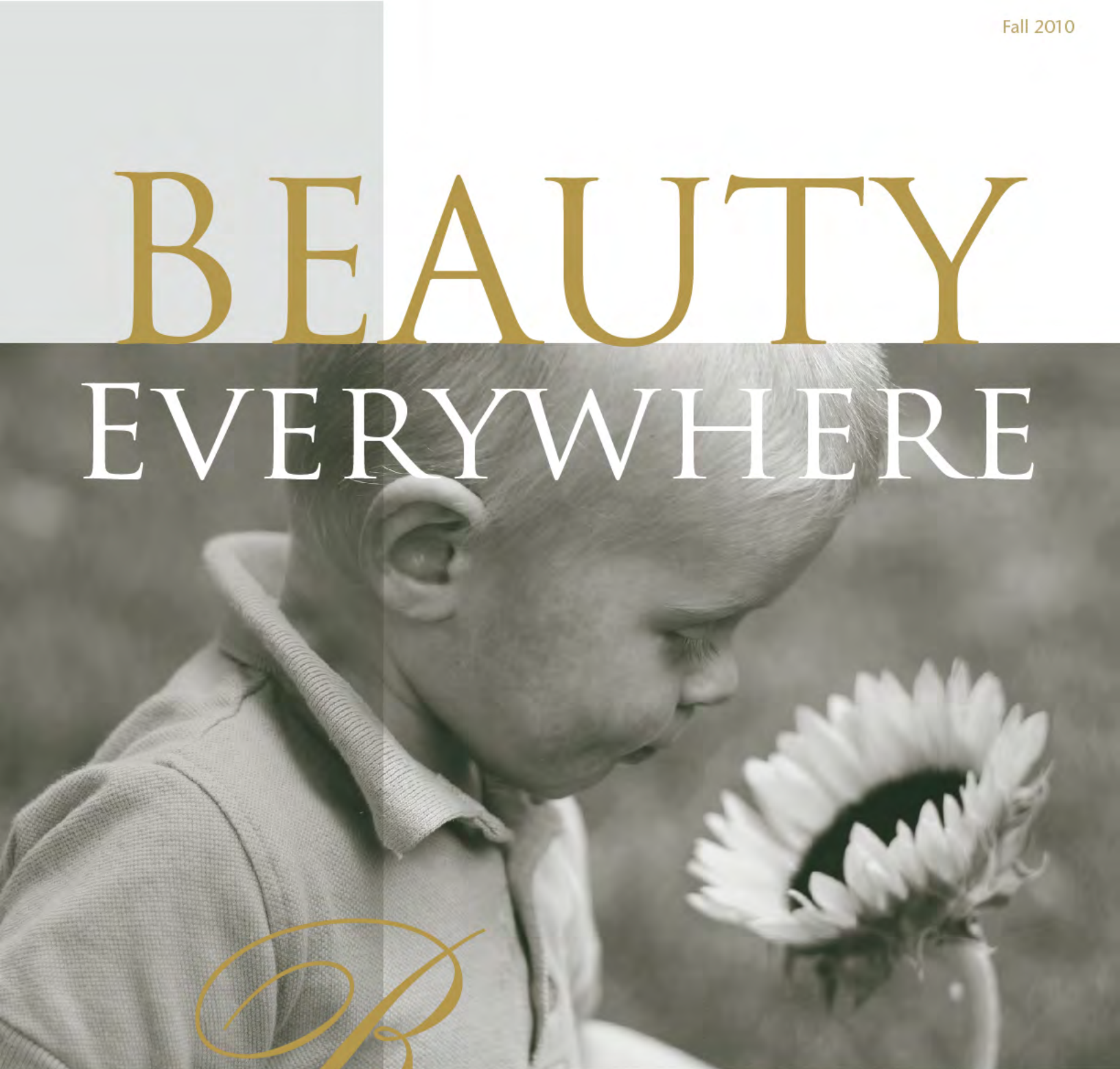


BEAUTY EVERYWHERE

A black and white photograph of a young child, seen from the side, looking down at a daisy flower. The child is wearing a light-colored, textured sweater. The background is a soft-focus field of grass and flowers.

B

*efore a sunset, snow-capped mountain,
a golden meadow...if we allow ourselves to pause
from our busy lives and begin to listen,
we are drawn into the glorious mystery:*

The wonder and goodness of existence, of being.

Several years ago in an airport, one of our Sisters met a young man returning from Sedona, Arizona, famous for its glorious landscape of red-hued rocks. He said, still in awe at all he had taken in: "Sister, in Sedona, even if you don't believe in God, you believe in God."

The beauty of nature has the power to lead one to the healing truth of God's goodness and love. Before a sunset, snow-capped mountains, a golden meadow, whatever the scene might be, if we allow ourselves to pause from our busy lives and begin to listen, we are drawn into a mystery accessible to all, a truth that confirms our identity: the wonder and goodness of existence, of being.

THE GRANDEUR

The God Who fashioned Beauty.

Why do our hearts rest and seem more at home before such beauty? The experience of tangible beauty is a natural sacrament - a sign pointing to something (Someone) beyond itself - what is earthly merges with the eternal. Such an experience is restorative to the degree that we allow ourselves to be immersed in the mystery and glory that we, too, exist and are beautiful in the image of the Beauty behind what we receive.

It's not just nature's beauty that can cause the heart to soar. One of the greatest gifts we have as human beings is the capacity to translate what we experience into art that others, too, might see a glimpse of what we have perceived. Music, painting, poetry touch and ignite the inner recesses of the heart, bringing us into deeper communion with others in the experience and gift of life.

Culture matters. It is the fruit of our listening to the truth of beauty. The quality of a culture is the measure of the joy that overflows in knowing oneself (collectively) as a recipient of and participant in the abundant goodness of life.

Though our culture seems tormented by counterfeit beauty, the call of what is true and abundantly good continues to ring out with magnified splendor. Those who follow the call with patience and receptivity recognize they will never be the same. As you read the following pages, know that our hope and prayer is that you will be stirred to attentiveness to the beauty which is within us, and surrounds us all. God bless you,

Mr. Agnes
Mother Agnes Mary

What lies behind beauty?

The Irresistible Power of Beauty

A few years ago, Madelyn walked through the doors of the Uffizi Museum in Florence. As she wandered through the galleries, taking in all of the beautiful Renaissance paintings, she spotted an image of our Lady. She later shared with us how deeply it impacted her life. "I was so moved by its beauty that I sat on the nearest bench and I cried and cried, like a little girl. I'm sure everyone thought I was crazy - but I was crying for joy. I think it was the joy of being loved . . . I knew somehow through experiencing beauty that God loved me and that I wasn't alone." A young New Yorker had a similar experience of having his life transformed by beauty. One afternoon, after years of searching for meaning in his life, Colin wandered into Our Lady of Lourdes Church in upper Manhattan. As he entered, he was enveloped by the Gregorian chant filling the glorious church as the schola practiced up in the choir loft. Colin felt drawn out of himself and his problems, being so deeply inspired by the beauty of the music, that this experience became the turning point of his life. Through this experience he had been given the grace to believe that God existed and that he was known and loved by Him.

There are countless stories and examples of people being attracted by the beauty of the world around us, and experiencing God through it. What is it about beauty that is so healing and makes us feel like we've come alive? Why is it able to fill us with the assurance that there is a good and loving God - and that He loves us intimately? Perhaps there is more to beauty than what meets the eye. But what?

Part of the power of beauty is that it is able to lead us to truth - truth about God and about ourselves. Each of our lives is beautiful because God desired that we exist and share in His image of truth, goodness, and beauty. This truth about the beauty and dignity of our lives cannot be taken away or diminished. However, we often forget our own inherent dignity and the dignity of others. We seem to lose sight of the beauty and goodness of life and the world around us. What might keep us from seeing the beauty that surrounds us?

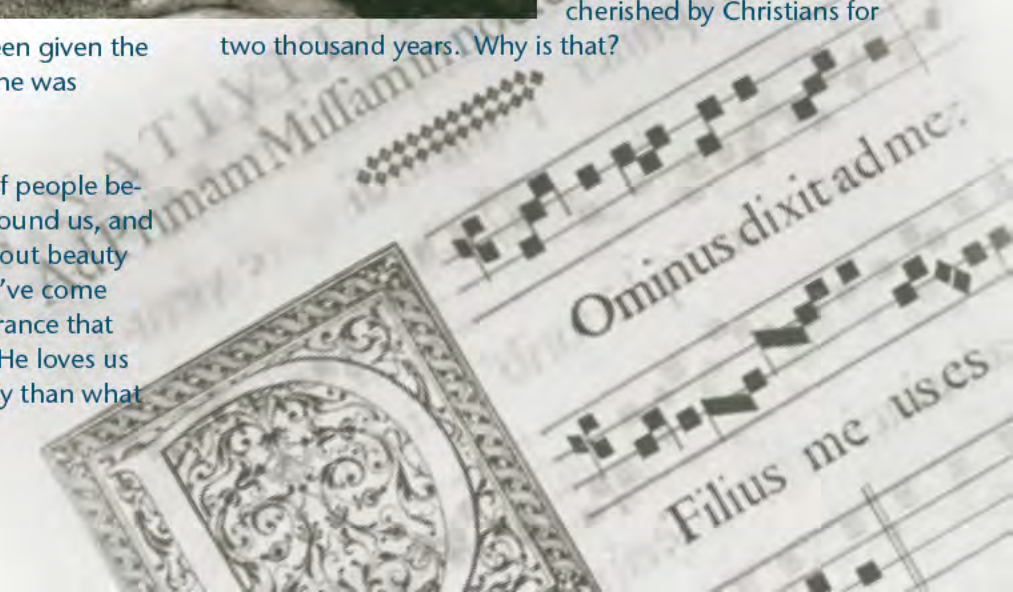
The Triumph of the Cross

Beauty has the potential to draw us out of ourselves, and into communion with God and others. Sin is the opposite - it creates division, clouds our vision, and prevents us from seeing beauty in ourselves and around us, giving us a negative outlook on life. So, what should we do? Where can we find healing? The answer lies at the foot of the Cross, where we see Jesus beaten, bleeding, tortured and dying. Although the image depicts one of the ugliest scenes in human history, it has been cherished by Christians for

two thousand years. Why is that?



"Late have I loved You, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new - late have I loved You!" St. Augustine



True love has the transforming power to makes all things beautiful, and so the crucified body of Jesus on the Cross becomes irresistibly beautiful. The ugliness of his wounds and suffering are now part of the most beautiful act of love in history.



Christ teaches us that love is able to make what is ugly and deformed into something beautiful – that the truest beauty is not limited by physical appearances. Jesus makes lovely all of our unloveliness – in fact, He is drawn to our unloveliness and is not repelled by it. The consoling gift of Confession places us at the foot of His Cross where the love of Jesus heals and restores us to our original beauty – it

even enhances our beauty!! The forgiveness and love that we experience in Confession has the healing power to open our eyes again, to rid us of the sins that cloud our vision and prevent us from being able to see ourselves and others as we truly are. Jesus' total gift of self is beautiful, it communicates His deep love for each one of us, and it heals us. Union with God in prayer and the sacraments helps us to start living lives of beauty as our lives become more and more conformed to Beauty Himself.

Called to be Beautiful for the world

It is easy to associate beauty with what we can see or hear in nature, music, and art. But beauty is most profoundly present when we love, especially in difficult and trying circumstances. Think of the people in your lives who have loved heroically – the fathers who work multiple jobs to provide for their families or think perhaps of those whose elderly parents require round the clock care and attention. This is love in action and its beauty transforms the world. This love loses nothing of itself in self-donation, although it is completely emptied out for another. This love actually becomes more compelling and irresistible precisely because it is a gift of self. Loving in self-gift often involves the pain of self-sacrifice – and yet, don't we all desire it? For example, don't women desire children, even though it involves the pain of childbirth and many years of sacrificial love? We were created for love, to love – because we were created in love. Self-giving love is the beauty of the Saints and it was forged and fortified as they chose to love and give of themselves in demanding situations. Think of Blessed Mother Teresa, who spent her life serving the "poorest of the poor." Think of St. Maximilian Kolbe, who laid down his life for another man in a concentration camp. Think of St. Gianna, who heroically chose to carry her baby to term, even though it meant suffering and ultimately death on her part. This is the beauty of Christ's love, the beauty that we were created to share with the world.

Love can be hard, but it is possible and it is all around us in its (sometimes) hidden beauty. How can we learn to see it – to live it? We must learn how to see Beauty again and to fall in love with God, Who "first loved us." Give yourself permission to let the Lord love you and to fill you with His beautiful love. We need to give ourselves time and permission to slow down, to look around and to experience wonder and awe. We need to allow ourselves to marvel at the intricate beauty of creation; to spend time in quiet prayer or adoration; to re-notice the often overlooked (or taken for granted) acts of love of your spouse or friends; to relish in the joy and beauty of your child's face. Living immersed in the beauty of God's love will restore broken relationships, build up family life, and enable us to begin to "see" each other, not as burdens, but as gifts. Beauty is not out of our reach or hidden away in museums or symphony halls, available only to some. God is near to all those who have the desire to see Him, to those who stay close to Jesus, who is Beauty Incarnate. He is there for those who make constantly their own, the prayer of the blind Bartimeus:

"Master, I want to see." (Mark 10:51)



Mother Agnes Mary S.V., Sr. Antoniana Marie S.V. and Main Celebrant at the Mass of Profession Archbishop Charles Chaput, O.F.M.

Perpetual Profession

At her profession, Sister Antoniana Maria vowed "to persevere faithfully until death." The vows don't end with death, however. Rather, they begin here and now the intimate worship and union with God that all are offered in Heaven. The bond between Jesus and a Religious carries over into eternity. "Until death," – the little deaths of everyday and the inescapable death that ends our life on earth – is the space where our response of love to Jesus is defined. Please pray for Sister Antoniana and all our Sisters that our response may be one filled with the beauty of fidelity.



Temporary Profession ►

(back row left to right)

Sr. Fiat Marie, S.V., Sr. Bernadette Therese S.V.,
Sr. Mariae Agnus Dei S.V.

(middle row) Sr. Maria Anne Michela S.V.,

Sr. Talitha Guadalupe S.V., Sr. Hosanna Christi S.V.,
Sr. Bethany Madonna S.V., Sr. Joan Marie S.V.

(front row) Sr. Amata Filia, Sr. Catherine Peter



WHEN HE TAKES YOUR BREATH AWAY.

In nature He revealed His Beauty,
then In the Eucharist He poured out His very Self. *-Sr. Antoniana Maria*



As I stood amidst the majestic Rocky Mountains feeling embraced by their grandeur and strength, I was struck by the sheer beauty I experienced. I knew right then and there that God is real, and He is Beautiful. I was born in Winnipeg, in the Prairies of Canada; a place known for the warmth of the people's hearts. At 10 years old our family decided to drive as we moved to Vancouver, which took us right through the Rocky Mountains, an experience that enriched my heart in a way that only an encounter with the beautiful can. Seeing the snow-capped, jagged precipices that seemed to reach the heavens nearly took my breath away. I had never been in the mountains before, and standing at the base, I felt so small, and yet it was as though God was asking me, "Do you like it? I made it for you!"

Settling down in North Vancouver with the mountains in our backyard and a view of the water from our front porch, life was good. As a family we became active in the parish and annually would participate in the Life Chain, which our pastor was very enthusiastic about. As I entered high school I joined many clubs, but the two I was most passionate about were the Environment Club and the Respect for Life Club. For me, they went together; we must be good stewards of the earth in order to give glory to God the Creator; and the summit of creation is the human person, made in God's image and likeness.

Most nights my mother would gather us together to pray the family rosary. This united us and kept the fire of faith burning in our family, along with Sunday Mass and frequent Confession. When I was 15 years old, a parish nearby began a Perpetual Adoration Chapel, so I signed up to make one Holy Hour every Saturday. This began a hunger for prayer that grew through the years. I was always 'open' to a call to Religious Life, but I honestly didn't think God was calling anyone to this vocation anymore because I had never met a young religious sister. I had dreams of marrying the love of my life, of traveling the world and serving the poor.

After finishing high school, I began studying Environmental Science at the University of British Columbia. In January of my first year I attended the National Campus Life Network Symposium in Toronto. It was at this symposium that I received a summons by the Lord to make pro-life work my life's mission. I remember watching a short video called 'The Harder Truth' that showed images of the effects of abortion. Although I had already seen this before I was struck to the heart in a deeper way. I kept praying the Hail Mary over and over again. In my heart I knew that this disturbing reality was happening every day, that the inestimable beauty and worth of one human life was lost forty million times over every year. This one human life created out of love by God, called into existence to reflect a unique aspect of the beauty of God. I couldn't hold back my tears as I silently begged God for mercy upon us. In the midst of the silent tears I felt a quiet call on my heart from the Lord, "What are you going to do now that you know the value of one person?" I wanted to quit university and begin working on behalf of the protection of life immediately! However, a very wise man encouraged me to finish university and to spread the message of life on my campus.



A year later I had the great joy of going to Rome for World Youth Day. As I was preparing to go, I asked the Lord to make this a true pilgrimage for me. To spiritually prepare I decided to make the Total Consecration to Mary through the way of St. Louis de Montfort. I arrived in Rome on Aug. 14th, the eve of my Total Consecration. My heart was overflowing with intense joy and gratitude to God for His great goodness to me. His goodness brought me to Italy, a place I had only dreamed to visit. I was surrounded by friends who loved the Lord and were encouraging me to go deeper in my faith. His goodness was too much to bear!

Late into the night, after all had gone to bed after a long journey, I found my way into the dark chapel. There was one small light on the tabernacle. As I gazed at the tabernacle I made an act of faith and said, "I know You are here Lord, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Blessed Sacrament. Thank you for bringing me here to the Eternal City!" Then something impelled me to ask this next question. "What do You want me to do with my life?" First there was silence. Then, in the depths of my heart I heard His proposal, "Will you love Me with an undivided heart?" More silence. From the core of my being tears began to flow. They were tears of joy and sorrow, confidence and fear. The God I encountered as Beauty when I was 10 years old in the Rocky Mountains was now speaking and revealing Himself to me as Love from the Blessed Sacrament. Not a generic love, but a very intimate and personal love. The experience of His call was undeniable.

My greatest dream was to marry the love of my life...what an awesome and humbling mystery to know I am espoused to Jesus Christ forever. He who Is Love, Beauty and Life.



Love Lavished.
When I first began discerning if I had a religious vocation, I was very attracted to the way of life, but felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of it: Moving across the country? Surrendering everything and everyone I know and love?

Being consecrated to God? Becoming a spouse of Christ? It's too much!!! The decision seemed way too big for me. But through a lot of time in prayer, especially before the Blessed Sacrament, I realized it was a step I had to take in order to settle the restlessness of my heart that I knew could only be satisfied by God. The Lord gave me the grace to understand that the religious life is indeed "too much": too much joy, too much love, too much of a gift! I am but a small, unworthy child, yet the Father, infinite in His generosity and never ceasing to lavish His children with His abundant goodness, was asking me to receive His gift by following Him as a Sister of Life. How could I refuse such a gift that has since led my heart to a peace and happiness that I never knew was possible?!
-Sr. Amata Filia



Do not be afraid.
I had a sense I could be called to religious life, but a question remained: Could I trust God enough to lay all of my hopes, fears and dreams at His feet? Then, one autumn day while meditating on Jesus' words to Peter whom He was calling to walk on the water in total faith and trust, I realized that He was speaking those same words to me. I knew that the time had arrived to cast myself into the arms of Him who had loved me into being and was now beckoning, "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid... Come."
-Sr. Maria Anne Michela



Giving All
To know is to surrender to Love, abandon oneself to His grace, and leap in full faith into the Mystery. To know is to engage His grace to live the "yes" for which you have been created, letting peace daily guide you as you discover the way. To know is to daily fail, fall, and falter and yet always find in your inmost heart the grace to go on, for you have found the One your heart loves, the One whom you must give everything.
-Sr. Mariae Agnus Dei

STARVING THE SOUL

from the Beauty it Longs for

Entrapped
and enslaved,
pornography
robs us of
the happiness
and freedom
we ultimately
desire.

Our hearts yearn for intimacy: to be known, to love and to be loved. Love is the most basic fundamental need of every human heart, we cannot live fully without it. We falter when we seek to fill this good and natural desire for intimacy by illegitimate means. This is seen in the attack against the dignity of the human person and the recent surge of pornography use which obliterates the beauty and sacredness of marital love. No one sets out to become obsessed with pornography but because it is so highly addictive (similar to heroine), people eventually find themselves lured into a trap. Those who use pornography often feel less bonded to their spouses and women whose husbands use pornography feel betrayal, mistrust, and anger. The intimate marital relationship is exploited and becomes cheapened because pornography is an empty counterfit of the real beauty and joy of sexual intimacy shared in marriage. In a recent study, 56% of divorce cases involved one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites.¹ A man who struggles with pornography shared, "I absolutely agree it is damaging. It damages my respect for my wife, and she has done nothing to deserve that damage. It damages my self-esteem and respect for myself, because I know it is not helpful to our life, to our marriage, to our love. It reduces my satisfaction in a wonderful woman. It makes me yearn for things that I should not want. It is disruptive to my inner peace. I don't like myself when I am looking at porn."²

People often justify their use of pornography by reasoning that this is something I do privately and

I am not hurting anyone. This logic however, while it may seem reasonable, is utterly flawed. Every action and thought shapes how we relate to others. The use of pornography stunts a person emotionally and those who use it tend to withdraw from friends, family, and spouses. Pornography leads people into a fantasy world with unrealistic figures, and creates unrealistic expectations. The human person, to whom the only proper response is love, is now used merely as an object for the pleasure of another. It is important for us to remember that every single person on a screen is someone's daughter, sister, son, niece or mother.

Pornography, which was at one time an occasional vice, has become a mainstream, widespread addiction. The statistics are shocking: Unprecedented numbers of men visit pornographic websites and one out of every six women. It is a multi-billion dollar industry that produces greater revenue than the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC. Its revenue eclipses that of all professional football, baseball, and basketball franchises combined. About 1.5 billion pornographic downloads occur each month and 2.5 billion pornographic e-mails are sent daily. 65% of boys between the ages of 16 and 17 reported having friends who regularly download Internet pornography and 90% of 8-16 year olds have come across pornography online. TV and the media have become saturated with pornography: there are millions of pornographic websites and the number of sex scenes on television has doubled in recent years.³ The most innocent victims of this pornography industry are children who unknowingly go onto websites, and find themselves lured into a fantasy world and trapped in an addiction.



The Sirens trying to lure Odysseus and his men

Pope John Paul II pointed out that the problem with pornography is not that it reveals too much of the person, but that it reveals too little of the person. The person in the image is reduced, de-personalized and objectified. Those who use pornography cultivate a mindset where they look upon others only as objects and their perspective of the human person becomes distorted. Once caught in this trap, people can no longer see true beauty, they lose a taste for it and they separate themselves from God, who is the all beautiful One, and sanctifying grace is lost from the soul.

It seems like it might be easier to ignore the problem, but the stakes are far too high. Behind the numbers and startling statistics are people and families whose lives are being destroyed. How can we recover from this epidemic? We tend to hide our faults from God out of fear or shame thinking that he cannot assist us in this area. We feel great humiliation and that this is an area of our lives too impure or impoverished for God to enter into. This is a lie. God is mercy and deeply desires to free his sons and daughters from this addiction that threatens their hearts and families.

1. "The Social Costs of Pornography" The Witherspoon Institute, 2010
2. "The Weight of Smut." *First Things*. Mary Eberstadt, May 2005
3. These are gathered statistics from a variety of secular reports compiled in "Blessed are the Pure in Heart" Bishop Robert W. Finn. 21 Feb 2007

Find the help you need. It's time.

1. Throw out or delete ALL pornographic materials that you have.
2. Don't surf the internet when you're lonely, tired, bored, or upset. When tempted, find a wholesome distraction.
3. Don't let boredom take over. Participate in sports and other healthy, positive activities.
4. Be accountable! Find someone you can trust (like a committed Catholic man or priest) and speak with him openly and honestly about the problem you have.
5. Seek professional help. You cannot do this alone.
6. Pray daily. Receive the Sacraments as frequently as you can or need, especially the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Make the sign of the cross when impure thoughts come to mind. Repeat short prayers such as "Jesus, I trust in You", "Jesus, I love You" or "Jesus, help me."
7. Remember that every woman is some man's daughter. Remind yourself that each person is made in God's image.
8. Do not lose heart. You are not alone. With God's grace you can overcome the addiction and experience true freedom!

For resources: [www.FLRL.ORG/TRUE FREEDOM.HTM](http://www.FLRL.ORG/TRUE%20FREEDOM.HTM)

The Sirens

of Homer's Odyssey

College curriculums of old all included a reading of Homer's Odyssey, a classic epic poem from ancient Greece. It chronicles the adventures of the hero Odysseus on his long travels home from the Trojan War. Each encounter, each danger traversed or beauty unfurled, teaches Odysseus a bit more about the meaning of life and how to best live it. Among these adventures is his passage through the dangerous waters surrounding the remote island of the Sirens. Ancient Greeks knew well about the Sirens, a trio of nymphs who seduced passing sailors onto their island with songs filled with illusory promises which none could resist. The bones of ill-fated men, strewn along the shore, told of the unhappy end to the seemingly blissful beginning of each encounter with a Siren. Knowing he had to pass their way, Odysseus sought the sage counsel of another and decided to have his fellow sailors plug their ears with beeswax and tie him to the mast of his ship, pledging not to unbind him or to turn towards the island regardless of his pleadings otherwise. In this way Odysseus was humbled by the power of the nymph's songs but, thanks to his faithful friends who kept him on track, was kept from the ruins wrought by their deception.

In the thousands of years that have passed since Odysseus' time, the human experience remains wrought with adventure, questions, danger and delight. The story of the Sirens remains a powerful one for us, especially in this age of marketing manipulation filled with pornographic poison, luring men and women alike with deceptive promises of beauty, happiness and fulfillment only to leave in its wake empty pockets and empty souls. Let us be aware of the realities of the fight before us, and ever ready with our weapons: knowledge of the sacred dignity of the person, true friendship, and trust in God's ways.

For, within the course of the thousands of years since Odysseus, God revealed Himself as one of us in the person of Jesus Christ. He confirms that, we, too, are on an epic journey home. Our life has a purpose, and a destiny. And now, with Jesus, we have a guide for He says, "I am the Way." He keeps us from disaster by inviting us to bind ourselves to His truth in the midst of alluring counterfeit voices. Even if we fail in the process, He doesn't leave us as dried bones on the shore but suffers in our place in order to bring us back to life. We can always begin again with Jesus.