

PORNOGRAPHY: THE SCOURGE OF OUR TIMES

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

25 October 2009

There is a matter, which I have wanted to address for a long time. And it's something about which we should be speaking more about particularly during Pro-Life Month because it has become "one of the most pernicious, widespread elements of the 'culture of death.'"¹ And it is providential that happened to choose this weekend to speak about. Just two days ago, when I did an Internet search to verify one of the facts, I accidentally discovered that this Sunday is the beginning of "pornography awareness week."

Pornography was once a shameful vice of the few but with the explosion of the Internet in the last few decades it has become "mainstream entertainment for the many."² Leading experts in the field of sexual addictions contend that on-line sexual activity is "a hidden public health hazard exploding, in part because very few are recognizing it as such or taking it seriously."³ In a twenty-page 2006 pastoral letter the Bishop of Arlington, Virginia, Paul Loverde wrote, "This plague stalks the souls of men, women and children, ravages the bonds of marriage and victimizes the most innocent among us. It obscures and destroys people's ability to see one another as unique and beautiful expressions of God's creation, instead darkening their vision, causing them to view others as objects to be used and manipulated."⁴

It used to be that our culture was essentially a moral culture in which most people, Catholics and non-Catholics, guided their lives according to the fundamental principles of sound morality. We know that no one is perfect and that we all have a tendency to sin,

but people used to have a much greater sense of Christian morality in their daily lives. For the most part, they tried to act morally and if they didn't, they usually recognized their immoral actions for what they were and didn't try to justify it, or even glamorize it, as so many do today.

And as part of this internal sense of morality people often felt an instinctive aversion to pornography. As a point in case, let me relate to you a story, which my grandmother told me many years ago about her father. She told me about how one day a friend of her father came to visit. The friend showed my great-grandfather what they used to call a "dirty picture" but instead of savoring it, he threw it on the ground in disgust, stomped on it with his boot and ordered the man to leave his property at once. And I'm sure that whatever that early twentieth-century picture was, it probably wasn't even anywhere near as revealing as some of the things that you can now see on the magazine racks of your local grocery store.

Now, think for a moment about how many men would react that way today—even good upstanding Catholic men. Photography far more revealing than in my great-grandfather's day has become so commonplace that it has become a part of our culture, which many people don't even question. It's everywhere! As I said, there's even borderline soft porn at the check out in the grocery store—and no one bats an eyelash. Everyone, who has a computer at their disposal, can access anything at any time. Pornography has become so all pervading in our culture that it's sometimes even hard to avoid just by driving down the highway.

But the easy accessibility of pornography on the Internet in the privacy of one's own home has turned this problem into an epidemic. Far from being innocent

entertainment, it is a grave offence against God and those He created in His image. It violates chastity. It is an offence against justice because those in the films and photographs become merely objects of depraved pleasure and profit for others. The pornography industry generates more revenue than all the major television networks combined. It brings in more revenue than professional football, basketball, and baseball combined.⁵ And it wouldn't be making all of that money if a lot of people weren't doing it. It leads to sexual abuse, violence, psychological trauma and ruptured relationships. Far from being a victimless crime, pornography "exploits its subjects, dehumanizes its viewers and inflicts significant damages on families, especially spouses and children."⁶

Pornography use has no favorites or boundaries. It is found among all walks of life, among young and old alike, among all faiths, including Catholics. It can be found among liberal and conservative Catholics, progressive and traditional Catholics, among dissenting, as well as orthodox Catholics and homeschool families. It can be found within the ranks of Protestant ministers, Jewish rabbis and Catholic priests, seminarians and even a few bishops. And although pornography is predominantly a male phenomenon, it can also be found among women. "Forty million U.S. adults regularly visit Internet pornography websites."⁷ It is a scourge that knows absolutely no boundaries.

Pornography is so devastating for the health of our already troubled society because it undermines the foundations of marriage and families by "[changing] the way men and women treat one another in sometimes dramatic but often subtle ways."⁸ It is a distortion of the truth about human sexuality, reducing what should be the expression of a married couple's intimate union of love, to merely "a demeaning source of entertainment and even profit for others."⁹ It immerses a man into an illusionary fantasy world, in

which he turns his attention and affection away from his wife, who begins to feel that she isn't interesting enough for her husband.¹⁰ He conceals and denies it, so she feels betrayed. Pornography drives a wedge between the two by undermining the trust and intimacy that should exist between them. And if the use of pornography is not curtailed and these feelings of rejection and betrayal not healed, it often leads to the permanent destruction of a marriage.¹¹ But none of this should be a surprise to anyone because the use of pornography within marriage violates the marital commitment, which a man and a woman make to each other on their wedding day.¹² Jesus said, "everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart?"¹³

But the spiritual and psychological damage of pornography can even begin long before marriage. Curiosity entices many young people into its web and before they realize it, they can't get out. The consumerist view of sexuality that pornography promotes makes it difficult to prepare for married fidelity.¹⁴ So, by engaging in what they consider harmless sexual entertainment young people are actually handicapping their chances of enjoying healthy and enduring relationships.

Children are also affected by pornography within the home. The more time a parent spends on the Internet, even if it's innocent legitimate websites, the less time he spends with his children. The user usually leaves bookmarks on the computer raising the risk that certain websites will be discovered by the children. And sons often follow in their father's footsteps, unwittingly perpetuating the father's sins into the next generation. But more seriously, because of the damage that pornography inflicts upon marriages, children often end up the victims of separation and divorce.¹⁵ No man enters into the dark

realm of pornography with the intent of becoming addicted, ruining his family or losing his soul. But it happens.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us that “Man finds his perfection ‘in seeking and loving what is true and good’ ”¹⁶ However, there are things that we sometimes choose, which appear good but are not the true good. They are only an “apparent good”—something that only appears to be good but really isn’t. And if a culture’s values are distorted, a person can begin to look on the real good (in this case chastity) as an apparent good, while looking at the apparent good (pornography) as the real good. This is the basis of all sin. As I heard a priest once say in a homily many years ago: “Sin feels good, and that’s why we do it.” In short, pornography feels good—but that doesn’t make it right.

What we need today more than anything else are strong, virtuous men, especially as fathers. Instead, pornography has crippled the ability of so many of them to spiritually protect themselves and their families. It has ensnared countless Catholic men and spiritually neutralized them. Pornography is nothing less than a raging spiritual battle for souls that has confused modern man about the true meaning of sexuality, manhood and masculinity. We have to engage the enemy head on and not be seduced by his deceptions. At stake is nothing less than our souls.

25 October 2009
St. Peter’s in Volo (6:00 p.m., 8:00 & 9:30 a.m.)

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¹ Suprenant, Leon, “Who’s Hiding in the Closet Now?: What Catholics Must Do to Combat the Homosexual Agenda,” From the September/October 2008 Issue of *Lay Witness Magazine*. (http://www.cuf.org/laywitness/Online_view.asp?lwID=1768)

² Quote from Bishop Paul Loverde’s pastoral letter “Bought With a Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God.” Manetto, Nick, “Scorn for porn—American bishop’s pastoral letter is latest Catholic effort,” 14 December 2006 (http://www.catholic.org/national/national_story.php?id=22345)

³ Manning, Jill C., "Pornography's Impact on Marriage & The Family," Testimony of Jill C. Manning before the Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Property Rights Committee on Judiciary, United States Senate, November 9, 2005. (<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/tst111405a.cfm>).

⁴ Quote from Bishop Loverde." Manetto, "Scorn for porn."

⁵ Suprenant, Leon, "Men of Valor," 30 October 2007. (<http://www.cufblog.org/?p=152>)

⁶ Manetto, "Scorn for porn."

⁷ Suprenant, "Who's Hiding".

⁸ Quote from Bishop Paul Loverde's pastoral letter "Bought With a Price: Pornography and the Attack on the Living Temple of God." Flynn, Fr. John, "Pornography Plague: Bishops Concerned Over Effects on Society and Marriage," 10 December 2006 (<http://www.zenit.org/english/visualizza.phtml?sid=99652>).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Flynn, "Pornography Plague."

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Matthew 5:28.

¹⁴ Flynn, "Pornography Plague."

¹⁵ Manning, "Pornography's Impact."

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1704.