

**CREATED FOR LOVE, CREATED FOR CHASTITY***A Pastoral Response to the Grave Evil of Pornography*

*Message
of the
Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines
on the occasion of the opening of the
Lenten Season 2016*

Our brothers and sisters in Christ:

One of the astonishing revelations of the Gospel is that every human person is created for both human and divine love, because every human person is made for a Triune God who is infinite mercy and love: "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life."¹ This is our great vocation, to enjoy the friendship of God and of our neighbor, whether he is a friend or a stranger, in God.

In this life, we realize this call by growing in charity, the theological virtue that empowers and transforms us into the likeness of Christ himself so that we can love God, our neighbors, and ourselves, as God himself loves us.² In the life to come, we will be perfected in this vocation when God so elevates us that we will be able to see him face to face.³ On that day when we directly experience God, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn. 3:2).

As Jesus Christ revealed through his life and especially through his death on the Cross, true and divine love is the sacrificial yet fruitful gift of self: "The clearest proof of the reliability of Christ's love is to be found in his dying for our sake. If laying down one's life for one's friends is the greatest proof of love (cf. Jn 15:13), Jesus offered his own life for all, even for his enemies, to transform their hearts."⁴

Each of us is called by Christ to live and to experience and express this kind of self-less love: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Each of us is called to give himself away in service of God and of neighbor. This is the only road to authentic fullness and happiness: "Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."⁵

As Pope St. John Paul II taught in his theology of the body, this God-given vocation to self-gift in communion is inscribed in our bodies as masculine and feminine: "The body, which through its own masculinity or femininity right from the beginning helps both to find themselves in communion of persons, becomes, in a particular way, the constituent element of their union, when they

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, §1.

² CCC, §§1822-1829.

³ CCC, §1045.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, §16.

⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, §24.



become husband and wife.”⁶ Our bodies reveal that we come from another and were made for another. They reveal that our sexuality is a beautiful gift from God that is ordered towards the perfection of our vocation to love.

Created for Chastity

Because we are created for love, we are also created for chastity. Chastity involves “the successful integration of sexuality within the person.”⁷ A chaste person masters his desires for sexual pleasure so that he can experience and live relationships that are true, good, and beautiful. Chastity helps him to recognize and to acknowledge the profound truth that our sexuality is ordered primarily to the love of husband and wife in marriage. It also affirms that every human person is made in the image and likeness of God and as such can never be used merely for our own sexual gratification.

“The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behavior that would impair it. It tolerates neither a double life nor duplicity in speech.”⁸

Chastity takes time to attain, and often, only after a struggle, but it is an integral and necessary ingredient of authentic love. As Pope Francis has emphatically taught: “All of us in life have gone through moments in which this virtue has been very difficult, but it is in fact the way of genuine love, of a love that is able to give life, which does not seek to use the other for one’s own pleasure. It is a love that considers the life of the other person sacred.”⁸ Chastity demands self-mastery not in order to repress but to bring to perfection our ability to love truly as Christ himself loves us.

The Corruption and Evil of Pornography

Pornography “consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties.”⁹ It includes visual images, written texts, and audio conversations, created to arouse the erotic desires of others.

Pornography is a grave evil that offends against chastity because it perverts and undermines the marriage act, the sexual intimate self-giving of husband and wife to each other, which should be enjoyed as a personal and private gift from God.¹⁰ It does grave injury to the dignity of all involved, performers, consumer, producers, and distributors, since each is dehumanized by an industry that exists solely to objectify persons for illicit profit.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, “Marriage, One and Indissoluble in the First Chapters of Genesis,” General Audience, Vatican City, November 21, 1979.

⁷ CCC, §2337. ⁸ CCC, 2338.

⁸ Pope Francis, “Pastoral Visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to Turin: Meeting with Children and Young People,” June 21, 2015.

⁹ CCC, §2354.

¹⁰ Ibid.



First, pornography harms the performers in the sex industry, even when they have given their consent to their immoral activities. It reduces them from persons made in the image and likeness of God who have been created for love, into mere sexual objects who are bought, sold, and used by others for sexual gratification.

And in the process, it stunts their emotional development and wounds their hearts, making it difficult for them to enter into the life-giving relationships of mutual trust and respect for which they were made. Not insignificantly, sex performers also face physical harm, sex abuse, and sexually transmitted infections.¹¹

Next, pornography harms the consumer by sabotaging his or her ability to develop intimate and authentic relationships. It encourages men and women to objectify others so that they no longer see them as individually unique and valuable. It promotes and advances a distorted view of human sexuality, which is often linked to violence, abuse, and the victimization of others, especially of women. It makes consumers, slaves to lust, which is the “disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure.”¹²

Pornography is especially harmful for children and young people who are beginning to discover their vocation to love and to be loved, because it makes it difficult for them to enter fully into the self-giving relationship of mutual trust, sacrifice, and respect that is necessary for marriage. Empirical studies have shown that prolonged exposure to pornography in young people not only makes them cynical about love, marriage, and child raising, but is also correlated with high-risk sexual behaviors that put them at peril for sexually transmitted diseases.¹³

In his Lenten Message for 2014, Pope Francis included pornography among the many vices that can damage the family: “How much pain is caused in families because one of their members — often a young person — is in thrall to alcohol, drugs, gambling or pornography.”¹⁴¹⁵ Even the occasional use of pornography can lead to addiction, both of which can injure marriages and destroy families because they undermine the trust and exclusive intimacy that binds a husband and a wife together.

¹¹ C. Rodriguez-Hart, R.A. Chitale, R. Rigg, B.Y. Goldstein, P.R. Kerndt, and P. Tavrow, “Sexually transmitted infection testing of adult film performers: Is disease being missed?” *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* 39 (2012): 989-994; and C.R. Grudzen, D. Meeker, J. Torres, Q. Du, R.M. Andersen, and L. Gelberg, “HIV and STI risk behaviors, knowledge, and testing among female adult film performers as compared to other California women,” *AIDS and Behavior* 17 (2013): 517-522.

¹² CCC, §2351.

¹³ D. Zillmann, “Influence of unrestrained access to erotica on adolescents’ and young adults’ dispositions toward sexuality,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27 (2000): 41-44; and D.K. Braun-Courville and M. Rojas, “Exposure to Sexually Explicit Web Sites and Adolescent Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 45 (2009): 156-162.

¹⁴ Pope Francis, “Lenten Message of our Holy Father Francis, 2014,” December 23,

¹⁵ . Available at

https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/lent/documents/papafrancesco_20131226_messaggio-quaresima2014.html.



Finally, pornography corrupts its producers and distributors. It turns them into callous exploiters who take advantage of the emotional, psychological, and economic vulnerabilities of sex performers and consumers for profit and gain. It is particularly heinous when it makes them complicit in the crimes of child abuse and human trafficking. In the end, pornography blinds everyone to the true beauty and meaning of human sexuality.

For all these reasons, pornography is a grave evil that attacks and undermines not only the individual person but also the common good. As such, producing, distributing, and using pornography are serious sins against chastity and human dignity that need to be confessed to obtain God's pardon and mercy. They are immoral and harmful not only in themselves, but also because they often lead individuals to commit other grave sins and even serious crimes that disturb the peace and unity of every society.

The Global Scourge of Pornography in the Philippines

It is a contemporary tragedy that pornography has become a pervasive social cancer, one that corrupts countless men, women, and children worldwide. It is a global scourge that has been fed by the rise of the Internet. Online, pornography is instantly accessible, apparently anonymous, and mostly free.

Data from a 2015 Study of World Internet Users and Population Statistics showed that there almost 3.3 billion internet users around the world (46% of the human population).¹⁶ In the Philippines, 47 million citizens (43% of the population) regularly use the web. Significantly, Filipino children are among the children in Asia with high access to the Internet: 82% of Filipino children use the Internet at least once a week, while 37% are online every day.¹⁷

Given the all-pervasiveness of the Internet, it should not be surprising that pornography has invaded our homes, workplaces, schools, and churches. The Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study of Filipino Youth in 2013 has revealed that 56.5% of Filipinos aged 15 to 24 years old have been exposed to pornographic videos and movies, 35.6% have been exposed to sexually explicit reading materials, and 15.5% have viewed pornographic websites.¹⁸ These young people are the future husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, of our nation, whose capacity for self-giving love has been deeply wounded. Therefore, parents must be held responsible in monitoring and supervising their children's access to the internet.

Internet pornography is a lucrative industry. Though precise statistics are unavailable, it is estimated that the global industry generates up to \$100 billion every year. Alarming, the Philippines has become a major producer and distributor of pornography, especially of child pornography, where it is now

¹⁶ Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics. Available at <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>.

¹⁷ Riza T. Olchondra, "Children influence buying patterns, poll says," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, May 24, 2012. Available at <http://business.inquirer.net/61337/childreninfluence-buying-patterns-poll-says>.

¹⁸ University of the Philippines Population Institute, *The 2013 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality (YAFS) Study in the Philippines: Key Findings*. Available at http://www.drdf.org.ph/yafs4/key_findings.



among the top ten countries for the production of online child pornography.¹⁹ One study has found that child pornography in our country is fueled by foreign and local perpetrators who are exploiting poor and vulnerable families and their children.²⁰ These are Filipino children whose innocence has been consumed for the pleasure of others.

The Restorative Power of Jesus Christ, the Face of God's Mercy

Many men, women, and children have been wounded and corrupted by pornography. They have discovered that the destructive effects of pornography on the soul are long lived and deep. The use of pornography, especially if it is addictive, is a common cause of shame and self-loathing. It wounds families, communities, and entire societies. It makes prayer difficult. Often, it is linked to other wounds, personal, psychological, and emotional, which together may seem insurmountable and unconquerable. However, in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Catholic Church in the Philippines is called once again to affirm and to proclaim the healing power of Jesus Christ, who is the face of God's mercy.²¹

To those who have been exploited and victimized by the pornography industry, nothing that you have done to you can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus! (Cf. Rom. 8:35) You remain and will always be a cherished and beloved child of God created in his image and likeness.

The Father of Mercies is waiting to forgive and to heal the wounds in your heart so that you may discover and experience authentic love. To you, we the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines pledge that we will continue to work to eradicate the grave evil of pornography from our land. Thus, the Episcopal Commission on Family and Life is tasked to consider programs against the scourge of pornography.

To those who make and distribute pornography, you should heed the stark warning of the Lord Jesus: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). However, this is the same Lord who instructed the Apostle Peter to forgive his brother not seven but seventy times seven times (Matt. 18:22).

God is calling you today to reject this industry of filth and corruption. No sin is too great to forgive, but with the help of grace, like the Prodigal Son, you must first come to your senses, arise, and return to the Father (cf. Lk. 15: 11-32). Repentance is an essential ingredient for receiving forgiveness.

To those who struggle with pornography, do not allow shame, fear, or pride, to prevent you from returning to God, the Father of Mercies, who loves you beyond all your other loves. The Gospel challenges all of us to live a life a

¹⁹ Anthony Vargas, "Online child pornography a 'cottage industry' in the Philippines," *Manila Times*, January 17, 2014. Available at <http://www.manilatimes.net/online-childpornography-a-cottage-industry-in-the-philippines/68689/>.

²⁰ Arnie C. Trinidad, *Child Pornography in the Philippines* (Manila: UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies and UNICEF, 2005). Available at http://www.unicef.org/philippines/8891_9909.html.

²¹ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, §1.



chastity. Self-mastery is a long and exacting work that can become an especially difficult challenge in a culture saturated with sexual images.²²

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* recommends several means to cultivate the virtue of chastity: self-knowledge, the practice of self-denial adapted to the situations that confront us, obedience to God's commandments, the exercise of the moral virtues, and fidelity to prayer.²³

Have recourse to the sacraments regularly, especially the sacrament of confession, to receive the strength and courage from God to help you in your trials. Entrust yourself to the patronage of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Blessed Virgin Mary, who have long been linked to the pursuit of holy chastity.²⁴

Finally, and most importantly, we are all called to rely on God's grace and power to resist and to overcome sexual temptation so that we may imitate Jesus Christ who was perfectly chaste and perfectly pure. Chastity is a virtue that is perfected by God working with us and in us. It is God who will complete what he has already begun in us.

May Mary Mother of Life, Virgin Most Pure bring us to the heart of Jesus her Son who promised that the pure of heart will be able to see God!

From the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Ash Wednesday, February 10, 2016

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²² Cf. CCC, §2342.

²³ CCC, §2340.

²⁴ The Angelic Warfare Confraternity is a supernatural fellowship of men and women bound to one another in love and dedicated to pursuing and promoting chastity together under the powerful patronage of St. Thomas Aquinas and the Blessed Virgin Mary. For details go to the website of the confraternity: <http://www.angelicwarfareconfraternity.org/>