



# Mama Needs Coffee

31 DAYS OF WRITING WITH THE NESTER, CATHOLICS DO WHAT?, MARRIAGE

## SUFFER THE CHILDREN: THE HIGHEST COST OF DIVORCE

OCTOBER 21, 2014

Last week I had the opportunity to sit down with a fabulously talented writer and speaker who was in town to give a lecture on motherhood. Since the event was in the evening, she had some time to kill and I figured what more relaxing thing could I offer her than brunch at my favorite restaurant surrounded by 3 mewling, jam-covered children? What mother of 8 who, having flown across the country to escape her own brood, wouldn't relish the opportunity?

Anyway, that's how I ended up eating eggs benedict with [Lisa Lickona](#), who was gracious and funny and entertaining and didn't bat an eyelash when I stripped Evie from the waist down on the patio lawn in plain view of all the other diners because I didn't feel like heading to the restroom for the 15th time for something as simple as a diaper change.

We circled around all kinds of fascinating topics, but there was one thing she shared in particular that really stuck with me. Her own parents, she explained, divorced when she was in grad school, sending shock waves through her universe.

Throughout the tumult and pain of the years following, she recounted that it was her mother's *difficulty* with the Church's teachings on divorce and remarriage that kept her in relationship with Christ through it all.

Her mom, she explained, was so mad that she couldn't receive Communion. She was so hurt that her new "marriage" wasn't recognized by the Church as such. And she wanted her children to take sides. Hers, particularly, not the Church's.

Then she told me something wild. She said that in a very real way, **the Church's response to her parent's divorce provided a tremendous source of comfort to her and her siblings.**

You read that right. She was comforted by the Catholic response to divorce and remarriage, which says, essentially, *not ideal* to the former and *not possible* of the latter.

### ABOUT ME



Hi, I'm Jenny, welcome to my little corner of the internet. If you're looking for FAQ's on Catholicism, life issues, marriage, and how to safely combine pregnancy with caffeine, you've come to the right place.

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basically just religious divorces. Or something.

ARCHIVES I'M LOOKING FOR ...

Plain English: if two people contract a valid, sacramental marriage...there's no getting out. Well, there's

Catholics cannot get divorced because marriage is a sacrament. The sacrament of marriage, like the Eucharist, is, too.

Annulment, which I'll cover in greater detail another day, is the process by which the Church determines the validity of the marriage itself, in other words, was a marriage actually contracted? Was something missing from the get-go (free consent, openness to life, exclusivity, to name a few...) that prevented a sacramental marriage in the first place?

When Lisa's parents called it quits on their marriage, they weren't just walking away from their covenant with each other; they were also walking away from the covenant they had made with God. And God doesn't walk out on covenants.

What was incredibly painful for her mother was actually immensely comforting to the children left in the ruins, because the Church recognized, as they did, that something had gone wrong.

That there was a real wound, a real suffering, and a real loss when mom and dad walked away from one another. And that it would be fair to no one to permit things to continue on, business as usual, when in fact their family had suffered a terrible rupture.

That's why remarriage isn't an option for Catholics. Because as long as both spouses are alive, they're still married...to each other. Even in the most unimaginably difficult circumstances. Even if one, or both, get remarried to somebody else.

Do you see the complications that ensue?

But more importantly, do you see where the greatest suffering lies?

It's in the lives of their children.

**Children are the real victims of divorce**, and they're the reason that marriages must be preserved at all cost. Sometimes at unimaginably great costs.

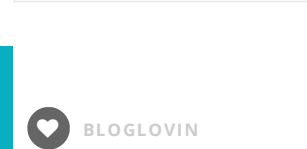
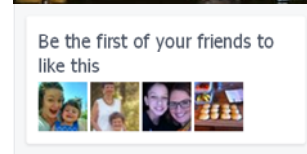
But what's the alternative?

Look around. Look at our society, so full of insecure and wounded people whose parents thought first of themselves and only later of the innocent little lives torn apart by adult decisions. Look at all the young people unwilling or unable to commit to relationships of their own, so scarred and gun-shy from the experiences of their youth.

We spend a lot of time talking about the need to support and minister to divorced couples, but very little time addressing the needs of their children, for whom the fabric of the very universe has just ruptured. The Church's firm and loving response to divorced and "remarried" Catholics is actually the most sane, compassionate, and logical response possible: "you have made a mistake, come, let us try to make it right, and let us not further your destruction by refusing to acknowledge the mistake."

And, perhaps most importantly, she says to the children, your suffering is real, and you have lost something irreplaceable. We cannot look the other way and pretend otherwise.

It's a small comfort in a crisis of epidemic proportions, but it's something.



TOP POSTS & PAGES

Luke Maximilian: a birth story with naming rights (episode 1)

Still Beautiful {guest post}

BACK TO TOP Luke Maximilian's birth story, part 2 (finale)

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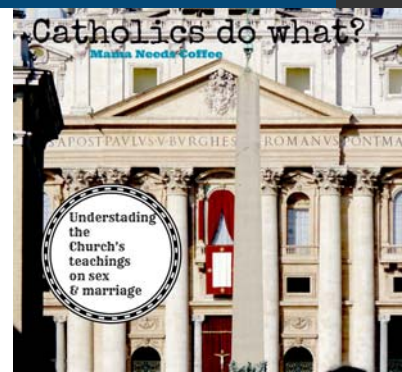
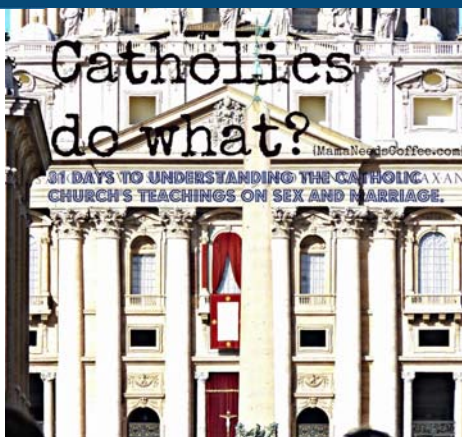
How to hack the KonMari Method with a houseful of kids

Genevieve Therese: A birth story

Genevieve Therese: a birth story (2 of 2)

The best Mother's Day gift ever (and it's probably not what you're thinking)

21 DAYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH'S TEACHINGS ON SEX AND MARRIAGE



[Click here for the rest of the series.](#)

p.s. For a better, smarter, and far more in depth treatment on the topic, you really ought to click over and read Lisa's piece on [Children of Divorce](#).



JENNY UEBBING



**27 COMMENTS**



MAGPIECOSTUMER

October 21, 2014 at 12:32 am

Reply

Thankyou so much for this, the series is wonderful and I have used it several times already to explain the church's position and I know it is going to be an invaluable resource for a long time to come.

As the child of divorced parents I can see the impact in my own relationship, no matter how hard I try I can never entirely quell the voice in my head that tells me my husband won't stay with me long term because I have unconsciously absorbed the idea that this is how marriages work, they last for a few years then he leaves and she is left alone with the kids.

AMY

October 21, 2014 at 1:15 am

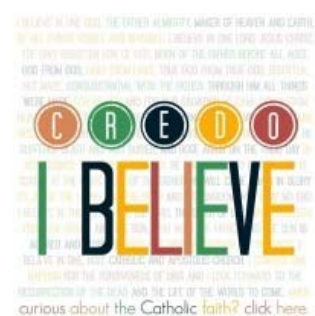
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CHARLOTTE {WALTZINGM}

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 2:09 am

As another child of divorce I wholeheartedly agree with your new friend's sentiments. It's the children who suffer most from this selfish act. The Catholic Church is the only institution out there not saying, "You'll get over it. Just move on already. Don't you want your parents to be happy?" Divorce is the nuclear option and the children are the ones who bear the brunt of the blast.



MITZI

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 4:28 am

This was excellently stated.  
I would like to read your explanation on the status of children from an annulled marriage. My father's first marriage was annulled and my sister has never forgiven the Church for "making her an illegitimate child". It's heartbreaking.



MICAELA DARR

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 7:21 am

I have family friends who feel the same way – that after 25 years of marriage and three children, how could their parents' marriage possibly be invalid? I'm not questioning the Church on this really. It's just a very difficult practice to defend, even if it does make non-Catholics more "comfortable" by making the Church appear more "reasonable."



MICHELLE M

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 12:59 pm

Dear Mitzi, I am a child of an annulment. This excerpt is from Annulments and the Catholic Church ~ Straight Answers to Tough Questions, by Edward Peters, J.D, J.C.D  
"An annulment, on the other hand, is an ecclesiastical judicial determination whereby what was believed to be a valid Catholic marriage is declared never to have been a marriage in the first place. An annulment does not deny that a relationship, perhaps a long and serious one, existed between the parties. It does not imply that the parties were "living in sin" or that the children are illegitimate. It only states that, as a matter of objective canon law, what was believed to be a valid marriage in the eyes of the Church was not so."

LAURA

Reply

negatively effect the children in a family. Please don't pretend the opinion that divorce is damaging to children is particular to us as Catholics and slap your "Catholics do what" stamp on it. Barf barf barf.

As far as I have seen, this post is a beautiful summation of your posts on Catholicism: something judgmental, something completely lacking nuance, something that you seem to know nothing about personally, something unfortunately in step with the Church's overall teachings.

In my last comments I was acting like my objection to your blog was that you seem disdainful of people who aren't as reflexively obedient to the Church's teachings as you are. I was being so incredibly PC given the context. In reality I would most love to know how you justify your holy throne of judgment. I understand that you think you are conveying a little depth to the Church's moral positions. All I can think when I read the tone you take on these type of subjects is— why. What do you think is positive or helpful about this post? I see that it is affirming some of the betrayal that children of divorce have felt, but do you think you could maybe leave that to people who are actually children of divorce? Perhaps phrase it in a way recognizes the parents had some kind of struggle? This just really doesn't seem like your personal issue, so why have you decided to chime in?

I wouldn't really expect you to notice, but just in case: yes, I see the hypocrisy. Let's just call judgmental proselytizing my own divorce/gay marriage/contraception/ivf/porn viewing. Maybe we can figure out our problem together.



BECKY

October 21, 2014 at 5:51 pm

[Reply](#)

I'm a child of divorce married to a child of divorce, and I have no idea why you think this post was offensive or problematic. I think the idea that only people with first-hand knowledge of a topic have the privilege of speaking about it is an assumption that people use to dismiss ideas they don't find palatable without having to think too hard about them. Personally, I welcome the perspectives of people from intact homes. I don't think anyone gets off scot-free in a culture this permeated with divorce; I knew plenty of kids growing up whose parents were married but who, confronted with families like mine, lived in perpetual fear that their parents would eventually split (which was often not an unfounded fear).



CAROLYN

October 21, 2014 at 7:57 pm

[Reply](#)

Becky, you hit the nail on the head... no one gets off scot-free in a culture that's permeated with divorce. I have had to explain to my six-year-old the concept of divorce and remarriage and step-families, in her insulated little world where her mom and dad are married and live together along with their children. It had altered the way she perceives the world – families sometimes \*don't\* stay together, and new moms and dads come into the picture, or have only a mom or a dad. Even if she never had to live with the painful effects of divorce first-hand, it still effects her by being in her surrounding.

person, you sure seem judgmental. \*scratches head\*



BECKY

Reply

October 22, 2014 at 2:02 am

My kids have four sets of grandparents, so there's definitely no shielding them from ugly realities ... my oldest (not yet 3) already seems confused that there are four people who are some variation of "grandma" in his life.



KRIS

Reply

October 22, 2014 at 2:28 pm

Interesting, Laura, that you would call Jenny "judgmental" because the tone of your comment is awfully judgmental itself. I didn't find this post judgmental at all – just very real. Along with all the other posts this month, Jenny is presenting the teachings of the Church, in a supportive and affirming way. It's your individual choice to believe/not believe or follow/not follow. As a child of divorce, who is married to a husband who is divorced and annulled, I agree with everything that Jenny said. It's the children who suffer the most – lost relationships with parents, instability of a broken home, multiple "others" in your life in the form of relationships and re-marriage. My own kids, at a very young age, have to learn the ins and out of step-parents, step-siblings, half siblings, etc. I have experienced, first-hand, the emotional damage done as a child of divorce, and seen the struggles my step-daughter has gone through over the damage done by her mother when she walked out on my daughter and my husband. My husband and I committed from day one of our marriage that we truly believed the Church's teachings on the sacramental nature of our marriage vows and that divorce would NEVER be an option for us. Truly internalizing the church's teachings on marriage leads you down the path of sacrifice and forgiveness, communication and love. It doesn't leave room for selfishness and looking for greener pastures when you become "unhappy".



KATHLEEN

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 1:52 pm

To Laura's comment above, Jenny is defending her faith. This is no different than what St. Paul did, what Thomas Aquinas did, and what modern apologetics like CS Lewis did. You don't like it? Don't read it. You are welcome to continue your "own divorce/gay marriage/contraception/ivf/porn viewing". Let us know how that works out for you. To Jenny, this: "Children are the real victims of divorce, and they're the reason that marriages must be preserved at all cost. Sometimes at unimaginably great costs." is the primary reason why I chose to stay with my husband after his sex addiction was revealed. I knew that if I left my husband, and didn't work on saving our marriage and family, my children would be scarred for life. It was not easy. It's still not easy. I still have nightmares about his infidelity. But we take one day at a time and every day work on our marriage for



JENNY

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 2:35 pm

St. Paul, Thomas Aquinas and C.S. Lewis. Um, I think I can die happy now. Thanks for coming to my defense, however little I deserve to stand in a line up of that caliber!



LAURA

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 2:26 pm

To clarify, because I realize anyone who comments here will be reading with a bias for Jenny- she feels compelled to shame (only OTHER people) who practice divorce/gay marriage/ contraception/ivf/ porn viewing. I can see that I am being a hypocrite for shaming Jenny's love of judgmental proselytizing.

And yes defending your faith is fine, but to me these article read more like they are written by a pharisee.

I hear the whole, if you don't like it, don't read it. I just seems there is some sort of assumption a number of Catholic bloggers are operating on that I can't grasp. Sitting around and explaining why other people are so bad bad bad passes as spirituality? I feel like the message is 'take this religious doctrine and choke on it' and I just can't see how that brings people closer to God.



JENNY

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 2:33 pm

I am confused by your continued participation here in this space, but obviously something I'm writing is resonating with you, and "who am I to judge?" if that's the case.

Glad you've got me all figured out 😊



KATHLEEN

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 3:26 pm

Laura, how do you know Jenny doesn't have a personal story that involves the dangerous effects of porn? How do you know she hasn't struggled with contraception? Just because she doesn't share a personal story for each of the posts in this series, doesn't mean she hasn't struggled with that issue personally. Jenny is a blogger and puts her life out there for the world to read, but she's also allowed privacy. Just because she hasn't written it, doesn't mean it hasn't happened. I have zero inside knowledge, in fact, I don't know Jenny at all. I'm just saying: we all have crosses we carry, we all have pasts, we all have weaknesses, so let's not assume Jenny has never struggled with any of the topics she writes about. We don't know what her personal struggles are. In fact I encourage you to read some of her archives

Catholics often refer to our faith as “faith of our fathers”. Our faith is handed down, generation to generation. In fact, most of what I know about my faith I have not learned in the classroom, or sitting in the pew. I learn from intellectual discussions like these. Laura, I’m sure if you put 10 random Catholics in a room together, it would be very unlikely that all 10 would be able to identify the core teachings of the Catholic church and further defend them. So just because this blog may seem like the Catholics are all gathering around the fire to blast those who don’t believe what we believe, I’m afraid that is a gross misunderstanding. I would guess that a good number of people who read this blog, even if they’re Catholic, don’t fully understand why the Church teaches what it does.

I love my faith and I never want to stop learning about it. I never want to stop growing spiritually. That is why I read blogs like Jenny’s. It’s not “sitting around and explaining why other people are so bad bad bad.” That couldn’t be further from the truth for me. I read & comment to understand more deeply why the Church I love so much believes and teaches what she does (key word begin “teach” because Jesus was a teacher). I could care less what decisions other people make in the privacy of their own homes, because, let’s face it, the majority of what Jenny is talking about in this series happens behind the bedroom door, and that is between that person and God. None of my business; I’m just working on myself.

I think your impression to “take this religious doctrine and choke on it” is misunderstood. Once upon a time I was pro-choice. Once upon a time I contracepted. Once upon a time I did a lot of things the Church frowned up. Then the Holy Spirit got to work in my heart and one by one, without even realizing it, I started to examine the Church’s teachings: why the Church teaches what she does, and bit by bit my heart started to soften and accept the Church’s teachings. The result was I was drawn closer to God and I didn’t even know how much I needed Him in my life. It wasn’t an overnight thing. Not at all. This took years. And I’m still learning. I still struggle with some teachings of the Church, but I also will not stop trying to understand why she teaches what she does.

And that is why, discussions like these, among Catholics and non Catholics alike, can “bring people closer to God,” as you put it. I hope that helps.



LPATTER

October 21, 2014 at 3:29 pm

Reply

Laura – hi. I’m glad you’re reading if these issues resonate with you, as they have with me for so many years. At some times in the past I’ve found the Church’s teaching puzzling, maddening, or just plain too difficult to recommend. I sometimes balk at things bloggers post when “explaining” Church teaching because it’s a matter of taking something that is articulated objectively and applying it in a more subjective tone and space, and in a way, “for” a certain audience – each voice sounds different to a different reader in a different place with differing backgrounds and perspectives. At the end of the day, I think the best thing to do is to go to the Church Herself, read Her words, and try to understand in what way Her Motherly Love is proposing an objective – yet personal – path to peace and harmony both for the individual and the world. Taking a step back first – asking “what is the vision here?” – helps me so much when I’m tempted to feel judged or irritated. People like Jenny – and so many others – do those of us a great service who want to chew (gnaw) on



saying is that the great personal offense you are taking with Jenny might not be needed. Catholicism itself offers such a range of voices and helps to those who sincerely seek the Truth and understanding about the revelation of Christ and moral path He proposes to all those who desire to “live in Him.” I hope that your ill feelings here won’t keep you from seeking more answers and insights on your journey. Peace be with you.



KATHLEEN

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 4:06 pm

Good point. Well said.



EW

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 6:00 pm

Remember, Laura, that two of the spiritual works of mercy outlined by the Church are to ADMONISH the sinner and to instruct the ignorant. It is never pleasant to be admonished, but correction is important in every area of life. Also, please remember that not all judgement amounts to proselytizing. Did Jesus say to the money lenders as he was dumping over their tables, “Hey, dudes, not cool. Maybe you should stop and consider the possibility that what you’re doing offends God, as long as it doesn’t make you too uncomfortable”? No, He laid into them. There is no mercy without justice, and glossing over things in the name of not offending people is an offense in itself.



KATHLEEN

Reply

October 21, 2014 at 3:39 pm

Laura, one additional thought for what it’s worth. I think what you may be referring to is Jenny seems prideful. Or I’ve heard the term “triumphal Catholics”. These people do exist. They make me nuts!! I am with you. But I don’t think Jenny falls into that category, not even close. That’s one of the reasons I read her blog. Again, I don’t know Jenny, but I have been reading her a while and it’s my impression that she understands we cannot restore and reconcile hurting souls while simultaneously beating them over the head with proclamations of our Catholic rightness. I guess I can see the misunderstanding if you recently happened upon her blog, but it’s my opinion that’s not the case at all.



EMY

Reply

October 23, 2014 at 11:38 pm

“...she understands we cannot restore and reconcile hurting souls while simultaneously beating them over the head with proclamations of our Catholic rightness.” I wholeheartedly agree, which is why I keep coming back. I’m a fairly liberal-minded person, and when reading about each of these issues, I see the faces

opposed to other bloggers/"triumphal Catholics" that leave me feeling hopeless and ashamed). It's OK to be in the muck of it, figuring things out. It's OK to question, and it's OK for Jenny to share some of the answers she's found (or rather, the Church's answers...and this is all speculation, as I don't know her, either!). It doesn't make it easy, but I'm not sure "easy" is a good expectation to have!



CHRIS

October 21, 2014 at 7:22 pm

Reply

Wow, these are complicated and deeply personal issues that your commenters tackle.... I just wanted to say how much I am enjoying ( and learningfrom) your series. Thank you for having the courage to take on such issues!

I'm a cradle and still practicing catholic, but do not know the details around many of the topics about which you have been writing....so wonderful to read clear, concise and sometimes humorous, tongue in cheek thoughts!

About divorce...I could not agree more with your post .....the only issue I have and there IS no answer is that sometimes due to abuse, divorce has to be the choice. I have seen too too many times when this is the case. Staying often brings terrible and dangerous consequences. Leaving means you are now breaking your covenant with the Lord....just my thoughts on a very difficult situation:)

Thank you ...:)

~~Chris



CAROLYN

October 21, 2014 at 8:07 pm

Reply

Chris, the Church does say that there are circumstances where staying in the marriage is impossible and separation is the best solution (to paraphrase). I have a family member that is going through such a thing now. We need to keep in mind that legal separation and (civil) divorce is a last-ditch solution, if you can even consider it that, and a person who has divorced but has not remarried or otherwise broken their marital vows are NOT sinning.

Unfair? Perhaps, but I can tell you that there's a world of difference watching family that has separated/divorced and entered new relationships vs. the family member that HAD to leave due to circumstance but has not divorced, has sole custody and otherwise focuses entirely on being a parent to her children. It's like night and day. It's still not ideal, but those kids are not having to deal with new boyfriends/girlfriends and stepsiblings coming into the scene, their home life has stablized and they are thriving. Not that the other kids from the other families are doing poorly necessarily, but it's just different.

REBECCA WEBS

October 22, 2014 at 1:48 am

Reply

believe he can help me i only give him a try that is how i got pregnant with the help of this great man the great Dr Lawrence he is really powerful you can contact him for any kind of problem i believe he has the power to help you i so much trust in him you can contact him on his direct email [Drlawrencespelltemple@hotmail.com](mailto:Drlawrencespelltemple@hotmail.com)



KATIE AMRHEIN

Reply

October 22, 2014 at 2:01 am

Hi Jenny! I have been reading your blog and am really enjoying it. You are truly a gifted writer and are using your talents to articulately and eloquently explain the Church's positions on some pretty big topics. The more I learn about my Catholic faith the more I am amazed by its wisdom. It is very humbling. Thank you so much this. God bless you and your beautiful family!



KATIE AMRHEIN

Reply

October 22, 2014 at 2:30 am

P.S: I just read through all the comments now... Kathleen you beautifully explained your journey and I think so many people would identify with what you wrote. Laura, everyone has a bunch of 'stuff' they are working on. No one is perfect, we all have our flaws. I have found though, that my Catholic faith has been a tremendous guide. How can I become a better wife, mother, friend overall person if I don't reflect on my decisions, actions, choices, etc. How can I identify my flaws, what I need to work on if I don't know what they are? Essentially, what is right from wrong? God's mercy is amazing. His love for us... is incredible. He is always calling us to be closer to Him. He is waiting for us to respond. He will not violate your free will. The Church is a guide that helps lead us away from the traps that our culture glamorizes. The Church leads us to a closer relationship to Our Lord. I have found so much peace and joy in my faith and I pray that you will too.

CATHOLICS DO WHAT? (21 DAYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S TEACHINGS ON SEX AND MARRIAGE) - MAMA NEEDS COFFEE

Reply

July 13, 2015 at 9:29 pm

[...] Day 13: Suffer the children: the high cost of divorce [...]

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