

Reflections

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Catholic Family Newsletter

November 2024

Bringing Light Into a World of Darkness

Habitual Sins

Akiana, Paintings of Jesus

Catholicism In Vietnam Has Grown

How To Leave Porn Behind

*****THOUGHT FOR TODAY*****

“

Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.” Ezekiel 20:20

By: Richard Pickard

Blessings to All:

The beginning of habitual sins develops slowly over time. One day you lied about something small to protect your pride or shift the blame to someone else. You feel a little guilt but pass it off as nothing to worry about. Then the next time you lied about something small you had less guilt but again, *'not to worry about such things.'* Over time, the guilt disappears. Your moral compass is not working as it should. Then it might escalate...Perhaps you might take something small that does not belong to you and your moral compass continues to suffer, but this time, *you feel no guilt.*

Over time, we may lose the “sense of sin.” St John Paul II in 1984 addresses this in his speech on *Reconciliation and Penance*.

“It happens not infrequently in history, for more or less lengthy periods and under the influence of many different factors, that the moral conscience of many people becomes seriously clouded. ‘Have we the right idea of conscience?’ – I

asked two years ago in an address to the faithful – ‘Is it not true that modern man is threatened by an eclipse of conscience? By a deformation of conscience? By a numbness or ‘deadening’ of conscience?’ Too many signs indicate that such an eclipse exists in our time. This is all the more disturbing in that conscience, defined by the council as **‘the most secret core and sanctuary of a man,’** is ‘strictly related to human freedom...For this reason conscience, to a great extent, constitutes the basis of man’s interior dignity and, at the same time, of his relationship to God.’ It is inevitable therefore that in this situation there is an obscuring also of the sense of sin, which is closely connected with the moral conscience, the search for [divine] Truth and the desire to make a responsible use of freedom. **When the conscience is weakened the sense of God is also obscured, and as a result, with the loss of this decisive inner point of reference, the sense of sin is lost.** This explains why my predecessor Pius XII one day declared, in words that have almost become proverbial, **‘The sin of the century is the loss of the ‘sense of sin.’**”

I believe that the world has indeed lost its sense of sin. Humanity is constantly being bombarded by “if it feels good, do it” philosophy. From killing a baby in the womb and referring this as **“woman health, My body, My choice,”** to the moral decay seen in the addiction to pornography, drugs and celebrating the sensual side of humanity including the increase in adultery.

People who oppose such sins are laughed at and those praying at abortion clinics are arrests and are liable to jail time if they block access to abortion clinics. **Did you ever think in your lifetime, that trying to prevent the killing of babies in the womb would be a criminal offense? While the law protects those that kill babies!**

The sense of sin is part of the moral law that God has given to each human as a guide. When we feel guilty about breaking the moral law, we feel regret, ashamed or guilty. Over time, habitual sins dull our conscience. Our conscience is the very core of our belief system given to us by God.



The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1796) states "Conscience represents both the more general ability we have as human beings to know

what is good and right and the concrete judgments we make in particular situations concerning what we should do or about what we have already done. Moral choices confront us with the decision to follow or depart from reason and the divine law. A good conscience makes judgments that conform to reason and the good that is willed by the Wisdom of God. A good conscience requires lifelong formation. Each baptized follower of Christ is obliged to form his or her conscience according to objective moral standards. The Word of God is a principal tool in the formation of conscience when it is assimilated by study, prayer, and practice. The prudent advice and good example of others support and enlighten our conscience. The authoritative teaching of the Church is an essential element in our conscience formation. Finally, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, combined with regular examination of our conscience, will help us develop a morally sensitive conscience.

You can defeat habitual sins. No matter what sins are in your life. When tempted, Pray, Pray, Pray... Use the Rosary. The Rosary is a weapon against the temptations of Satan. Or wear the Scapula...Wear a blessed cross...Keep blessed objects with you. Return to using Holy Water. Even if you don't pray the Rosary, keep it with you at all times. Don't give up. It might be hard, but your life will be happier when you defeat these sins.



Words to live by...

Ephesians 4:29-32

“Never let evil talk pass your lips; say only the good things men need to hear, things that will really help them. Do nothing that will sadden the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed against the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, all passion and anger, harsh words, slander, and malice of every kind. In place of these, be kind to one another, compassionate, and mutually forgiving, just as God has forgiven you in Christ.”



For child art prodigy Akiane, Jesus is for real.

By Mark Ellis —



Akiane with Jesus paintings

Her atheist parents were surprised when their three-year-old began to describe dreams and visions from God. This inexplicable direction in their daughter's life, combined with a remarkable talent in art and poetry, inspired her family to re-examine their own lives.

"My life began in an unusual way," says Akiane Kramarik, 17, who spent her early years in rural Illinois. By unusual, she refers to her underwater birth in "a shack" on the edge of a cornfield. "Our family had no money, no friends, no relatives, no television or radio. Our life was quite simple — long walks in nature, open conversations, and hands on explorations of knowledge," she says.

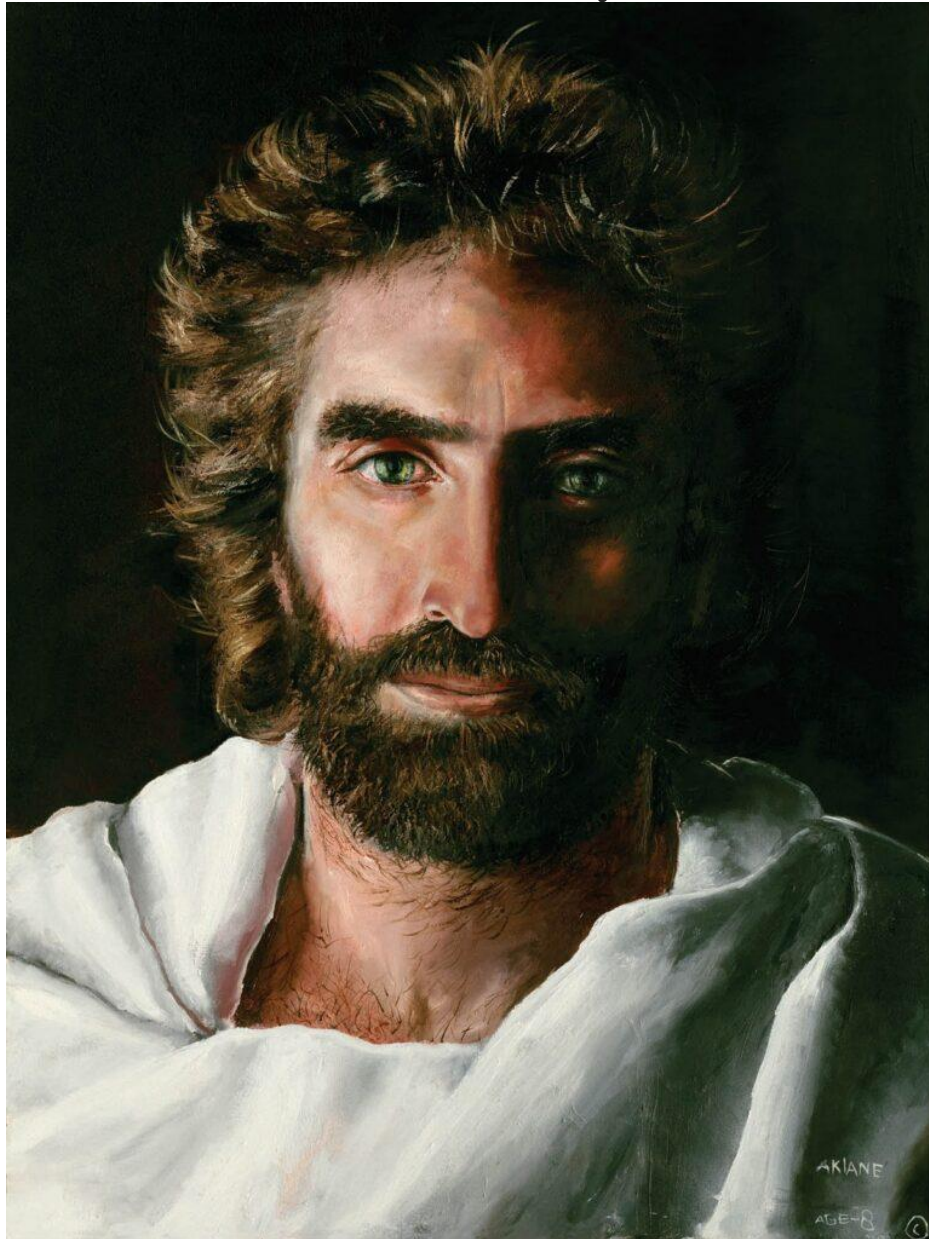
Her mother, Forelli, is a Lithuanian immigrant educator. Akiane's father, Mark, is a chef from Chicago with a Catholic background. In her early family life, there was no prayer, no discussions of God, and no visits to church. Yet in the insular atheistic environment her parents created — free from media influences or even outside babysitters — Akiane suddenly began to talk about God.

She spoke of colorful dreams and visions about heaven, Jesus, and God's amazing love. Her stunned parents realized her intense focus on God could not have been inspired by anything in the world they created for her. Indeed, Akiane seemed to be having supernatural encounters with the living God.

“Most of my spiritual experiences I kept secret, so as not to overwhelm my parents,” she says.

At a tender age, God implanted the desire to articulate her divinely inspired dreams and visions into art. “When I was four years old, suddenly I started experiencing vivid impressions about different dimensions and a great desire to express them through art,” she says. Initially, she utilized whatever medium was on hand: candles, lipstick, fruits, vegetables, charcoal or pencils.

“Prince of Peace” by Akiane



At eight-years-old, Akiane decided she wanted to paint the face of Jesus, based on the visions she received. She looked for a person she might use as an artist’s model for a long time, and finally told her family they should pray for God to send someone.



On the day they prayed, a mysterious carpenter showed up at their front door looking for work. Akiane took one look at the man's facial features – remarkably close to the vision she received – and told her mother he was the one.

In humility, the man initially said he was not worthy to represent his Master. But reluctantly, the man agreed, although he asked to remain anonymous.

Akiane's painting of Jesus was a painstaking effort. "The 'Prince of Peace' took me 40 hours to paint

and another 20 hours of working with model sketching," Akiane says. Akiane deftly works with light and shadows to create powerful impressions. "The light side of his face represents the truth, the dark side represents suffering," she notes.

Colton Burpo, the subject of the book "Heaven is for Real," identified this painting of Jesus as the closest representation of the Savior whom he witnessed in his dramatic vision.

Akiane and Colton

Both Akiane and Colton were struck by the beauty of Jesus' eyes. "All I remember were the eyes," Akiane says, "and they were like no other colors that were ever created. The closest color I can depict through paints is a sapphire hue." Colton identified the color of Jesus' eyes as blue green.

In 2010, Akiane told Seattle station KCTS that her spiritual epiphanies caused her parents to start seeking answers. "We went through almost everything," Akiane said. "We went through being Christian, being a Catholic, we studied Buddhism. At this point every one of my siblings have their own path toward a spiritual enlightenment."

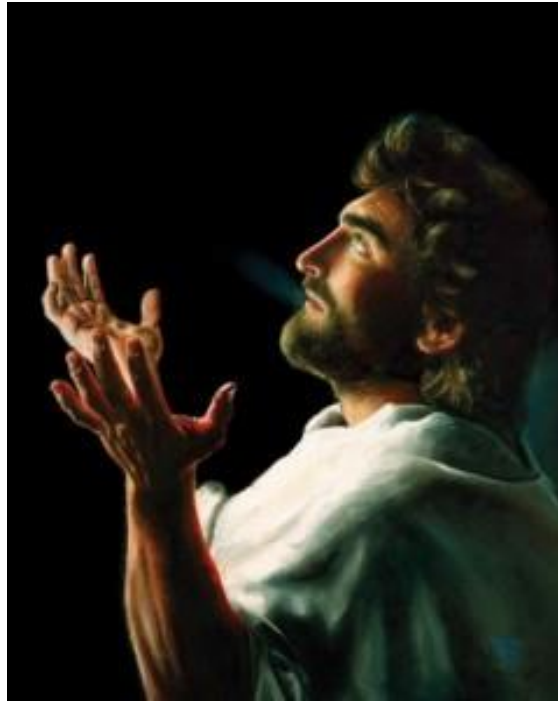
"I have my own and my parents have theirs and my brothers have theirs," she continued. "I'm the same person as when I was four years old. I haven't changed."

Akiane's discovery of God seems remarkably personal. "Since nobody told me who God was, I found God myself. He's been there for me through the years. I don't belong to any denomination or religion. I belong to God."

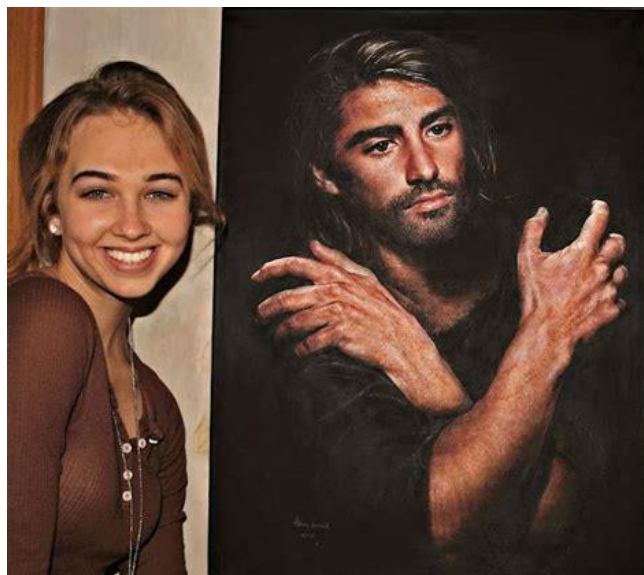
To eliminate any confusion, however, Jesus is first in her mind. "He is the only way to God — the only way to heaven and joy," she states. "My personal views on Jesus have only matured and deepened since age 4. As I grow, I see how vast and unlimited His love is."

"Jesus remains my highest authority, love, and God," she adds. "I pray every day that people will one day follow Jesus, His teachings and feel His love."

"Father Forgive Them" by Akiane



Akiane completed her second painting of Jesus, "Father Forgive Them," at age 9. "I have painted about 10 paintings of Jesus," she says, "including his mother Mary and many paintings of His creation. My current painting is another tribute to Jesus, a very special portrait, titled 'I AM.'"



As Akiane gets older, some of the early dreams and visions have begun to fade in her memory. "Although I have forgotten most of my early heavenly contacts, my recent visions continue in a special way," she says.

"I alone know how important Jesus is for me. Instead of writing it is best for me to express (this) through my personal connection — art. I portray Jesus how I see him, as human and as divine.

"My art is only a representation of what I see — Jesus' glory is beyond any description!"

Why Catholicism In Vietnam Has Grown In The Last 20 Years

By: Christian.Net, February 2024



Historical Background of Catholicism in Vietnam

The historical roots of Catholicism in Vietnam can be traced back to the arrival of Portuguese missionaries in the 16th century. The initial encounters between Catholicism and Vietnam were marked by a complex interplay of cultural exchange, religious fervor, and geopolitical dynamics. The efforts of early missionaries, including the prominent figure of Alexandre de Rhodes, played a pivotal role in laying the foundation for the Catholic faith in Vietnam.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Catholicism faced periods of both growth and persecution in Vietnam. The faith found resonance among certain segments of the population, leading to the establishment of vibrant Christian communities in various regions. However, these developments were met with

resistance from the ruling authorities, resulting in episodes of persecution and suppression of Catholic activities.

One of the most notable chapters in the history of Catholicism in Vietnam is the persecution of the 19th century, known as the **Vietnamese Martyrdom**. This period witnessed the martyrdom of numerous Vietnamese Catholics who steadfastly adhered to their faith despite facing severe persecution and hardships. The resilience and unwavering commitment of these martyrs left an indelible mark on the trajectory of Catholicism in Vietnam, inspiring generations of believers and shaping the collective memory of the Catholic community.



IN REMEMBRANCE OF HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF CHRISTIANS MARTYRED IN VIETNAM.

The Vatican estimates the number of Vietnamese martyrs at between 130,000 and 300,000. The tortures these individuals underwent are considered by the Vatican to be among the worst in the history of Christian martyrdom. The torturers hacked off limbs joint by joint, tore flesh with red hot tongs, and used drugs to enslave the minds of the victims. Christians at the time were branded on the face with the words "tả đạo" (左道, lit. "unorthodox religion") and families and villages which subscribed to Christianity were obliterated.

The 20th century brought significant challenges and opportunities for Catholicism in Vietnam. The country's tumultuous political landscape, including

the colonial rule, the struggle for independence, and the Vietnam War, profoundly impacted the Catholic Church and its followers. The Church played a multifaceted role during these transformative periods, advocating for social justice, providing humanitarian aid, and navigating complex relationships with the ruling authorities.

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the Catholic Church in Vietnam faced a new set of challenges as the country underwent profound socio-political changes. Despite these challenges, the Catholic community demonstrated resilience and adaptability, contributing to the rebuilding and reconciliation efforts in the post-war era. The subsequent decades witnessed a gradual resurgence of Catholicism in Vietnam, marked by the revitalization of religious practices, the emergence of new leadership, and a renewed sense of identity within the broader Vietnamese society.



Divine Mercy Procession in Vietnam

Factors Contributing to the Growth of Catholicism in Vietnam

1. Social Services and Humanitarian Work

The Catholic Church in Vietnam has been actively engaged in a wide array of social services and humanitarian work, addressing critical needs within communities across the country. Through initiatives focused on education, healthcare, poverty alleviation, and disaster relief, the Church has garnered widespread respect and admiration, earning a reputation as a compassionate and dedicated advocate for social welfare.

2. Embrace of Cultural Traditions

The Catholic Church in Vietnam has demonstrated a remarkable ability to embrace and integrate cultural traditions, fostering a sense of harmony and resonance with the broader Vietnamese society. By incorporating local customs, rituals, and expressions of faith into religious practices, the Church has established deep roots within the cultural fabric of Vietnam, resonating with the spiritual sensibilities of the Vietnamese people.

3. Youth Engagement and Leadership Development

The active engagement of youth within the Catholic community has played a pivotal role in driving the growth of Catholicism in Vietnam. The Church has invested in youth leadership development, providing opportunities for education, mentorship, and community involvement.

4. Spiritual Resilience and Faith Expression

The enduring faith of Vietnamese Catholics, coupled with their dedication to religious practices and communal worship, has served as a source of inspiration and strength.

5. Interfaith Dialogue and Collaboration

The Catholic Church in Vietnam has actively fostered interfaith dialogue and collaboration, seeking to build bridges of understanding and cooperation with diverse religious communities.

The Catholic Church in Vietnam stands as a vibrant and integral part of the country's social and spiritual fabric, embodying the values of compassion, resilience, and cultural harmony. As it continues to navigate the complexities of the contemporary era, the Catholic Church in Vietnam remains poised to contribute to the flourishing of society and the enrichment of the spiritual lives of the Vietnamese people.



Blessed Mother Being Honored in Vietnam by Local Bishop

How to Leave Porn Behind



Article by Samuel James

My older sister sat across from me at the Taco Bell and listened carefully. She knew I was lying, but she was too concerned to be angry. As she questioned me about the double life I had been living, which had been unwillingly exposed to my family and friends, she calmly heard my mistruths and told me that she knew better.

For years I had been hiding beneath the identity of being a pastor's kid in the church worship band while yielding myself totally to pornography. I was broken, but not broken enough, and still trying to put up a crumbling façade.

As she surgically deconstructed my lies, she knew I was broken. She knew I needed a path toward healing as soon as possible. So, she looked at me and said something that still echoes in my mind eight years later: "I want you to pursue a radical lifestyle of repentance."

"The sin of pornography goes much deeper than the singular moments of watching and downloading."

This frightened me. What did she mean? Yes, I knew I had to repent. Yes, Jesus had used this destruction in my life to show me his gospel in a saving way for the very first time. I was ready (or so I thought) to turn from my sin. The solution seemed obvious enough: (1) I had to confess openly my problem

with porn, (2) I had to get an accountability partner, and (3) I needed to see a counselor at my school (I ended up doing all three).

But her words “radical lifestyle” — *radical*, not garden-variety; *lifestyle*, not sporadic or occasional — suggested unknown depths of discipline. I squirmed in my seat, nodded, and quietly feared my future. Little did I realize how life-giving a “radical lifestyle” could be.

Why So Many Are Losing the Battle

If you had asked me, I would have said that my life was just fine as it was, except for the porn. But I’ve come to realize that this perception was wrong.

The sin of pornography goes much deeper than the singular moments of watching and downloading. It’s about entire daily patterns of unbelief, laziness, self-absorption, and much more. Thus, repentance from enslavement to pornography must seek more than behavior modification in one isolated habit. It must be a resolve to bring every piece of the heart’s architecture, every beat of the rhythm of life, into the light of the gospel.

Many Christian men are fighting a losing battle with pornography because they are trying to remove the sin without adopting a radical lifestyle of repentance. They know their spiritual lives would be sweeter without giving way to lust. They know their capacity for rich relationships with other believers would expand tenfold if they weren’t smothered by midnight shame. They know their Godward ambitions for vocation and missions and pastoring are being squashed by it.

They really do want it to be gone, but they want everything else to stay where it is — and then they are perplexed why it just won’t work, even with accountability partners and internet filters. It won’t work long-term because this is not how God designed us.

How Badly Do You Want to Win?

Repentance has a radical character to it precisely because repentance happens in the heart. Human beings are not equally partitioned creatures: one part intellect, one part body, one part soul, and so on. In his glorious, image-bearing design, God creates us with a center of existential gravity. The heart is that center.

“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23). God promised to give his covenant people new hearts that would lead to authentic and holistic obedience (Ezekiel 36:26). Jesus explicitly taught us that our external rituals pale in comparison to our inner heart-

delights (Matthew 15:18). Because our heart orients with everything else, and since real repentance happens foremost in the heart, turning away from heart-enslaving sin often has far-reaching implications.

If you are losing the battle against porn, let me exhort you, as a fellow fighter by God's grace: **You need to make radical changes in parts of your life that you might not intuitively think need changing.**

What about your job? Could the chokehold that porn currently has on you be strengthened by your daily vocation? Sometimes companies require you to have a smartphone, or to be online, alone, during late hours. While God has grace for every situation and promises the opportunity to resist temptation, I've met more than one fellow struggler who would have been much better off had they laid down their vocation at the feet of Jesus and chosen radical repentance instead. What does it profit a man to gain the world but forfeit his soul to the lust that will damn him?

Likewise, I've known friends, especially men, who don't realize how their lack of industriousness (or their dead-end job) is actually feeding a sense of aimlessness that makes them more vulnerable to the lure of porn. But the gospel commands those who are born again to reckon themselves dead to sin and alive to Christ (Romans 6:11). If you aren't being a faithful steward of your time in helpful, character-building work, take radical repentance with you to a different situation.

Consider too your hobbies. Most people who are serious about fighting lust know intuitively there are some movies and sitcoms they need to leave behind. A friend of mine was deeply frustrated at his lack of progress in this battle. He loved video games. But as he spoke and confessed that failure was still the norm, I started to realize that radical repentance for him would look like cultivating better, more life-giving hobbies. He was trying to negotiate with his old habits, instead of infusing them with radical repentance. His three hours of daily gaming were not neutral; they were artifacts of a cloistered lifestyle that had been tailored to resist valuable means of grace in the fight against lust.

Repentance Brings Us Gain, Not Loss

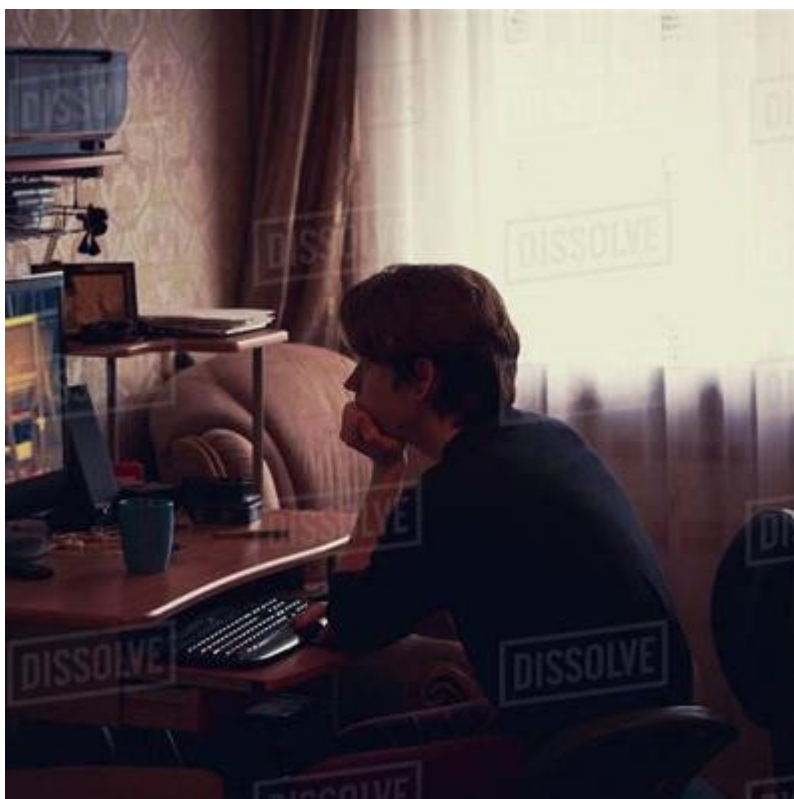
Radical repentance isn't just subtraction; it's addition too. One of the most helpful pieces of counsel I received was that I should start cultivating the skills, ambitions, and opportunities God had given to me, instead of merely sitting on the couch, retreating from life out of shame at the past.

"Radical repentance isn't just subtraction. It's addition too."

What holy ambitions have you been ignoring while merely trying to keep your

head above water? Don't just passively sit on the forgiveness and new life Jesus gives you. Turn it into a new job, one that empowers you to work heartily and serve others. Turn it into new hobbies, especially offline ones that can take you outside your own head. Turn it into a new lifestyle of sacrificial giving and of "radically ordinary" hospitality. Sin has no power over you, because you are under grace (Romans 6:14) and bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). Why not live like it?

Jesus offers much more than a cleansing purge. He offers an eternally springing fountain of himself that spills into every well in our heart. Trust me, whatever you lose in radical repentance is not something you want to keep. Radical repentance begins and ends with delight: delight in God, delight in what he loves, delight in his good gifts, and delight in his promise to never cast you away or leave you. Go to him — radically.



You cannot defeat Satan's temptations without Jesus. Call upon Jesus to Help you. Even if you win for a while and then fall again, don't give up. Jesus will help you. Your eternal soul is at stake. If you're a family man or woman and you watch porn, your habit will eventually be found out by your family. And your family may think since you watch porn, its okay to watch it also. Jesus is the answer. Call upon him. Go to confession. Start TODAY...Don't wait.

**The International Catholic Family Newsletter
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Our mission statement is to motivate people to pray and to be Christian examples in their work, home and with others, for those needing the Light in a world of Darkness.



The Rosary is the 'weapon' for these times. – St. Padre Pio

St. Paul Ministry

<https://www.catholicfamilynewsletter.com>