

## **Homily for the 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Many of you probably know that the week before last the priests of our Diocese gathered with Bishop Gainer for our annual priest workshop. It's a 5-day time for continuing education, prayer, and fellowship. This year, our theme was Mercy – it's still the Jubilee Year of Mercy after all! And, we spoke about God's mercy as it touches upon so many areas, like the sharing of our faith with others, which we call evangelization, and difficult decisions surrounding end of life issues. We also spoke about a very important and real issue facing our society today – internet pornography.

I must say as maybe awkward as it was, I was very thankful this topic was brought to our attention as priests, as we learned the average age of exposure to such material is between 8 and 10 years old. And then this past week on the Fox 43 Nightly News, a story by reporter Amy Lutz was presented, which quoted that some studies indicate the average age is actually closer to six! When I heard that, I knew I had to bring this topic up, because while we think such an age is too young – apparently it's not. Now, part of the reason for such a young age is not only the pervasiveness of this inappropriate material, but also the availability of technology, especially smart phones. In fact, my cousin's one year old child, while she was being held by her father, who was using his smart phone, did the “smart phone swipe” with her finger!

To help you understand more, I'd like to provide a few more statistics, because ignorance is not the way to make this evil go away. Rather, it's accepting the truth of the matter that we take the first step in confronting it. The figures I'm about to share are from reputable studies recently conducted. From 2001 to 2007, Internet porn went from a \$1-billion-a-year industry to \$3-billion-a-year in the U.S. According to a report commissioned by Congress, in 2004 some 70 million individuals visited these types of Web sites each week; about 11 million of them are younger than 18. 64% of parents do not use online parental controls or filtering software. And 64% of self-identified Christian men and 15% of self-identified Christian women viewed this inappropriate material at least once a month.

Now, I bring this topic up this week, not just because of the priest workshop and the news story, but for several other reasons. The first is because our Gospel today speaks to this issue in the following way. Jesus tells a parable about two people who went up to the Temple area to pray, one was a religious leader – a Pharisee – and the other one was a notorious tax collector. And although we might expect the religious leader to be the better pray-er, it's actually the tax collector who goes home justified in God's sight.

Here's the connection to the issue being discussed today: the Pharisee was so blind to his own sinfulness. He couldn't see how he needed God's forgiveness just like the tax collector, because he too was a sinner. Similarly, so many people are fooled in our society today believing that internet pornography isn't that bad, or that no one's getting hurt, or even that everyone's doing it. But, when it comes to sin – and this is a major area of sexual sin – Jesus teaches that we need to be like the tax collector. In other words, we shouldn't sweep our struggles and sins under the carpet; but rather, we need to admit the truth and humbly ask God for His mercy. The truth, though, is that many people feel humiliated or embarrassed because of their use of such internet material. And therefore, they often find it difficult to speak about with their children, spouse, close friends, or even with God in Confession.

My second reason for bringing up this topic today is because after Masses this weekend, the ladies of the Parish Council of Catholic Women will be distributing ribbons for the White Ribbon Against Pornography campaign – or WRAP, for short. WRAP began in 1987 when a woman heard a sermon delivered against pornography by her pastor in Butler, PA, and decided to do something about it. So, soon after, she conceived the idea of a simple white ribbon as a symbol of decency and purity, with the purpose of increasing awareness among parents and students about facts like those I mentioned earlier.

My final reason for mentioning this topic today, is because of a tremendously important opportunity coming up on November 12<sup>th</sup>. That day, at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Mechanicsburg, Integrity Restored – the same group that presented to us at our priest workshop – will be offering the first of its kind, Integrity Restored Day. The purpose of this day is to provide education, encouragement, and resources regarding Internet protection for individuals, families, and communities. There is a yellow flyer in the bulletin this week speaking more about this Integrity Restored Day. This workshop is geared for pastors and parish staff, parents and teens, and ALL parishioners. In other words, it's really for just about everyone. If I could beg you to go – and I am – then, please see the flyer in the bulletin for more info. There's a small \$10 registration fee, which includes lunch.

Let me stress that you're attendance at this event does not mean you're incriminating yourself or somehow revealing that you struggle in this way. But even if you do struggle with this, then this conference is especially for you. And please know that God truly loves you. You are not unlovable. And regardless of the number of times you've fallen into sin, Jesus loves you personally – as He does all of us – and desires that we all be with Him in heaven. God bless you.

**\*\*\*See the following links for more information: <http://integrityrestored.com/>, <http://www.steas.net/integrity-restored/>, <http://theporneffect.com/> \*\*\***