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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?

An Orthodox Response to Human Trafficking

Portland, Oregon. A city filled with outstanding restaurants, shopping, and scenic beauty. One of the greenest cities in America, it is a vibrant, progressive community just 100 miles north of my home in Eugene. Portland, Oregon; A city that has emerged as a leading center for human exploitation.

Yes, 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, slavery persists in the United States. At least 1 million people are forced laborers or sexual slaves. And this problem is not unique to the U.S. According to the United Nations, at least 2.4 million people are enslaved worldwide. In fact, every minute, 2 people are sold into slavery.

Chained, beaten and starved, they are forced to work long hours in fields, factories and sweatshops. Others are forced into prostitution. For example, Kim thought she was dating a member of the U.S. Military. She never suspected that her boyfriend was actually part of a human trafficking ring. She was physically and psychologically tortured. Eventually, she escaped her captors by crawling through an air duct. Kim was fortunate. Of the 2.4 million people trafficked, just one percent escape captivity. For every one like Kim that escapes, 99 others don't.

Ladies and Gentlemen, human trafficking is a persistent problem that violates our God-given dignity. As Orthodox Christians, we are called to respond with love, compassion, prayer, and action.

Prayer is an essential weapon for battling human trafficking. When St. Peter was imprisoned, the entire church earnestly prayed for him. Acts 12, verse 7: "And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he struck Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands." Let us not underestimate the power of prayer. Christ has promised us that "where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am also." Every time we gather together for the divine services, we pray for "the sick, the suffering, the captives, and for their safety and salvation." We should also pray for the traffickers that they be released from their spiritual bondage. As Christ said, "love your enemies and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you."

In addition to prayer, we can also take action. St. Nicholas once saved a family from inevitable slavery by secretly throwing bags of gold coins into their house. St. Philothea is an incredible example of one who bravely gave her life that others might live in freedom. Once, four women who had been abducted by the Turks escaped and ran

to St. Philothea for refuge. Despite harsh imprisonment by the Turks, she courageously refused to betray the women.

Like St. Nicholas and St. Philothea, we too can take bold action to address modern slavery. St. Catherine's Vision, an international, pan-Orthodox organization, is soliciting ideas to bring about an Orthodox response to human trafficking. Their goal is to provide practical relief and to help liberate as many people as possible. Other efforts are under way such as the Hope Project. The nuns of All Saints Monastery, in New York are designing a program that will provide female victims of sex trafficking with safe housing, medical care, psychological services, rehabilitation, and a variety of other social services. In order for these projects to become realities, they will require our communal effort.

Even if we, as individuals, can only help in modest ways, the collective result will be change. Simply buying fair trade products, will ensure that your food is produced without human exploitation. During the midnight service on Pascha, the church is completely dark except for one candle held by the priest. At the words, "Come receive the light", the priest begins spreading the light from candle to candle, until the entire church is radiant with bright candlelight.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I urge you to be that light in the darkness. Together, we can unite to create change and relief for victims, just like Kim. These are people just like you and me; created in the image and likeness of God. 2.4 million people every year. 2 every minute. Ladies and gentlemen, in the time it took to say this speech, ten more people have been enslaved.