

Discours au Séminaire

Re: Addiction

1er juillet 2019

On behalf of the Diocese of Port Louis, Mauritius, I want to welcome you all to this Addictions Conference whose goal is to “bring hope to those struggling with drug, alcohol, gambling or sex addiction.” A special welcome to Hon. Pravind Jugnauth, Prime Minister, whose presence indicates that caring for and curing people from addiction is a priority. It is my great pleasure to be with you today and offer my support for this educational gathering. I especially want to thank Fr. Jocelyn Gregoire and the Beacon of Hope Organization, as well as the co-sponsors, such as Duquesne University and the local businesses, government entities, and concerned individuals who have invested in this event. I am especially grateful to those of you who have traveled from abroad to be with us in Mauritius and participate in the dialogues that will take place over the next few days.

The mission of the Church is to stand with the poor. When we say we take an option for the poor, we are not referring just to monetary poverty. Poverty comes in many different forms – one of which certainly is addiction. Indeed, some have referred to people who are struggling with addiction as the modern lepers, because they are alienated from their families and friends; they are susceptible to losing their jobs; and, tragically, they often lose the sense of themselves as good people who are capable of leading a good life. The shame that comes with addiction can be destructive. For shame undermines a fundamental conviction that every person is created in the image of God and thus has dignity, worth, and the potential to contribute something meaningful to the world.

The cost to the person who is addicted can never be reduced to dollars and cents [rupees]. Our concern springs from something deeper than economic reasons; it comes from our understanding that all people should have the opportunity to genuinely know their worth. Every person should have the chance to use his God granted freedom to develop his gifts and talents. Addiction is a kind of slavery that binds the addict and undermines his/her ability to become more “a human being.”

Paradoxically, however, addicts who have actively started a journey of recovery, and who work day after day at remaining sober, learn some of the most valuable lessons in the human experience, and can teach us a lot about how to become really human.

A first lesson they learn on their journey from addiction to recovery is one of courage. They need to face up honestly to the deep causes of their addiction. It takes a lot of

courage to admit one's shortcomings, the ways in which we have missed the mark and acknowledge that beyond those who tempted us or let us down there lies a big chunk of personal responsibility. The courage to admit our frailty and weakness is one of the milestones on the road to recovery.

Addicts on the road of recovery also learn a lesson of humility. This leads them to admit at some point that they cannot achieve recovery on their own. They acknowledge that they are powerless over their addiction and that they need the care and the helping hand of brothers and sisters to be able to make it. Thus, they teach us silently that we are not self sufficient even if we think we are. We are not islands unto ourselves. We are brothers and sisters, members of the human family. And no one in this family can be saved in isolation. Our safety, our salvation depends upon the solidarity of our brothers and sisters. As human beings, we all receive a call from God to be our brothers and sisters' keepers.

In this sense the pain and suffering of our brothers and sisters who are travelling on their journey of recovery can be redemptive. The stories that people in recovery tell can be achingly sad but also deeply inspiring, especially for those who are just taking the first steps to address their addiction. To have another person humbly witness to powerlessness over addiction; to hear them take responsibility for causing others hurt; and to listen to them commit to make amends for wrongs is hope-producing.

It is my deep-seated belief that the ugliness of addiction can be transformed into a renewed quality of life and solidarity which amounts to an invaluable contribution to a safe and caring society.

This is what compels me to advocate for broad-based rehabilitative approaches to care for the addict. In many places throughout the world, justice systems have adopted alternate pathways to dealing with people whose addiction bring them into contact with the police and the courts. Globally, there is a recognition that punishment is not always the best and certainly should not be the only social response to irresponsible or illegal alcohol and drug use. While we must balance individual rights with safety for all members of the community, we must be cautious not to use social responses that *only punish* for breaking the law without also giving people an opportunity for rehabilitation and recovery.

This is why I urge that we Mauritians take a pastoral approach to dealing with addiction and those who commit offenses as a part of their addiction.