

## Go Tell

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The Protecting God's Children® (PGC) program has broken through the wall of silence and denial that has often accompanied child sexual abuse incidents.

Within the context of a training session, as the facilitators and participants of the program work to identify why children don't tell and explore ways to become more protective of children, I am often reminded of a particular television episode in which Oprah Winfrey interviewed Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel (December 9, 1993). Ms. Winfrey is in conversation with Mr. Wiesel and they watch footage of the concentration camp experience, which of course vividly exposes the victims. (In order to do justice to the interview, a sequence of the exact transcript is quoted below.)

*Winfrey: "I've heard the words. I cannot—I can—even though it's—I can't—I can't conceive of it though. You know, I can't there are no words or images that are—that are strong enough to conceive that—that there are people who did this to other people. There just aren't. No matter how good a writer you are, no matter how many times you say the words. And you were saying to me that it's hard now even—you were there. You saw it and you can't believe it."*

*Mr. Wiesel: "I believe it. But I can't understand it."*

*Winfrey: "Can't understand it, yes."*

*Mr. Wiesel: "The enemy was counting on that. He was counting on the fact that in pushing the violence, cruelty... and evil to its grotesque limits, that we, the victims, will be incapable of telling the tale. (Continued conversation...) And that's what he was counting on."*

It could be, as expressed through the insight of Elie Wiesel, that the enemy somehow counts on the disbelief of the victim and to whom the victim tells the story, is the same mindset of the perpetrator who assaults a little child. It should answer the questions we all ask: *How does the abuse continue? Does the sexually abusive perpetrator consciously or unconsciously count on the disbelief of the faultless victim?*

It seems that perpetrators count on the disbelief of their victims—that the abuser could talk himself or herself into being assured that this innocent child will not be able to believe this is really happening, or that something is happening the way they think it is happening. Even if the child, were, in some way able to tell someone, the child may question internally the ability to verbalize what happened in a way that would be convincing to themselves or to others who did not witness it.

The time has come for abusers to know that, in fact, children are going to be believed. This enemy (those who sexually abuse children) has to know that in the Catholic Church, we are all on the lookout, and we as adults are going to tell when we have a sense that something is not right. We as caring adults need to let potentially abusive adults know that we are educating children to "go and tell." We as caring adults need to let potential abusers know that we are going to be defiant in the face of the destructive force that interrupts the simple and loving heart of a child and has ruptured the Church. The perpetrators must know that

they can no longer count on the helplessness of children and the intimidation of other adults who were once afraid. Perpetrators can no longer count on our disbelief.

It is true that when we, as caring adults, hear about certain abuse or are told about certain people our first response will be, “I can’t believe that.” or to say, “No, I will never believe it until I hear the person tell me themselves.” We must get in touch with our own sense of disbelief and not allow it to stop us from weighing the truth no matter how much it challenges us.

We, as caring adults, will not apologize for being skeptical at times in observing the behaviors of others and when addressing those situations that may be threatening to children. We will work with diligence in doing so, and we will borrow the words of Elie Wiesel when he attempts to express why it is important not to let innocent people become victims. Elie Wiesel has said, “I swear never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

Let us, also, break the silence—go and tell.

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