

ANY ONE TO LISTEN TO MY STORY ?

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What shall I do now?

Actually, I did not do anything wrong at all. I am committed to my religious teachings and regularly take part in all church activities. I try to abide by parental guidelines and customary traditions in my day-to-day living, though I cannot claim to be a perfect human being. I have never had sex 'cause I'm still young and Mummy used to say, "Sex outside marriage is a sin." And I am not yet ready for marriage but now, who will marry me, i.e. when everybody gets to know that I'm HIV^{ve}. Perhaps, the best thing is to keep the knowledge to myself. But would it be right and moral?

I have never taken drugs though many times, I've tempted to do so. Wanted to please my friends and be one with them but Dad's words would come haunting, "Remember Son, drugs will drug and suck you out and out till you'll be nothing. Try once and you'll be hooked for life." No sex and no drugs and yet I'm afflicted by this virus. But who'll understand?

My problem is how to tell, when to tell and whom to tell 'cause I'm not sure if anyone will believe me and then what will happen to me. I've seen it happen to my friends. **It's not so much the physical suffering caused by the HIV virus and its consequences, viz. AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome) but the psycho-social trauma of being stigmatized, discriminated, denied even by the very loved ones and portals of faith and religion – supposedly, the last resort of refuge and strength . (ps.46:01)**

Somewhere I've read that religion **frees and unites**. It might have been a Conference Theme or something. I don't exactly remember but the writing was good. However, most probably, the freedom and unity that religion is supposed to bring must have ended with the meeting of religious leaders and the learned otherwise, our world would have been different. We would have been free to tell what happened to us without any fear of being misunderstood. And perhaps the process of remedial and not coercive action would have been initiated with the cooperation of all – religious workers, social activists, those in government, nurses and doctors - we would have shared our experiences, shortcomings, shortfall, inadequacies and together take up corrective measures, i.e. where ever the lacunae exists.

I wanted understanding and counseling from the church? But it's hopeless. I'm told it cannot change its rule of discipline against person who commit fornication and /adultery. Why would people till date, still associate a person living with AIDS as being sexually promiscuous? **Don't they keep up with the latest news or do they conveniently ignore them so that they can go on condemning, ostracizing and discipline wrongly. Perhaps it's their habit and culture, I don't know; I'm confused.** But wasn't it King David who wrote, "Blessed is the man who does not... sit in the seat of mockers..." (Ps.01:01)

From what you've read ahead, you might think that I'm ungrateful and cynical. I can't help it if my fellow beings and co-sinners do not change their attitude toward me and my fraternity. Yes, it cannot be denied that all people are not bad, that many are sympathetic and quite understanding but at the same time, they are so condescending and patronizing! It really puts one off. Forgive me for being so blunt.

Whose fault is it any way? Surely not mine! But more of that later. For now, tell me what should I do? How do I go about it ?