

## Homily for June 12, 2020

In 1890 the English novelist and playwright Oscar Wilde wrote a novel about a man named Dorian Gray who made a pact to sell his soul in exchange for eternal youth. But that was just the beginning. For years Dorian got deeper and deeper into evil, deception, and murder. His physical appearance remained unchanged, remaining always youthful. But there was a record of his moral decay told in his portrait, that had been painted by Basil Hallward. With the passing of the years the portrait mysteriously became more and more ugly with each of Dorian's callously wicked acts. At the end of the novel, we finally see the fruit of the unrepentant soul in decay: *the Picture of Dorian Gray*, which is the novel's title, had become a hideous man, hardly recognizable as a human being.

In today's Gospel our Lord cautions us in very strong language about an evil in the human heart that can lead people into a world as dark as the one inhabited by Dorian Gray. It is the world of the lust-filled heart deformed through the medium of pornography. How clear the Lord is in his exhortation: He makes it very clear, pornography does not just result in the distorted use of the eyes, but the body, both of the ones victimized in movies and those watching; as they participate in disordered sexual acts on themselves. Both end up being demeaned and diminished.

So let's us look at this from two perspectives. From that of the "performers" and that of children. While numerous research studies have proven that performers in pornography films do not enjoy what they do on-set, many people still believe the opposite, because they don't see the suffering the performers endure. What most people don't know is that there is a doctor on every porn set. He will give them any drug you can name – he will give them Percocet, Xanax, heroine, he will give them anything to get the person to go through that scene – to take that torture and smile while they're doing it."

What about for children? When children first come into contact with pornography their initial reaction is that "there's something scary" about it, and even something violent, but that very quickly they start to learn from what they see that "violence is a sex act," and this notion becomes more normal as they get older.

Dr. Donald Hilton Jr. of the University of Texas Health Science Center is a celebrated neuroscientist and surgeon. Dr Hilton has examined the scientific changes in the human brain when viewing pornography. Essentially, he said human beings have "two brains," one being the cortex, what Dr Hilton calls our "thinking brain," and the other being the brain stem, referred to by Hilton as our "wanting brain." So, while the brain might tell us to do something because it feels good, the cortex will tell us to slow down and think about the consequences. Between the two is the "reward centre" of the brain that while intending to help motivate us, the reward centre can be "hijacked and diverted" from this purpose if we take in "powerful rewards indiscriminately."

In this case, the reward centre can "reset the pleasure thermostat of the brain," and a "new normal" is established, which can quickly become addiction, Hilton said, explaining that the

brain structure is impacted by learning, and that “addictive learning sculpts the brain in a very damaging way.”

Children and young adults are particularly at risk from this, he said, because for one, the frontal-lobe control center of the brain don't fully mature until the person is in their mid-20s. However, most exposure to pornography happens at a young age, leaving children particularly vulnerable to changes in the brain structure. He said children are also more at risk because the chemicals for processing rewards and addictions are not yet mature, so “an immature braking system is essentially paired with an accelerated reward-seeking drive.”

Now when faced with such a situation, as the modern porn industry, we like Elijah in today's first reading can feel alone against such an evil. But we need to remember that with the Lord, and the community of the faithful, represented in the reading by the people Elijah is to anoint, this is not so. But it does require action. So, I want to ask especially those of you with young children, what kind of protection do you have on internet access? There are various products available that can assist with this. One we can get at discount. Please email me if you would like to find out more.

Oscar Wilde knew nothing of the modern porn industry, but he captures so clearly the impact of such a dark medium and those caught in the making of such material and those who view it. St. Peter's wants to be here to support those caught in this Web so that the small voice of our loving God can be heard amidst the din of disordered desire and practice.