



Lent Sixth Week

Leader:

Spare us, God. Spare your people! Do not let us die for we are crying out to you.
Joel 2:17

Song:

A Lenten hymn of your choice

Leader:

As we enter into this final week of Lent, we are called to participate ever more deeply in the agony and death of Jesus. As we gather in prayer, let us be mindful of the suffering of the body of Christ still present in our world. Let us seek and search out ways that we might help to bring about resurrection for our oppressed sisters and brothers, especially children who are exploited in ways we can only imagine.

A Cyberspace Story:

With a single click of the mouse at their computers, children can be thrust into the dark world of cyberspace seduction. An Italian priest, an energetic and caring pastor, was offering an internet course to the children in the parish school when he was accidentally introduced to this world. As Father Fortunato Di Noto was helping the children research information, one young girl wanted to know more about candy. When the Italian slang word for lollipop was entered into the search engine, a pornographic website used to seduce children appeared on the screen. Father Di Noto was enraged. He discovered websites where adults prey on children, explicitly displaying child rape and child torture for the viewing pleasure of adults.

Father Di Noto transformed his rage into moral action. Knowing that the personal lives and futures of many children are being destroyed in this manner, he began a search of those online predators. Law enforcement officers in Europe and North America credit him with providing information leading to several breakthroughs in their investigations. He has been able to help investigators break international pedophile rings in Russia and the United States.

A national study in the United States revealed that one in five children who go online regularly are approached by strangers for sex. The most common response among children internet victims is silence. Because they are afraid of losing internet access, children will not tell their parents and try to deal with the matter in their own way.

Silent Reflection

Scripture:

This, rather, is the fasting that I wish:
Releasing those bound unjustly,
Untying the thongs of the yoke;
Setting free the oppressed,
Breaking every yoke. Isaiah 58:6

Reflection:

What fasting does this cyberspace story inspire you to undertake?
Does the action of Father Di Noto move you in any way to help set free those caught in the web of computer addictions, both the perpetrators and the victims?
How?

Scripture:

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute! Speak out! Judge righteously, defend the right of the poor and the needy. Proverbs 31: 8-9

Reading:

Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead by God to become an advocate for all God's people. Jesus stands with all of humanity against the powers of evil. The powerful and the wealthy have many advocates to stand with them. Jesus is the Advocate for the poor. Adapted from *Economic Way of the Cross*

Reflection:

When Jesus said, "What I have done, you also must do," he meant more than washing feet and changing bread and wine. His words included service to all those in need. His words call us to be advocates for the poor and the oppressed. What is my resolve this Paschal Season to release children who are unjustly bound by pornographic websites, to raise up women who do not resources to care for their families, to call the rich and the powerful to accept their responsibility to promote gospel values?

Prayer:

Leader:

To our own greed
To our habits of consumption...
To our fears that keep us from action...
To social systems and structures that oppress the poor and vulnerable...
To ways that we might challenge those unjust systems and structures...
To our blindness that keeps us from seeing the needs of our neighbors...
To our own addictions to comfort and security...

Response: Open our eyes

Closing Prayer:

O God, we confess that we are more ready to help our family members and friends than to help our neighbors who we do not see or whose differences create fear within us. Forgive us and empower us to become true advocates for those who are excluded and overlooked.
Through Spirit's power we pray. Amen. Adapted from *Economic Way of the Cross*