



International Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking

8 February 2018

Culture—the attitudes, beliefs, values, customs, and traditions of a people at a given point in time—informs our way of life. It shapes how we view and understand the world around us, determines who and what we value, and guides how we treat others. Culture both creates our worldview and blinds us to our bias.

While it encompasses key aspects of our identity, such as language, food, art, clothing, and faith, culture is also fluid. Just as we are created by culture, so, too, we can influence cultural change. If we are to create a world in which human trafficking is eradicated, then we must first address the existing culture which allows it to flourish.

The Culture of the Disposable

“Many are the faces, the stories and the evident effects on the lives of thousands of persons whom the culture of deterioration and waste has allowed to be sacrificed before the idols of profits and consumption. We need to be alert to one sad sign of the ‘globalization of indifference’: the fact that we are gradually growing accustomed to the suffering of others, as if it were something normal or even worse, becoming resigned to such extreme and scandalous kinds of ‘using and discarding’ and social exclusion as new forms of slavery, human trafficking, forced labor, prostitution and trafficking in organs.”¹

“[T]his is ‘scrap culture,’ the culture of the disposable.”²

“Globalized society frequently looks the other way with the pretense of innocence. Under the guise of what is politically correct or ideologically fashionable, one looks at those who suffer without touching them. But they are televised live; they are talked about in euphemisms and with apparent tolerance, but nothing is done systematically to heal the social wounds or to confront the structures that leave so many brothers and sisters by the wayside.”³

“The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others.... We have become used to the suffering of others.”⁴

¹ Pope Francis. [Address to the United Nations Office](#), Nairobi, Kenya, 26 November 2015.

² Pope Francis. [General Audience](#), 5 June 2013.

³ Pope Francis. [Message to Participants in the U.S. Regional Meetings of Popular Movements](#), 16-19 February 2017.

⁴ Pope Francis. [Homily during the visit to Lampedusa, Italy](#), 8 July 2013.

For reflection

- *What connections do you see between a “culture of deterioration and waste” and social exclusion in global society or in your own cultural reality?*
- *How might our attitudes and actions inadvertently contribute to social exclusion? What relationships do you see between social exclusion and human trafficking?*
- *What strategies have you discovered to counter numbness or indifference to suffering?*
- *In your imagination, picture yourself meeting a victim of human trafficking. What does this person look like? How do you approach him/her? How do the two of you interact? What stories does he/she tell? What emotions are present? What is your response to this person before you?*

As you reflect on this interaction, to what extent have your responses to such questions been influenced by images of trafficking victims in your culture?

Toward a Culture of Encounter

Pope Francis tells us that, in stepping out of ourselves, we must be ready for an encounter, that

“with our faith we must create a ‘culture of encounter,’ a culture of friendship, a culture in which we find brothers and sisters”.⁵

⁵ Pope Francis. Address on the Vigil of Pentecost with the Ecclesial Movements, Saint Peter’s Square, 18 May 2013.

“[W]e truly encounter another when ‘I am wounded by the brilliance of his being, when I am touched by his action.’ ”⁶

“We are accustomed to a culture of indifference and we must strive and ask for the grace to create a culture of encounter, of a fruitful encounter, of an encounter that restores to each person his or her own dignity as a child of God, the dignity of a living person.”⁷

For Pope Francis, the term “encounter” describes a rich and multifaceted concept, ranging from profound, dynamic, interpersonal interactions to societal structures and relationships that draw people together, and respect and embody the dignity, beauty and mystery of all whom they touch.

Pope Francis regards the creation of a global culture that fosters such deep, reverential interpersonal meetings, respect for human dignity, and societal right relationships as central to the Church’s mission as well as a goal for all of human society. His culture of encounter is the antidote to the poisonous culture of objectification and commodification, selfishness and greed, and indifference and disregard that underlies and enables evils like human trafficking and other forms of violence.

For reflection

- *What concrete actions can we take together to foster a “culture of encounter” in our diverse realities?*

⁶ Romano Guardini, quoted in Diego Fares, S.J. 2015. *The Heart of Pope Francis: How a New Culture of Encounter is Changing the Church and the World*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, p 21.

⁷ Pope Francis. Homily at Santa Marta, 13 September 2016. Quoted in “[Pope Francis at Mass: Overcome indifference, build a culture of encounter](#),” *Vatican Radio*.

- *To what actions will I personally commit?*

Sharing

Closing: Prayer for the End of Human Trafficking

As shared by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, Convent Station, N.J.⁸

God of freedom, beauty and truth
we believe that your deepest desire,
your most powerful energy,
is that all creation might know abundant life.

We raise our voices in anguished prayer
for our sisters and brothers,
women and girls, men and boys,
who are modern day slaves;
They are your beloved daughters and sons,
exploited sexually or forced to work
because of human violence and greed.

Fill us with your holy anger and your sacred passion
that those who are trafficked might know healing and justice;
that traffickers will come to repentance and conversion;
that all of us might live in such a way
that others are not made to pay the price
for our comfort and convenience.

⁸ Resource can be found on the [Catholic Health Association of the United States website](https://www.chau.org/).

Hasten the coming of the day when all people
and our precious Earth itself
will be treated, not as a commodity,
but as radiant images of your freedom, beauty and truth.
Amen. May it be so.



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