



## Human Trafficking: What is it? What can be done?

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

New York, NY

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Fathers, Sisters, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be back in New York and with my good friends at Crossroads. This is one of those rare occurrences when I have actually been asked back to address an audience who had the patience to listen previously to me. I have thus tried to wear a disguise so that people won't remember me from last year. I have unfortunately succeeded in looking a year older.

But, on a serious note, I am very grateful to Angelo Sala and his great colleagues at *Crossroads*. My own association with *Commune e Liberazione* goes back to close collaborations on the various battles the Holy See Mission was facing, in the 1990s, and which it continues to face to protect life and the family at the United Nations.

The battle that we will be speaking about this evening has at its root the same cause which is behind every abhorrent abuse of basic human rights—the need for each culture and each person in that culture to recognize that the dignity of the human person is inviolate. The recognition of this essential human dignity is fundamental to any efforts aimed at the common good. Laws which do not have this as their common foundation, at best simply recalibrate the very chaos they are meant to order.

At the outset of my talk, I give fair warning that my point of view, and my advocacy for action are faith-based, and that my faith is Roman Catholic. The vast majority of my life has been spent working for the Church in various capacities, although I can say with pride, that it has most often been in partnership with those of other faiths and those without faith. Yet it would be disingenuous to not speak of the heart of my convictions which has driven and continues to drive my personal work.

As a faith-based institution, the International Catholic Migration Commission has as its core mission advocating for, and whenever possible, providing protection to, the over 230 million migrants on the move throughout the world. It is fascinating to note that despite its Catholic name, like so many works of the Catholic Church, probably 90+% of the millions of persons that ICMC has helped are not Catholic, and in fact are not even Christian.

ICMC was Papally-founded by Pope Pius XII in 1951 with the immediate goal to assist the thousands of European refugees who needed protection in the aftermath of World War II, and as Providence would have it, its subsequent beneficiaries have largely been Buddhists and Muslims. This we share with many secular organizations. But most fundamentally ICMC's work proceeds from basic Catholic social teaching precisely about the dignity of the human person and the recognition of the redemptive sacramental character of our work. As Pope Francis has noted, the Church's work is not only humanitarian, rather, its humanitarian action is transformed through its sacramental character and evangelical mission, in that in assisting the marginalized, beneficiaries are offered an encounter with Christ just as we, at the same time, through the Mystical Body, discover Christ as God by assisting them.

And speaking of faith-based--

And the joy of the faith, perhaps a brief note of Catholic humor—a story my Jesuit uncle used to tell about the Trappist monk whose carefully adhered to the rigors of his life of prayer, silence, and permanence. He was told that he could speak only to his provincial once every two years, and could only speak two words to him. He evidently did not wish the opportunity to be missed to express in some small way the challenges of his vocation.

Thus, the first year when the monk's provincial inquired whether he had anything to say, he nodded, and the provincial gave permission for him to speak. Perhaps hoping that two words to the wise would bring an amelioration that could give him the ability to endure his challenging vocation, he responded simply: "food's bad".

Similarly, another two years went by (and my uncle never indicated whether there had been any positive effect based on the monk's first two words), and again, the provincial encouraged him to speak his two words: and the monk upon obviously significant reflection said "bed's hard."

And again, in the sixth year, the provincial provided him the opportunity to express himself and he said: "I quit." To which the provincial replied "well I'm not surprised as you have been doing nothing but complain ever since you got here."

The irony in the story is that it is finally all about freedom and choices. The sometimes-challenged monk knew always that his choices were made in full freedom and using that freedom he could actually "quit" and walk out the monastery door.. But tonight the subject of our study and concern, are those freedom-less victims who woke up yet again today to the overwhelming dread of the incalculable loss of their dignity and freedom and who feel voiceless in a world that literally does not recognize their plight.

These would-be laborers, who alarmingly number almost 15% of the total number of migrants globally, like most of our migrant forebears, left home with the goal to do

honest hard work in order to bring some financial help to their own needy families that remain back home.. For this reason, Pope Francis has called human trafficking perhaps the greatest crime against humanity of our times.

We are particularly blessed to have with us Mr. Simon Deng, who is himself a former trafficking victim, who can speak of the reality like only those who have experienced such abuse, can. In preparation for his remarkable and impactful story, I would like to be his John the Baptist and prepare the ground by providing a brief overall background on human trafficking and the Catholic Church's recent focus on its prevention.

So let us begin by defining our terms and providing some very general idea of the breadth of the human trafficking/modern slavery global plague:

Article 3, paragraph (a) of the [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons](#) defines Trafficking in Persons as *“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”*

Personally, I find the expression “at a minimum” an oxymoron, since how can the human mind envision worse than those scenarios?

Thus, given that the descriptions in the definition literally make the skin crawl that such abuses could occur, exactly how prevalent is human trafficking?:

The estimates of the number of persons globally living in conditions of trafficking are generally given as numbering an estimated 27 million. However, since, by definition, these crimes are clandestine, one wonders whether that vast number reveals the full reality. As a telling point of comparison the total number of arrivals of slaves during the entire period of legal international slavery over 300 years was estimated to have been around 10.7 million.

Other general human trafficking statistics:

- 800,000 persons trafficked across international borders every year
- 1 million children exploited each year by global sex trade
- 50% of persons trafficked internationally are children
- 80% of trafficked persons are women & girls
- \$32 billion – Total yearly profits generated by the human trafficking industry
- \$15.5 billion is made in industrialized countries

- \$13,000 per year generated on average by each “forced laborer.” This number can be as high as \$67,200 per victim per year.

So, any human being must ask, how can this sort of abuse be allowed to exist when all universally agreed international human rights instruments including the *International Declaration on Human Rights* is clear:

**Article 3.**

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

**Article 4.**

No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Recognizing this anomaly, in 2000, the international community managed to finalize the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime --which included the [Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons](#) previously mentioned.

Kofi Annan, the-then UN Secretary General, stated at the time that with the Convention, “the international community demonstrated the political will to answer a global challenge with a global response” “If the rule of law is undermined not only in one country, but in many, then those who defend it cannot limit themselves to purely national means.”

Yet, what are the concrete results of this clearly vital expression of international will? The UN Office on Drugs and Crime reports on a positive note that while prosecutions are increasing, and the number of countries with national anti-trafficking legislation doubled by 2008, and more than half of these countries have established an anti-trafficking police unit, the truth is that most country’s conviction rates rarely exceed 1.5 per 100,000 and 2 out of every 5 countries had not recorded a single conviction by that same year.

*The Trafficking in Persons Report* indicates that 7,705 trafficking prosecutions took place worldwide in 2012 with less than 5,000 convictions and that there were only 1,153 prosecutions for trafficking-related labour exploitation worldwide resulting in only 518 convictions.

Thus, for both the big and small fish perpetrators, this could not be more encouraging news for traffickers to continue their profitable destruction of human lives. Having worked at the UN as a diplomat for the Holy See for 16 years, I am well aware of the limitations that political action alone can accomplish.

One fundamental aspect of the global challenge is the lack of basic public awareness of the problem, since by its very nature, it is dependent on secrecy or complicity.

Secrecy, since it is often difficult to detect, as it is most often hidden. **I heard a talk by a self-identified expert on human trafficking who freely confessed that when a trafficking ring was broken in San Francisco where he lived, he was delighted until he realized that the female victims were actually waitresses at a restaurant where he ate often, and yet even he to his subsequent horror, did not realize their plight.].** Complicity, since as regards prostitution, “consumers” do not want to do without their vice, regardless of its devastating effect on females who are most often no more than 14 years old. Thus, even major sporting events such as world cups have been reluctant or ineffective in preventing human trafficking during games. **But even more basically, how many of us can respond with confidence to the question of whether our own consumption is linked to trafficking-based labor inputs?**

So where do we go from here?

Clearly, the most important anti-human trafficking advocate alive today happens to be a 78 year old Argentinian who recently immigrated to Rome.

Pope Francis’ model given in his leadership in praying and fasting for Syria, provides the example that we need to follow for the blight of human trafficking . **I am convinced that the the anti-trafficking work of the Church must first and foremost proceed from the basis of prayer as a global call to reflection, a bond of unity for all people of goodwill, a request for God’s particular assistance regarding the scourge of modern slavery—with particular prayers channeled through, Saint Josephine Bakhita, the former Sudanese slave canonized in 2000, who finally found freedom. Then from that richness, and only from that continuing spiritual well-spring can we hope to have an effective, lasting effort of practical and concrete action.**

As I will describe, the Church has many practical advantages that will offer a path forward against trafficking, -- in some important ways even more than governments or the U.N., but for the Church to simply assume the mantle of a political operative, even with all of the best intentions, without drinking at the well of divine love and grace at every opportunity, it becomes in the words of St. Paul, an empty vessel, and a clanging cymbal signifying nothing.

Thus, perhaps a few words about the theological imperative that leads to the Catholic Church’s abiding interest in migrants, refugees and trafficked persons.

I mentioned that ICMC was founded by Pope Pius XII, and co-founded by the future Blessed Pope Paul VI who served as his Pro-Secretary of State. Pius wrote an apostolic constitution entitled *The Exiled Family of Nazareth* to point to the theological basis for the Church’s focus on the protection of migrants in which he refers to his founding ICMC. As he summarized this theology: *“The émigré Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, is the archetype of every refugee family. Jesus, Mary and Joseph...are, for all times and all places, the models and protectors of every migrant, alien and*

*refugee.*” God did not only become an infant of a poor family, but suddenly became the child of a migrant/refugee family.

Following this example, over the past 63 years, ICMC has responded to refugee crises the world over—most especially in the Far East in the 1980’s and 90’s and currently with the well over 4 million refugees in the Middle East emanating daily from Syria, as well as Iraq and Iran.

Just as in the last talk I gave to Crossroads I had made mention of the plight of trafficked people and thus with you today to discuss this, I want to also note another driving protection issue which has raised its ugly head over the past several years and which I would hope to speak on with greater specificity at another time—which is the millions of Syrian and Iraqi refugees that are currently finding themselves facing another winter in tent cities far from their home—an inhuman plight which is opening these extraordinarily vulnerable people to the further threats of being trafficked.

And, as with any agency responsible for the protection of migrants, and indeed any human being who becomes aware of the tragedy of modern slavery, ICMC resolved to become involved and to try to make a difference. Some of its activities, in addition to its advocacy to the international community through its Geneva headquarters, have included: 1) seconding staff to assist in writing national anti-trafficking legislation, 2) educational and sensitization courses for national military and police forces, and 3) partnering to establish safe houses.

It was at one such safe house on which ICMC partnered with Caritas Lebanon in Beirut that the ICMC Secretary General, Mr. Johan Ketelers and I met with what was one of the most haunting tales of my by-now rather long and internationally-lived life.

## THE STORY OF MIRIAM

Upon entering the house we were introduced to the women who were currently seeking shelter following their respective escapes from their enslavers. I couldn’t help but take particular note of one girl who seemed almost ethereal, with a countenance of an unspeakable depth of sorrow--a breathing body whose soul had been eviscerated. She was a young woman named Miriam, from Sri Lanka who, while holding the hand of the other Filipina girls in the house, had agreed to relate her own trafficking story.

Miriam, had ventured abroad to find honest work in order to be able to help support her poor family back home. Like so many unwitting victims, she had to pay a huge amount required by the local employment agent (a third of her two year salary), which put herself and her family deeply in debt.

Fortunately, unlike many victims who end up forced into prostitution and drug use, Miriam actually did get the job of housemaid she had been told she would get. And

so, for the first week, she felt things were going well. Her employer and his wife welcomed her and advised her that they would “do her the favor” of holding on to her passport as, they said, it would prevent her losing it. While she had some misgivings, she handed her only official documents over to her new employers.

That next week Miriam worked particularly hard to make a good impression. But her employers again complained and said that “until she got her work up to snuff” she would have to work 7 days a week. They demanded the key to the apartment, which, they said, would be locked from the inside henceforward since she would not be allowed to leave unless/until they were satisfied with her work. Additionally, they told her they would hold her weekly pay for the foreseeable future since she wouldn’t be needing it as she could not longer leave the premises.

Not wanting to lose her job, Miriam determined to work even harder, hoping to get her employers’ approval the following week, together with the key to her freedom. She nevertheless felt a sinking feeling as she had never before felt as trapped as she suddenly did.

Again, that next week she worked almost without rest, knowing that not only her job, but her normal freedom was at stake.

The following week, her employers again told her that she was not working hard enough. She was devastated since she knew she could not worker harder than she had been working. It just wasn’t humanly possible. And she knew she had completed all of the tasks given to her more than satisfactorily.

Then the husband told Miriam that he had noticed that she had a nice perfume and she might be able to keep her job if she came back with him to the bedroom. Her sinking feeling turned into horror. She was trapped.

The other girls residing in the house --who were listening to Miriam tell her story were in tears, as were we who were listening. They indicated that their stories were very similar to hers. Each had been seeking employment to send money home to their families, and each got trapped into a life of slavery, of physical and sexual abuse.

She indicated that her employers eventually accused her of stealing from them, which would have been impossible since she had never been able to leave the house. With that excuse, things escalated from sexual abuse to beatings every other day. This abuse then escalated to burnings with an iron and sadistic electrocution.

Miriam’s captivity lasted four years until she miraculously found an open door and managed to flee.

Miriam said that often wondered if the woman she replaced had managed to live up to her employers’ expectations, and only found out subsequently that she had jumped to her death off the balcony of the apartment.

When I asked if she was happy with her freedom, and what she was going to do now that she was free, she began to cry again. Miriam explained that as her employer had taken her honor, she would never be able to go back home, as her family would at best disown her.

A story like this seems almost inconceivable. Almost. Until you hear the recent story of the three girls in Cleveland, Ohio, in the U.S. who were enslaved in a U.S. city for over 10 years. The point is that enslavement can and does happen “next door” wherever one happens to live.

Our conclusion after hearing Miriam’s story and bits and pieces of her housemates in the safe house was that it is vital that safe houses continue to provide sanctuary for these girls. But it isn’t enough.

We must find a way to PREVENT these girls from falling into these diabolical traps. We must not only help to heal, but more importantly, we must prevent the shattering of lives.

And so, again, the question is how?

If our concerted efforts are to mean anything, they must be concretely addressed through:

- a) ensuring that legal instruments are in place to protect migrant workers, and that they are enforced,
- b) public awareness and educational campaigns at national, community and family levels which inform,
- c) mechanisms to ensure normal financial rewards for good and well-intentioned workers, and
- d) a valid public certification of employment agents who agree to provide minimums of protection and reasonable fee schedules for their clients.

And in addition to these essential building blocks, what does the Church itself have as its value added. That is, what is the comparative advantage that the Church brings to the global table to eliminate human trafficking?

And I would submit that the Catholic Church offers 4 unique advantages:

- 1) The extraordinary grass-roots presence of the Church throughout the world—[if anyone wants to find out anything about a community in which they land, an intelligent first step is to first touch base with the local pastor and the sisters in that community—and this is true from Des Moines, Iowa to Lyon, France; from Cebu to San Francisco];
- 2) The great Catholic educational history and expertise—Catholic schools are respected globally and they have been responsible for inculturating Gospel values for



millennia,--Catholic nuns, clergy, and laypeople have been instrumental in the history of women's education. An end to trafficking should thus be seen as yet another great educational challenge;

3) The Bully Pulpit--What President Teddy Roosevelt borrowed as a term to describe the ability of the US Presidency to focus attention on particular topics--was itself borrowed from the bulliest pulpit of all. As we have heard since the election of Pope Francis, themes enunciated and simple gestures of a Pontiff can be an amazingly powerful voice for the voiceless and a clarion call for change;

4) And lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the Church's institutional staying power:

While many institutions come and go are based on what is finally the popularity of a particular individual or movement, what I might call the "franchise value" of the Catholic Church has an unparalleled history of continuity. In an ever-fluctuating world, its actions for the good are bankable. I thus often joke that banks love the Church because it pays its debts "religiously". One can literally bank on the Church to create social services from scratch, and to create parishes in prairies generation after generation.

And over the past year and a half since Francis' election as a "migrant Pope" who indicated that his brother cardinals had chosen him from the ends of the earth, and from a migrant Italian family, we have heard an extraordinary emphasis about the Church's concerns for the poor, about migrants, about refugees, and perhaps most of all, about trafficked persons.

And again, armed with this almost unprecedented inspiration, of the bully pulpit, what is the path that Francis would bid us follow?

A year ago November, Pope Francis called a workshop on Human Trafficking to be sponsored by the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in the Vatican to which I was honored to be invited. World experts from around the globe participated, including four Anglican bishops representing the Archbishop of Canterbury to come to terms with the global challenge before us. I am pleased to report that it published a global call to action, and that the Pope has initiated an international action-oriented response in partnership with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Australian billionaire Andrew Forrest, and several important imams to call together the leaders of the major religions of the world, political and corporate leaders to a spiritually-centered, but politically-active focus.

In the initial drafts, I was highly gratified to see a major focus on the involvement of young people and women, whose very participation might help to preclude their entrapment, but much more importantly, that the suffering of the millions of trafficked women, children and men might not be in vain.

Concomitant with the challenges of human trafficking, our societies are also confronted by younger generations who not only sometimes rightly rebel against the preceding generation, but in a sense rebel against their own humanity. Earlier this

year when I was traveling through Dubai, a 24 year old Filipino store salesman with whom I struck up a conversation offered the deeply felt remark, that he and his generation, as he put it, “find it difficult to be righteous”. It is a generation that in many instances does not seem fully cognizant of the need to find themselves through going outside of themselves. A generation which often seems allergic to even telephone voice contact, in favor of texting ever-briefer abbreviations, finds its eyes fixated on screens rather than faces, and holding computer keys rather than hands.

It is not enough therefore to enlist adults in this global fight as the statistics show that it is the youth who are most at danger of becoming victims of traffickers, and in fact, part of the trap can often be the virtual internet reality that traffickers present to lure youth to a trafficking fate.

We must look together for solutions with youth, recognizing that there is no one-size-fits-all set of solutions—but rather, our purpose in joining together is to learn what is most effective and what is not, prioritizing proven best practices, particularly from the women religious, pastors and lay leaders who have been bravely on the ground, often alone, for decades.

During the Vatican Workshop on Human Trafficking ICMC proposed as the center piece of the Church’s dual aim of global prayer and call to action that the Holy Father declare a world day of prayer on the Feast Day of St. Bakhita on February 8, where every diocese or group of dioceses would host a well-publicized media event to highlight the tragedy and what is being done to stop it, to be carried out in parallel with a call to prayer and fasting led by the Holy Father in St. Peter’s Square.

And we proposed that an integral part of this at the multiple Church levels would be to prioritize the recruitment of youth to look at the problem of human trafficking through their lens of choice—the video lens, and share its horror with their contemporaries.

The hope is that, in witnessing the problem, they will recognize the consequences of relativist views which do not have as their foundation the essential dignity of the human person. It is further hoped that youth might be drawn to help in identifying overall solutions which they can also share in formulating. One possible scenario would be a global contest for youth where individuals would submit 2- minute videos whose work judged by their peers to be most poignant and that these could be shown to the Holy Father during the annual Global Day of Prayer on February 8<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of St. Bakhita. not only be heard at the national level, but in each diocese and community.

Youth need to see the world through the eyes of youth and we need to direct their eyes towards this problem that imperils them most of all.. For youth who are caught up in the din of unending intrusive messages, a simple call for moments of silence in favor of trafficking victims whose voices cannot otherwise be heard, can serve to open their consciousness to world beyond the mundane.

I was buoyed several years ago when my then 17 year old daughter came home with a plastic bracelet on which was written “Kony 2012.” When I asked about the significance, Mary became much more animated than usual and said “Daddy it is an important movement against child soldiering that the kids have seen on an internet site, and we are going to get together and have major marches and demonstrations in support.” My assumption that “the kids” she had spoken about were only her friends from school was thrown out the window when I discovered that the video that had been created had gone viral and had the largest number of hits in history—some 95 million in one day.

What this said to me is that there is a great pent up desire amongst young people to join in a meaningful cause that they can apprehend “in their language”. The saddest part of the story is that now one never hears about Kony 2012 and that it crashed and burned financially and morally as it was based on two shallow a base and without an overarching faith underpinning that could carry forward. Once again, the youth was left disillusioned, and more importantly, child soldiering continued unabated.

The second group that I am convinced need be fully involved in the Anti-trafficking mobilization, is women.. Just as women’s education would have been stalled, if not sidelined without the Church’s guiding reverence for Mary’s essential role in divine history, the respect for the equal rights of women and children, and of their particular vulnerability for traffickers needs to be continually vocalized as an essential element in any strategy to end human trafficking.

Just as the women religious were amongst the first and certainly amongst the most effective advocates for women’s education, so they have been in the forefront in human trafficking..

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I would like to conclude by focusing on Pope Francis’ thoughts and teachings on human trafficking.

His vision is certainly not one of exclusivity, but rather, as this is a global problem, it requires an open embrace to other religions to express their determination in their own spiritual terms that this form of modern slavery must be stopped. The Holy Father notes that it is imperative for there to be the legal basis both internationally and nationally to recognize human trafficking for the crime against humanity that it is. Yet, there are laws and laws, and without a ground-swell of public outrage, laws are sometimes not given the follow-through that is needed. He has thus also pointed repeatedly to the fact that as consumers we are not blameless if we do not question how to diminish the demand for goods and services produced through trafficking. Thus another important aspect of the Church’s plan is to call for the certification of corporations and their supply chains to be trafficking-free.

What I believe the Holy Father is calling us to is to take stock of our present situation in each country, and indeed in each village, to learn of what is already being done—and I believe that in many cases we will be edified by the bravery, the inventiveness, and the stick-to-it-iveness that we will witness in hearing, from those who have been working in this field for years, of their measured successes, and hopefully, also of their failures, since much can also be learned from failure.

With this in mind, ICMC has thus entered into a pioneering partnership with the Philippine Bishops Conference to first map on-going anti-human trafficking efforts throughout the Philippines and the Asia region, and in February of this year I was honored to give the keynote address at the first national conference sponsored by the Philippine Catholic Church on human trafficking to which the Philippine Vice President and Minister of Justice actively participated. The mapping of the great history of witness can provide a blueprint of what will become a strategy for success for the future. And this regional effort is one that should serve as a pilot for other regions of the world where their own histories of trafficking are both similar and unique, but which in order to be effective, must be part of a global commitment and plan of action.

This sort of mapping is a first step whose aim is not only to assist victims, but to prevent victimhood. And in so doing, we do not set ourselves up as teachers, but pupils, who by sharing histories at a round table, can all increase our expertise and effectiveness. It is my sense that many involved in anti-trafficking have often felt a sense of swimming upstream, and the good news is that with Pope Francis the tide of that stream has very perceptibly shifted.

I want to share with you, that several months back, in fact on the day the Holy Father announced the day of prayer and fasting for Syria, I was honored to have an audience during which the pope said, as he put his hand to his chest, that this is a matter which is very dear to his heart.

*I would like to draw my remarks to a close with reference to a sermon given by Pope Francis on the Feast of St. Thomas the Apostle who is portrayed by the gospel as one of the most human of the apostles in his continual doubt of the divinity of Christ. As we know, Thomas' doubt of Christ's divinity even endured past the crucifixion and resurrection, and Our Lord, when He appeared to the apostles, exemplifying his infinite patience, he instructed his friend and disciple, the doubting Thomas, to literally touch his wounds in his hands and feet and chest. Our Lord knew that like many, Thomas could not believe in Christ as God without a compelling incarnational experience.. Pope Francis rhetorically asks and answers where in our day we can touch the wounds of Christ:*

**"In the history of the Church there have been some mistakes made on the path towards God. ...We find Jesus' wounds in carrying out works of mercy, giving to our body – the body – the soul too, but – I stress – the body of your wounded brother, because he is hungry, because he is**

**thirsty, because he is naked because it is humiliated, because he is a slave, because he's in jail because he is in the hospital. Those are the wounds of Jesus today. And Jesus asks us to take a leap of faith, towards Him, but through these His wounds. ...We need to touch the wounds of Jesus, we must caress the wounds of Jesus, we need to bind the wounds of Jesus with tenderness, we have to kiss the wounds of Jesus, and this literally. Just think of what happened tfo St. Francis, when he embraced the leper? The same thing that happened to Thomas: his life changed. "**

May God bless the future efforts of those who have taken on, and hopefully the many who will take on, the prevention of human trafficking – especially our youth, and by so doing, come to meet God through the wounds of our fellow man.

In closing I would ask that in addition to whatever commitment you make to end this unspeakable blight that you also raise your voices and those of your families and friends in prayer. As the basis for all of the plans of action that we might choose, we need to pray with one voice that those who woke up once again this morning to the dread of yet another hopeless day, may soon find again through the fruits of our efforts, an end to their isolation, the joy of freedom and the recognition of their human dignity which is the fundament of love upon which all God's creation rests.

Thank you.