

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE WORLD DAY OF PRAYER, REFLECTION
AND ACTION
AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

Clementine Hall
Monday, 12 February 2018

[Link](#)

[Joy Monday]

First of all we would like to thank you for your tireless and benevolent attention and concern for all migrants and victims of trafficking. We have experienced many difficulties and a great deal of suffering before arriving in Italy. Once we arrive in Italy we work hard to integrate, and finding dignified work is nearly impossible. Do you think that the surprising silence surrounding trafficking is due to ignorance of the phenomenon?

ANSWER

Certainly there is a lot of ignorance on the topic of trafficking. But sometimes there also seems to be little will to understand the scope of the issue. Why? Because it touches close to our conscience; because it is thorny; because it is shameful. Then there are those who, even knowing this, do not want to speak because they are at the end of the "supply chain", as a user of the "services" that are offered on the street or on the Internet. There are, lastly, those who do not want it to be talked about, because they are directly involved in the criminal organizations that reap handsome profits from

trafficking. Yes, it takes courage and honesty, "when, in our daily lives, we meet or deal with persons who could be victims of human trafficking, or when we are tempted to select items which may well have been produced by exploiting others".^[1]

The work of raising awareness must begin at home, with ourselves, because only in this way will we be able to then make our communities aware, motivating them to commit themselves so that no human being may ever again be a victim of trafficking. This seems like an easier task for young people, given that they are less structured in their thinking, less confused by prejudices, freer to reason with their own minds. The more enthusiastic and spontaneous voice of young people can break the silence in order to denounce the atrocities of trafficking and propose concrete solutions. Adults who are ready to listen can be of great help.

For my part, as you may have noted, I have never missed an opportunity to openly denounce trafficking as a crime against humanity. It is "a true form of slavery, unfortunately more and more widespread, which concerns every country, even the most developed. It is a reality which affects the most vulnerable in society: women of all ages, children, the handicapped, the poorest, and those who come from broken families and from difficult situations in society".^[2]

I have also said that "what is called for, then, is a shared sense of responsibility and firmer political will to gain victory on this front. Responsibility is required towards those who have fallen victim to trafficking in order to protect their rights, to guarantee their safety and that of their families, and to prevent the corrupt and criminals from escaping justice and having the last word over the lives of others".^[3]

[Silvia Migliorini, Via Dalmazia High School, Rome]

Many of us young people would like to have a better understanding of trafficking, migration and their causes. Yes, we would like to commit ourselves to making this world more just. We would like to address topics like this with the young people of our society, using social networks too, seeing their considerable power of communication. Dear Pope Francis, in parish groups, in youth movements, in Catholic educational institutions, sometimes there are not adequate and sufficient avenues to address these topics. Moreover, it would be nice if activities were organized to promote social and cultural integration with those who are victims of trafficking, so it would be easier for them to overcome their tragedy and rebuild a life. What can we young people do? What can the Church do?

ANSWER

Young people are in a privileged position to encounter survivors of human trafficking. Go to your parishes, to an association near home; meet the people, listen to them. Your response and concrete commitment will grow from there. In fact, I see the risk that this may become an abstract issue, but it is not abstract. There are signs that you can learn how to “read”, which tell you: this could be a victim of trafficking here, a slave. We need to promote the culture of encounter which in itself leads to an unexpected wealth and great surprises. Saint Paul gives us an example: in Christ, the slave Onesimus is no longer a slave but much more; he is a beloved brother (cf. Philem 1:16).

You young people can find hope in Christ, and you can also encounter him in migrants, people who have fled from home, and who remain trapped in the networks. Do not be afraid to encounter them. Open your heart, let them in, be ready to change. Encountering the other naturally leads to change, but there is no need to fear this change. It will always be for the best. Remember the words of the Prophet Isaiah: “Enlarge your tent” (cf. Is 54:2).

The Church must promote and create spaces for encounter. For this reason I have requested that parishes be opened for welcoming. It is important to recognize the great task in response to my appeal, thank you! I ask you who are present here today to work in favour of opening up to others, especially when they are wounded in their dignity. Become promoters of initiatives that your parishes can host. Help the Church to create spaces for sharing experiences and integration of faith and of life.

Social networks too, especially for young people, are a seemingly endless opportunity for encounter: the Internet can offer more opportunities for encounter and solidarity among all, and this is a good thing; it is a gift of God. However, for every instrument that is offered to us, the choice that mankind decides to make of it is fundamental. The communicative environment can help us to grow or, on the contrary, to become disoriented. The risks inherent in some of these virtual spaces must not be underestimated; through the web, many young people are lured and drawn into slavery from which it then becomes beyond their ability to free themselves. In this sphere, adults, parents and teachers — also older siblings and cousins — are called to the task of watching over and protecting youths. You must do the same with your relatives and friends: perceive and point out particular vulnerabilities, suspicious cases on which light must be shed.

Thus, use the web to share a positive account of your experiences of encounter with our brothers and sisters in the world, recount and share good practices and generate a virtuous circle.

[Faith Outuru]

I am one of many young women who have come from a faraway country, with a different culture, with different life situations and the experience of a different Church. Now I am here and I would like to build my future here. But I think about my country, of many young people who are misled with false promises, swindled, enslaved, prostituted. How can we help these young people to avoid falling into the trap of illusions and into the hands of traffickers?

ANSWER

As you said, it must be ensured that young people not fall “into the hands of traffickers”. And how horrible it is to realize that many young victims were first abandoned by their families, considered as rejects by their society! Many were then introduced to trafficking by their own families and so-called friends. It happened in the Bible too: remember that the older brothers sold the young Joseph as a slave, and thus he was enslaved in Egypt!

Also in conditions of extreme poverty, education is shown to be important. It is an instrument of protection against trafficking; in fact it helps to identify dangers and to avoid illusions. A healthy school environment, like a healthy parish environment, allows young people to condemn traffickers without shame and to become bearers of just messages for other young people, so that they do not wind up in the same trap. All those who have been victims of trafficking have been immeasurable sources of support for new victims, and extremely important informational resources to save many other young people. It is often fake news, spread via word of mouth or filtered through social media, that entraps the innocent. Young people who have encountered organized crime can play a key role in describing the dangers. Traffickers are often people without scruples, without morals or ethics, who live on other people’s misfortunes, exploiting human emotions and people’s desperation in order to subjugate them to their will, rendering them slaves and subservient. Suffice it to think how many very young African women arrive on our shores hoping to start a better life, thinking they will earn an honest living, and instead are enslaved, forced into prostitution.

It is fundamental for young people to build their own identity step by step and to have a point of reference, a guiding light. The Church has always sought to stand beside people who suffer, in particular children and young people, protecting them and promoting their integral human development.

Minors are often “invisible”, subjected to dangers and threats, isolated and easy to manipulate; we want, even in the most precarious situations, to be your beacon of hope and support, because God is always with you.

“Courage and hope are qualities that everyone has, but they are most befitting in young people: courage and hope. The future is surely in the hands of God, the hands of a provident Father. This does not mean denying difficulties and problems, but seeing them, yes, as temporary and surmountable. Difficulties, crises, can with God’s help and the good will of all, be overcome, defeated, transformed”.^[4]

[Antonio Maria Rossi, Via Dalmazia High School, Rome]

We young Italians are confronted with a context marked more each day by the plurality of cultures and religions. It is an open challenge. Often the lack of respect for the diverse, the throw-away culture and corruption — from which trafficking arises — seem normal. Pope Francis, please continue to encourage our government leaders

to fight corruption, the arms trade and the throw-away culture; also encourage all religious leaders to guarantee spaces where different cultures and religions can get to know one another and appreciate each other, so that all can share the same spirituality of hospitality. I would like to ask you: what can we do here so that the scourge of trafficking disappears definitively?

ANSWER

When countries fall prey to extreme poverty, violence and corruption, the economy, the regulatory framework and the basic infrastructures are inefficient and are unable to guarantee security, goods and essential rights. In such contexts, the perpetrators of these crimes act with impunity. Organized crime and the illegal trafficking of drugs and of human beings choose their prey from among the people who have the most inadequate means of subsistence and even less hope for the future.

The response therefore, is to create opportunities for an integral human development, starting with a quality education in early childhood, creating subsequent opportunities for growth through employment. These two modalities of growth, in the various phases of life, are antidotes to vulnerability and to trafficking. What I have defined many times as “the throw-away culture” is at the foundation of behaviours which, in the market and in the globalized world, lead to the exploitation of human beings, on all levels. “Poverty, the needs and dramas of so many people end up being considered normal”.⁵

Some states promote, within the international community, a particularly harsh policy in seeking to defeat human trafficking; this attitude is in itself misleading because, due to behind-the-scenes economic interests, it does not seek to address the underlying causes. Furthermore, the position on the international level is not always coherent with internal policies. I truly hope that you may send a message to the leaders at every level of government, of the business world and of society, asking for access to a quality education and then, to fair and sustainable employment.

One strategy which includes a greater awareness of the theme of trafficking, beginning with a clear terminology and with the concrete testimonies of protagonists, can certainly be of help. Real awareness about the topic, however, devotes attention to the “demand for trafficking” that is behind the offer (chain of consumption); we are all called to reject hypocrisy and to face the idea of being part of the problem, rather than turn away proclaiming our innocence.

Allow me to say, if there are so many young women victims of trafficking who end up on the streets of our cities, it is because many men here — young, middle-aged, elderly — demand these services and are willing to pay for their pleasure. I wonder then, is the principal cause of trafficking really the traffickers? I believe the principal cause is the unscrupulous selfishness of the many hypocrites in our world. Of course, arresting traffickers is an obligation of justice. But the true solution is the conversion of hearts, cutting off demand in order to dry out the market.

[Maria Magdalene Savini]

Pope Francis, in one of your messages to the mayors of large cities meeting in the Vatican, you said that in order to be truly effective, the common commitment to raising ecological awareness and to combat modern forms of slavery — trafficking of human beings and of organs, prostitution, illegal labour — must start at the peripheries.^[6] We young people also often find ourselves in the periphery and we suffer from exclusion, the uncertainty of not having work or access to quality

education, living in situations of war, of violence, being forced to leave our lands, belonging to ethnic and religious minorities. We women, especially, are penalized and are the primary victims. What space will be given in the Synod on Young People to the young women and young men who come from the peripheries of marginalization caused by an outdated development model which continues to cause human degradation? How can we ensure that these young men and women may be protagonists of change in society and in the Church?

ANSWER

I would like — for those who are real witnesses to the risks of trafficking in their countries of origin — that they may find in the Synod a place to express themselves, from which to call the Church to action. Therefore, it is my great hope that young people representing the “peripheries” may be protagonists of this Synod. I hope they may see the Synod as a place to launch a message to the governing leaders of countries of origin and arrival in order to demand protection and support. I hope that these young people may launch a global message for a worldwide mobilization of youth, so as to build together an inclusive and welcoming common home. I hope they may be examples of hope for those who are experiencing the existential tragedy of discouragement.

The Catholic Church intends to intervene in every phase of the trafficking of human beings: she wants to protect them from deception and solicitation; she wants to find them and free them when they are transported and reduced to slavery; she wants to assist them once they are freed. Often the people who are trapped and mistreated lose the ability to trust others, and the Church often proves to be the last lifeline.

It is absolutely essential to respond in a concrete way to the vulnerability of those who are at risk, so as to then guide the process of liberation beginning with saving their lives. Ecclesial groups can open safe havens where necessary, in places of recruitment, on trafficking routes and in countries of arrival. My hope is that the Synod may be an opportunity for the local Churches to learn to work together and become “a safety net”.

Lastly I would like to conclude by quoting Saint Josephine Bakhita. This great Sudanese woman “is even today an exemplary witness of hope for the many victims of slavery; she can support the efforts of all those committed to fighting against this ‘open wound on the body of contemporary society, a scourge upon the body of Christ’”.^[7] May she inspire us to extend gestures of brotherhood to those who find themselves in a state of submission. May she enable us to engage, to be called to the encounter.

Let us pray:

Saint Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child and endured unspeakable hardship and suffering.

Once liberated from your physical enslavement, you found true redemption in your encounter with Christ and his Church.

O Saint Josephine Bakhita, assist all those who are entrapped in slavery;

Intercede on their behalf with the God of Mercy so that the chains of their captivity will be broken.

May God himself free all those who have been threatened, wounded or mistreated by the trade and trafficking of human beings.

Bring comfort to survivors of this slavery and teach them to look to Jesus as an example of hope and faith so that they may find healing from their wounds.

We ask you to pray for us and to intercede on behalf of us all: that we may not fall into indifference, that we may open our eyes and be able to see the misery and wounds of our many brothers and sisters deprived of their dignity and their freedom, and may we hear their cry for help.
Amen