

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

Traffic Is Never Good, But This Traffic Is Heinous

Last week, we began this month's series on Respect for All Human Life with a column on protecting the lives of our youngest human persons. However, if we are to call ourselves "pro-life," then we must respect and protect all human life through all stages, from conception to natural death. The columns for the rest of the month will carry the idea of respect for all human life through the lifecycle of the human person, focusing on just a few of the pertinent topics for each stage of life. This week, we take a look at a topic that affects young people and people of working age, human trafficking.

Recently, human trafficking has finally received a great deal of media attention. According to the United Nations, human trafficking is defined as "the recruitment, transportation, harboring or receipt of persons by means of force, fraud or coercion." [UN General Assembly, "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons...", §3a, 15 November 2000] The goal of human trafficking is to use the "trafficked" persons for forced labor - especially in the areas of agriculture, fishing, sweat shops, and domestic help - or for sexual exploitation - such as prostitution and pornography. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), a great majority of "trafficked" persons are women and girls (55% of forced labor and 98% of sexual exploitation) and 26% of all victims are aged 17 and under. [ILO, 2012 *Global Estimate of Forced Labor*]

Human trafficking has often been referred to as "modern day slavery" and we as Catholics should work to eradicate this blight on our society. The Church has always taught that such activities, which diminish the value of any person, are objectively sinful. During Vatican II, the Church

stated in *Gaudium et Spes* that "slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children, [and] disgraceful working conditions where [people] are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons" are "infamies indeed." [Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 27]

So, what can we do about human trafficking? First, we can ensure that we are not contributing to industries that profit from human trafficking. Last year, we saw evidence that human trafficking is active in our neighborhood. ["Hundreds arrested in South Florida, Treasure Coast massage parlor bust", www.local10.com, 2/21/19] Also, online pornography is coming into many homes and can be viewed on tablets and phones as well. The customers of pornographic websites are keeping those sites alive...and keeping the *victims* of the pornographers imprisoned.

Regarding those who profit from other forced labor, perhaps we can ask ourselves, "Do I know where my produce comes from?" or "How can I be sure that the food I give to my family was produced in a way that did not denigrate others?" It is our responsibility to find out more and ensure that the people who are providing us with food are doing so with labor that is respected and valued.

What else can we do? We can do our part to ensure that our government is taking the proper oversight over industries that are prone to profiting from human trafficking. We can also work to promote new legislation that inhibits and hopefully stops all human trafficking.

To summarize what we need to do: Learn more about human trafficking, do not support those who take advantage of others, and do our part to stop this *dis-respect* of human lives!

