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"I Try To Listen"

I am a midwife. For the past 16 years I've worked in a primary care center in a small town near Malaga, Spain.

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A midwife's work has many facets: monitoring pregnancies, giving classes before and after childbirth, visiting mothers prior to delivery, etc. I also provide information, for those who are interested, on natural family planning.

Much confusion surrounds this profession but, thank God, the Christian upbringing my parents gave me and the formation I receive from Opus Dei (I'm an associate in the Work) enable me to give a ray of hope to many people who come to see me in truly agonizing situations.

Sometimes I see mothers with deep psychological scars because bad advice led them to an abortion in moments of confusion. Their remorse is a terrible burden that devastates them day after day and causes them anguish: "There is no pardon for me. I'll never forgive myself for what I've done," a woman on the verge of tears recently told me.

I try to listen and console. Most of the women are Catholics who have lost touch with God, whether out of ignorance or for some other reason, so I encourage them to come back to

him, seek his forgiveness and go to confession. For I'm convinced—I've seen it happen over and over again—that it's only when they realize they've been pardoned and reconciled with God that they can forgive themselves and recover hope.

I know what will happen

Often people invite me to speak about these matters in discussion groups or health centers. Although my time is limited, I try to go as often as I can because I know what will happen.

What happens is that almost always, when we finish, a woman asks to speak with me alone about a private matter. The last time I was in a discussion about abortion, a young girl approached me and said she had an appointment at an abortion clinic but wanted to talk with me before going.

I listened to her for a long time in silence, letting her unburden herself. When she finished I told her I understood how difficult her situation was, but that all I could do was inform her that what she had decided on was the worst thing she could do. I advised her to ask St. Josemaría for the strength to have that child.

I heard nothing more from her for quite some time. Later I learned that she had given birth not just to that child but to two more, and had decided to begin practising her Christian faith once again. Now she has a large family and goes to an Opus Dei center to receive Christian formation.

More yours than mine

Thank God, such cases are not rare. The other day a patient I vaguely recalled came in with a five-day-old daughter in her arms. "Take her," she

told me, "this child is yours. I brought her in so you could meet her, for she is more yours than mine."

Then I recalled who she was, a young girl with whom I had spoken at length several months earlier. She had been absolutely determined to have an abortion, so determined that her bag was packed and she was ready to leave home with her young son, abandoning her husband.

I had tried to help her gain confidence in God and in herself. I told her that the child she saw now as an obstacle to her personal plans would, on the contrary, be the great solution to all her difficulties. I assured her that if she would abandon herself into God's hands, he would help her.

"You were right," she said. "God has helped me—and how! All the problems I had with my husband

were resolved; and he's crazy about his little daughter."

Not everyone who comes to me is a mother. Once a man came in asking where his wife could have an abortion. I told him that my profession was about bringing lives into the world, not eliminating them. He got mad and left.

A short while later he came back, insisting more strongly. It was an ugly scene, with more tension than before. All I could do was confront him, calmly and clearly, telling him that he had come to the wrong place. He continued insisting and became angry, so I told him once again that my hands only work for life and never for death. I wasn't able to convince him. Our conversation was so disagreeable that when he left my hands were shaking.

A few days later he came back. Just seeing him made me nervous, until

he explained that he had come to apologize for his boorish conduct and to thank me for having spoken with him so clearly. "What about your wife?" I asked. "Ah, she's doing very well," he said. "She's very happy we decided to go ahead with the pregnancy."

Heroic conduct

Often I see people behave in a way that I can only call heroic. For example, a pregnant mother who already had a child with Down Syndrome came to see me. I helped her all I could with her second pregnancy, which was quite complicated. She steadily declined special tests because she was determined to accept joyfully the child God was sending her, healthy or not.

I had the joy of holding her child for the first time, for it was a cesarean delivery. It was a beautiful boy,

perfectly healthy. I saw no more of her until seven years later when we passed on the street. "Look," the boy's mother said to her son, "this is the lady who was the first one to hold you in her arms when you were born." "Really?" he answered. "Is this the one you always ask me to pray for?"

Dramatic circumstances

I often see young people in dramatic circumstances. Once a girl came to tell me that the father of the child she was expecting had AIDS. She had become pregnant thinking, mistakenly, that this would help him and had even gone to another city to live with him. But when the father understood her situation, he left her. Now she found herself alone, abandoned by everyone and very confused, thinking about an abortion. She refused any test to find out whether she herself had

contracted the disease. All she could do was cry.

The pediatrician and I helped her all we could, and she had a perfectly normal girl. Now and then she brings her daughter to me, saying, "Pick her up; she's really 'your daughter.' I brought her for you to see her." By now she has restarted her life, married, and has another child. She thanks God that we helped her become a mother at that terrible time. "If you hadn't done what you did," she said, "my life would have been scarred forever."