

Day 3

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

We like to think of our world as free of slaves. We have come so far since the time of the slave trade, since the time of the Emancipation Proclamation. We respect all cultures and live in Southern California—a region so heterogeneous that virtually every neighborhood looks like a United Nations convention. So, how could we possibly have slaves in the twenty-first century?

MODERN SLAVE TRADERS

Today's slaves are not as easy to spot as those of past centuries. Slavery today exists under the name "human trafficking", and it happens in every country, to people of every race and background and socio-economic situation. Today's slaves live in the shadows, in a life of servitude that goes virtually unrecognized by most of us.

The UN International Labor Organization provides some

shocking statistics on the prevalence of human trafficking worldwide: Of the 21 million victims of trafficking and human slavery worldwide (both sex trafficking and labor trafficking),

11.4 million are women and girls, and 9.5 million are men and boys.

Of all trafficking victims, 4.5 million are victims of forced sexual exploitation. 98% of these are women and girls.

Forced labor generates \$150 billion in illegal profits per year. Trafficked teens are worth \$500,000 per year to a trafficker—money that elicits ruthless strategies to trick unwitting victims.



Children aged 17 years and below represent 26 percent of total victims, representing a total of 5.5 million child victims worldwide. 1 in 6 of the 18,500 runaways reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children in 2016 were likely sex trafficking

victims. 86% of these likely sex trafficking victims were in the care of social services or foster care when they went missing. The NCMEC also operates a service for people to report instances of suspected child sexual exploitation. In 2016 this service received 8.2 million reports, most of which related to apparent child sexual abuse images, online enticement, child sex trafficking, and child sexual molestation.

Los Angeles is one of the top three points of entry into this country for victims of slavery and trafficking. The diverse communities of this sprawling city make it easier to hide and move victims from place to place, making it very difficult for law enforcement to locate potential survivors.

Law enforcement in Las Vegas believes that trafficking and slavery in the “Sin City” has increased because of advertisements that encourage people to “sin all they can” while in Vegas – without anyone needing to find out.

WHAT IS TRAFFICKING?

Human trafficking is a horrific crime against the fundamental rights and dignity of the human person. The United Nations Protocol on Human Trafficking defines it as “the “recruitment, transportation, harboring or receipt of persons by means of force, fraud or coercion.” Essentially, this means that human trafficking victims are taken, either by force (abduction) or by coercion (false promises) to work for little or no pay and are not allowed their freedom.

Here in the United States, traffickers look for victims online. They often pose as attractive young men and prey on teens’ desire to be loved and seen as attractive. Closely following the rules of never providing your full name, address or phone number online is critical. Still, traffickers are savvy. The most important rules are to NEVER agree to meet someone that you only know online, ask questions, and if something seems strange, either online or in-person, tell a trusted adult immediately or get law enforcement involved.

Trafficking occurs when someone takes you with the promise of giving you a job or offering you marriage by using coercion, fraud, deception and force. It is modern-day slavery and traffickers will not hesitate to harm you and your family. Sex trafficking occurs any time a victim is asked or forced to have sex for money.

What many people don’t know is that the vast majority of porn “actors” are actually trafficking victims, or slaves. These women and men are forced to perform horrific actions for other people’s pleasure. You would never consider walking past a slave being beaten by his master without trying to stop that, right? Well, watching porn is pretty much the same thing.

Victims of trafficking are often placed in unsafe or illegal living or working conditions. Far from home, traffickers or employers force women and children into prostitution, sweatshop labor or other illegal activities. Other times, sex trafficked girls and young women may still live at home but be trafficked at night and on weekends by pimps who threaten her family if she tries to get away.



Many people ask why more victims don’t attempt to escape if they are being held against their will. Imagine a victim’s situation – their oppressor has threatened to come after them or their family if they attempt to escape. Human

traffickers are clever. They often “groom” their targets with false promises of protection or love, and then hold them captive and manipulate them emotionally.

If a victim does successfully escape, it is important that they find help right away. They may have limited language skills, unfamiliarity with the area, or poor physical and mental

health due to their enslavement. If they are left helpless on the streets, they will be vulnerable to falling prey to their traffickers once again. With no money, possibly no documents to prove their citizenship, and no contacts or resources, they may be unable to get themselves out of their situation.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Most people will tell you that hate is the opposite of love. Actually, it is not. Pope St. John Paul II wrote and spoke extensively on the fact that “use” and not “hate” is the opposite of love. When we use another person for our own personal gain, we are not respecting that person for the being they are created to be—an individual loved into existence by God and destined for eternal life.



Slavery in any form is a drastic version of use. But, it is not the only version. How does someone become a trafficker? It seems so heinous to us, yet this behavior must come from somewhere. The desire to use another person begins when we are young—it can be an innocent-seeming endeavor. You can use your friend for what he or she can give you—a weekend at their cabin or entrance to a party. Another time you might use someone because they can get you drugs or are willing to have sex with you.

The jump to enslaving someone for either physical or monetary gratification is extreme—but it is a continuation of a habit of not treating other people with the respect they are due simply by being a member of the human family.

WHY DO PEOPLE DESERVE RESPECT?

“Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1934).



What does this mean? It means that every single one of us has been created out of love by God and sustained in love every day. Jesus came to offer salvation to each person equally. Using someone means we think we are better than they are. It is essentially telling God,

“I don’t care that you created, love, and died for this person. I want to treat her or him however I want, so that it makes me happy, regardless of what it does to him or her.”

This means that not only do we have an individual dignity that other people should respect—we must radically respect and love others. We believe that God is Trinity. This means that the Three Divine Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—exist in relationship with each other. It is from the love of the Father and the Son that the Holy Spirit comes forth. If God is a communion of love, and we are made in His image, then this means that we all have a vocation to love. Those who participate in human trafficking violate both their own call to love and the inherent dignity of the people that they traffick (Compendium of Social Doctrine 34).

WHAT FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Human trafficking is an underground business, making firm statistics hard to come by. But the facts in cases that come to light are chilling. For example, in 2017, two Los Angeles men were arrested for being a part of a sex trafficking ring that brings young women and girls from Central and Northern California to the San Fernando Valley, Burbank and West Hollywood. The predators were able to lure the women, some as young as 15, into the commercial sex trade using the internet and phone apps.

Economics and human trafficking are very much intertwined. While there are more and more organizations working to help victims leave slavery and re-enter the world,

relatively few international organizations effectively target specific root causes or seriously attempt to stop the demand for trafficking victims.

Human trafficking is an attack not only on human dignity, but also on Christ's work to bring about the Kingdom of God. We are called to seek a new social order in which there are adequate solutions to material poverty and the weakest are not prevented from freeing themselves from conditions of misery and slavery (Compendium of Social Doctrine 325). In doing so, we help restore to the world what was destroyed because of Original Sin, and foreshadow the perfection that Jesus Christ will bring about at the end of time.

