine was dead and lives again. He was lost and is found.

JESUS: They began to celebrate. Now the elder son was out in the field. As he

came in, he neared the house and heard music and dancing. He summoned one of the servants and asked what was happening.

SERVANT: Your brother came, and your father killed the fatted calf because he has him home in good health.

JESUS: The son was angry and would not go in, so his father came out and begged him to come in.

ELDER SON: For so many years I have served you and never neglected your commands, but you have never given me so much as a kid goat to celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours comes back after devouring your property with loose women, you kill the fatted calf for him.

FATHER: Son, you are with me always, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice. This brother of yours was dead and lives again. He was lost and is found.

Luke 15.1-3, 11-32

bed and cried. My body folded around him as if I were trying to draw him back inside me.

Our families and the adoptive couple had a farewell ceremony in the hospital chapel. We played the song "On Children," the quotation from Kahlil Gibran. We read blessings we had written for Michael and his new parents. My sister sang a song.

We closed with a ritual. As a song played, my boyfriend and I stepped to the front of the room, holding Michael. Our family members came up one by one and kissed us, then said goodbye to our little boy. Then we placed Michael in the arms of his new parents, said our own goodbyes, and left.

Doubts from my decision did not follow me out the hospital door that day, only sadness. Every part of me ached

for my son. I remember desperately wanting to kiss him again.

I started college three months later. I didn't feel ready when I packed my bags, but the transition offered a needed distraction from my pain.

I saw Michael nearly a year later. I drove to meet him, his parents and his older sister at a restaurant. I was terrified. Seeing this little boy so connected to my soul was difficult, knowing he would not remember my face. His smiles overruled my anguish. He was happy. I knew what I needed to know. I drove home in peace.

Even if I never meet my son again, we will always be connected. We still share the same moon.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why is the author so wrong about how her parents will respond?
- 2 In what ways does her parents' support help make Sarah's decision one she is proud of?
- 3 When have you experienced your parents giving you unexpected support?
- 4 Why does the younger son in the gospel go away? Why does he return?
- 5 Why does the father welcome rather than punish the younger son?
- 6 How are Sarah's parents like the father?

Discerning right from wrong

Conscience is our awareness of what is right and wrong—a moral sense of what God expects, of what harms and breaks relationships and what gives life and builds up the human family. Conscience helps us judge what is right and wrong when we face choices in our lives.

“Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a human person,” the bishops of Vatican II wrote in the Church in the Modern World (#16).

No one is born knowing right from wrong. Our parents begin teaching us the difference between loving and hurtful actions. Our parents join together with the Christian community to teach us what is good and what is evil, what actions build up the community and what actions tear it down.

A Christian conscience takes its spirit from Jesus’ teachings; for example, the two commandments he considers greatest: to love God with one’s whole heart, mind, and strength and one’s neighbor as one’s self. Jesus demonstrates what is right and wrong for his followers. Washing his disciples’ feet like a servant is right. Forgiving sins and healing sickness are right. Speaking the truth to his opponents is right.

The choices each of us consistently makes and the actions each of us regularly does build up moral character. Our decisions shape who we become.

Conscience is more than knowing rules and the commandments. Conscience is really a vision of who I am and want to be—how I live. I want my life to matter to others, so I volunteer to tutor. I care about Earth and work with the crew planting sedges and other plants around a pond where the water from our school parking lot drains. I have seen kids my age working in sweatshops, so I buy union-made clothes.

Conscience is practical. It is my capacity to reason about how to take responsibility for my vision of who I am

and want to be. It is my capacity to reflect on my actions and judge day to day what is good.

Using conscience to decide what is right is a process that includes at least four steps.



Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1796

1 Focus. What is the problem I face? What is it I must decide?

In Sarah’s case she has to decide what to do with the child growing within her. She wants to go to college. At first she can’t imagine facing her parents. Her boyfriend is too troubled to marry.

2 Discern prayerfully. What do I want to do? What are my options? What is the right thing to do?

At first Sarah considers an abortion. But she sees the Church’s commitment to life on a billboard and notices people with babies in strollers.

To discern is to weigh options prayerfully, to sort out in the here and now what is right. Prayer makes God a partner in making decisions and opens us to a bigger picture than our own. Sarah

sits for hours, crying and thinking, before like the prodigal son, she decides to trust the relationship she has with her parents.

3 Consult. What do the people I value most have to say? What does the Church teach is right and why? What wisdom does the bible hold in regard to my choice? What does Jesus teach? What consequences will my choices have?

When Sarah talks to her brother, her reality changes. She consults her family. When her mother holds her, Sarah finds the strength and support to have her baby. Many young people misjudge how parents’ will react, thinking they will reject or disown them rather than embrace them.

Sarah also consults with the baby’s father about the baby’s future. Together they choose an adoptive family, based on Sarah’s family experience and values.

4 Choose, act. When conscience has helped us discern what is good, we choose and act. Sarah chooses an open adoption to be sure her son thrives.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 **Journal about how your conscience worked in making a significant choice in your life. Reflect on the following questions: What was at stake in the choice? What reasons did I have for going one way or the other? How did I feel about myself and who I am? How did I feel about God and who God wants me to be?**
- 2 **Research how teens in films or television shows make decisions. Keep track in a log who talks to parents, teachers, counselors, or other adults and how helpful or unhelpful they find these adults. How accurately does the media portray your experience of the adults in your life?**

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