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Topic #5

Human trafficking (i.e., the exploitation and enslavement of women and children) remains a tragedy even today. We know that all human beings are created by God in His image (Genesis 1:27); therefore, how can we as Orthodox Christians help these victims and assist in the efforts to eliminate human trafficking?

Twenty-one million people. That number is higher than the population of New York State. That number, twenty one million, represents how many human beings are being trafficked globally right now. Across the world, people have forgotten that all of those twenty one million humans were created in the image and likeness of God. In all three synoptic gospels, Jesus says, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them,” but five and a half million children, today, are being trafficked, exploited, and prevented from seeing God. God, who loves us, created all of us, but some have chosen to turn away from that love and live a life of sin and hatred. Those people are leaders of human trafficking networks.

Human trafficking is often referred to as the modern form of slavery. There are more people living in slavery today than there have ever been at any point in human history. Slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865. Why then, are there one and a half million people enslaved in our country today?

Many people only recognize human trafficking, as the sexual exploitation of women and children, but there is much more to the story than that. Beyond prostitution, other large components in this trade are forced labor and organ trafficking. Men, as well as women, and children can fall victim to any category this industry. As a teenage girl, I am among those at the highest risk of being abducted and sold into the slave trade. Knowing this provides me with a fear that is very difficult to shake off. Parking lots, stairwells, and many public places are, unfortunately not safe enough to be alone in. I know that I can leave this fear with God and He will protect me, but sadly, that is not the case for everyone.

In reference to the number of casualties in World War Two someone said, “the death of one man is a tragedy, but the death of a million is a statistic.” Sadly, this quote also rings true when looking at today's slave trade. We become desensitized to what is happening and the numbers begin to lose meaning. But imagine of someone you know, someone from a nearby school, church, or family, had been abducted and trafficked. Their loss would be a tragedy. The story of their disappearance would be talked about amongst the community and maybe even broadcasted on local news. They would be mourned and prayed for. Each person in captivity is part of a family or a community. Each loss is a tragedy. One more person sold into human trafficking does not make a difference to the people writing the statistics, but it should make a difference to us. Each person of those twenty one million in captivity has a soul from God, and they are suffering. Each one of them has a family that is now missing a piece.

In Saint Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (6:19), we are asked "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own;" This verse goes beyond remaining moral ourselves. Individually, trying not to sin is not enough, we must help those who have fallen into sin. Jesus, the Son of God ate with the unclean and the outcaste of society. Why shouldn't we do the same? The Holy Spirit is present in all of us, but many victims are forced into immorality. Regardless, we must welcome them back into our churches and society. The victims of human trafficking suffer trauma that is unimaginable to us. Rather than sympathizing with the survivors, many people judge them for what they may have done or has been done to them in captivity. If Jesus did not throw the first stone at a woman caught in adultery, I ask you, who are we to condemn those who have been held captive and raped against their own will?

In this situation, the worst thing we can do is nothing. An estimated thirty-two billion dollars are profited from slave labor. By purchasing goods from certain companies, you may be prompting forced labor and child labor without even realizing it. Companies such as Hershey, Nike, Walmart, and many more have been found using slaves in factories and sweatshops in foreign countries to produce goods at lower cost. Purchasing fair trade products, however, ensures that workers are being treated fairly and humanely. Donating to a charity that helps victims of human trafficking is another way to assist in elimination of the slave industry. Finally, prayer is one of the best ways that we, as Orthodox Christians, can help the victims of today's slave trade. Every time we say the Our Father, we ask God to "deliver us from evil" and the "us" in that line does not only include the people around you, it includes everyone. Think about it. If we could all take a single minute to ask God to help the people, not only victims of human trafficking, but all the people suffering of evils in the world. It is really not that much to ask, and it is something that all of us here today can do.