

2018 18TH SUNDAY

On Tuesday evening I attended a talk given by Brendan Malone on Pornography. I'm glad I went. Brendan emphasised that all of us have been made in the image and likeness of God- that we all have a God-given dignity. Pornography is insidious because it objectifies us; it degrades our dignity as unique, precious human persons. Women or children come to be seen as objects for personal gratification rather than as persons to be loved and treasured. It also has a dreadful effect on all those people involved in its production; especially the actors.

I attended the talk to learn how best to minister to people sucked into the quagmire of pornography. People sometimes confess to dallying with pornography in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. What pastoral advice would be most appropriate?

Brendan spoke of exhorting afflicted persons to embrace their dignity as sons or daughters of God- a dignity which is demeaned by watching pornography. He underlined the importance of self-discipline- of immediately switching away from anything which has even the merest hint of being pornographic. He underlined the importance of ruthlessly policing what we view or read especially on social Media.

This was good advice- but I know that it is not sufficient. When a person is addicted to pornography, it has a power over a person which is almost impossible to conquer. I have grave doubts whether a person can consistently switch off pornography simply under their own strength. There is something demonic about pornography- something hugely alluring- which can only be defeated by enlisting the power of Jesus.

And I believe today's Gospel gives us a way forward.

We easily recognise that if we are to be physically strong we must eat good, nourishing food.

What is not so freely acknowledged is that if we wish to lead robust spiritual lives- lives free from all addictions and obsessions- a relationship with Jesus is of the essence. As Jesus said in today's Gospel- He, Himself- is that nourishing Food which gives a person the strength to win a victory over such evils as pornography. He, Jesus, is the Bread of Life.

A person afflicted with an obsession to pornography must turn to Jesus; humbly kneel and say: "This addiction is too hard for me to overcome alone, my Lord. Please, please help me." The person must have faith that just as Jesus overcame the power of Satan on the Cross, He will, in turn, overcome the power this demonic addiction has over them. He is the Bread of Life.

A wise person will also come to the Sacrament of Confession. In this healing Sacrament, graces are bestowed to strengthen all people in their battle against sin. When the priest places his hands over the penitent's head, he will pray for the Holy Spirit to not only grant pardon to the penitent but also peace, peace of heart. A new strength will surely be given.

Jesus is the Bread of Life

Recently a woman came to me deeply distressed over how badly her teenage daughter was treating her. She was being treated with continual defiance- day in, day out. And she was just so tired; so worn out. She was at the end of her tether.

As the woman was speaking, I felt a great compassion for her. And then she said something which lifted my heart and I knew that all was not hopeless; that all would be well.

The woman told me that last week she had done something she had never done before. In tears over another verbal barrage from her daughter, she had retreated into her bedroom. She had closed the door and then, without thinking, had gone down on her knees and begged and begged Jesus to help her. And slowly a peace came over her. She felt loved. And she knew that she was not alone.

I placed my hands above the woman's head and prayed that Jesus, the Bread of Life, would continue to strengthen my sister with powerful spiritual food; helping her to renew her energy and to continue being a good Mum to her defiant daughter.

Prayer is like the very best of food. In the Book of Exodus the People of Israel- wandering aimlessly in the Sinai Desert, were rebellious because they were hungry. Moses desperately called out to God for help. And help came. God fed them with quails and a bread-like substance called manna.

Today's message, then, is very simple. When we are exhausted and feel that we lack the strength to cope with the challenges life is throwing at us- be they pornography, rebellious teenagers, bullying at work or parents who don't

value what we say; if we are experiencing debilitating pain in our bodies and can no longer drive or care for ourselves- get down on our knees (if we can make it) and pray. None of us are supermen or superwomen. We need Jesus, the Bread of Life, to sustain us. Reach out to the Lord in trust.

And don't be afraid to seek prayer from others; especially your priests. As we heard last week: Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish and then handed them to the Apostles who served the 5000. It is our privilege as priests to act as the Apostles acted: to serve the Bread of Life to the 5000.