

Obsession Control: Dealing with Addictions  
ReCatechism 6  
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Although we might identify it with Hollywood celebrities (Lindsay Lohan, Whitney Houston, Charlie Sheen, etc.), sports stars (such as Mike Tyson and Bob Probert), politicians and even police, it is a passion that plagues every sector of society.

*Addiction* is defined by Webster's as "the fact or condition of being [dependent on] a particular substance, thing, or activity". People are drawn into accepting any and all addictions as a normal part of their lives. It grasps onto them like a vortex, a vicious cycle that is very difficult to break out of. Addictions come in all sorts and sizes, all with the opportunity to have the same catastrophic effects. All addictions not only take hold of our day-to-day lives, but they take us off the road to salvation, since **"your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."** (1 Peter 5:8)

Although there is hope in every situation, people need to be there to help the person or people suffering; otherwise, that hope dwindles with every passing day. *Addictions play for keeps.*

Today's presentation is about *Dealing with Addictions* and making **CHANGE** happen for all those who are affected by it.

**Children to Adults: Who falls into addictions**

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth:* so begins Genesis 1:1, as we hear about the creation of the world. Throughout the account of creation, we see how everything is made by the will of God and that the Almighty saw every creation was "good" (καλό). Humanity was different, though. Adam was created by God with the following words: "let us make man in our image and likeness" (or as the Septuagint says, «ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ'εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ'ομοίωσιν»). Due to the fall of Adam – his sin being his arrogance and not repenting for his sin, not that he ate a

proverbial apple (or whatever fruit it was in the Garden) – humanity has retained the image of God (free will), but not the likeness. As Metropolitan Anthony Bloom says:

*Every one of us is in the image of God, and every one of us is like a damaged icon. But if we were given an icon damaged by time, damaged by circumstances, or desecrated by human hatred, we would treat it with reverence, with tenderness, with broken-heartedness. We would not pay attention primarily to the fact that it is damaged, but to the tragedy of its being damaged. We would concentrate on what is left of its beauty, and not on what is lost of its beauty. And this is what we must learn to do with regard to each person as an individual, but also - and this is not always as easy - with regard to groups of people, whether it be a parish or a denomination, or a nation. We must learn to look, and look until we have seen the underlying beauty of this group of people. Only then can we even begin to do something to call out all the beauty that is there.*

For, *Christ looked at everyone he met, at the prostitute, at the thief, and saw the beauty hidden there. Perhaps it was distorted, perhaps damaged, but it was beauty none the less, and what he did was to call out this beauty.*

It is with this spirit – with a Christ-centred spirit – we must see our neighbour that is going through the temptations of addiction.

**CAMH**, or *the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health*, is one of Canada’s leading addiction and mental health organizations. It was formed in 1998 and serves as a public teaching hospital, “providing comprehensive, well-coordinated, accessible care for people who have problems with mental health or addictions.” (CAMH, 2011) In their studies, CAMH has the following statistics available from various sources (CAMH, 2011):

### **Prevalence and Incidence**

- 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental illness in their lifetime. The remaining 4 will have a friend, family member or colleague who will.
- About 20% of people with a mental disorder have a co-occurring substance use problem.
- 1 in 10 Canadians 15 years of age and over report symptoms consistent with alcohol or illicit drug dependence.
- 3.8% of adults in Ontario are classified as having moderate or severe gambling problems.

### **Who is Affected**

- 70% of mental health problems and illnesses have their onset during childhood or adolescence.
- Young people age 15-24 are more likely to report mental illness and/or substance use disorders than other age groups.
- Overall, men were 2.6 times more likely than women to meet the criteria for substance dependence.
- 25% of male drinkers are high-risk drinkers compared to 9% of female drinkers.

### **Cost to Society of Mental Illness and Addictions**

- Mental Health is the number one cause of disability in Canada, accounting for nearly 30% of disability claims and 70% of the total costs.
- Tobacco is responsible for one-quarter of cancer deaths in Ontario.

These statistics highlight that everyone and anyone can fall into addictions. People that enter the vicious cycle can be *entire families, groups of friends, bullies and/or supposed “friends” forcing others to get involved*. There is no “puzzle piece” that says which people will be faced with this difficulty and which people will not. Different circumstances are faced by different people because of the difference in the people involved.

### **Home and away: Where addictions take hold of our lives**

St. Paul says to the Corinthians in his first letter, **“Do not be deceived: ‘bad company corrupts good character.’”** (1 Cor. 15:33) To pinpoint not only addictions, but our lives in general, we must know *where* we are educated – not merely education in school, but our “cultural education”, our education as citizens of the world.

An old African proverb says, *“it takes a village to raise a child.”* This is just as true today as when the proverb was first said. Parents are the obvious first members of this “village”. The vast majority of parents care for their children and want only the best for them. Yet, parenthood is also a “hit-and-miss” process: *do parents get a handbook when their first child is born? No.*

Of course, the family is not just parents: they include brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, *κουμπάροι* and godparents. All of them play an important role in this process. All these people are a part of the family dynamic (some more than others); therefore, they can also be a part of the beginning of greater problems. An example that comes to mind is from this past summer when I visited Vancouver. A teenager at one of their churches was talking about the difficulties of being in high school today and, although he admitted he had a loving family, he told me he had a problem with smoking. He smoked his first cigarette at 13, after he saw his father smoking outside the house. When he confronted his father about it, the father said he never smoked a day in his life. He hasn’t stopped since. It’s Proverbs 6:27 in action: “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?”

For children and youth, school is a “tribe” that nurtures them as they go through adolescence. Who doesn’t remember the great teacher who made them smile and feel special – or the mean teacher that made them cry (*or they wanted to punch in the stomach*)? The same is true of administration, principals, other students and parents who formed relationships with all students as they go through the formative years. In the usual Greek Orthodox home, “school” also is extended to *Greek school, Sunday School,*

*sports, clubs and even work.* If that is the case, kids are influenced by others other than family members six (*or even seven!*) days a week from a very early age.

Lastly, all of humanity is educated through technology: television, the internet, their iPhone and Blackberry. The classroom has been re-invented forever. The positive is that so many new doors are opened and we find out things we might have never known. The negative aspect is that “the facts” presented are not necessarily true. If you pay for an advertisement, a webpage, a podcast, you can say whatever you want. So, the “selective truth” is something we today are living with.

### **Alcohol & Drugs, Gambling & Technology: What addictions people face**

In the same letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul says that, “‘all things are lawful for me’, but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me’, but I will not be enslaved by anything.” (1 Cor. 6:12) Although we have free will, it does not mean we should use it irresponsibly.

*I would like to preface the following remarks by saying that I am not a doctor and I can only speak about the following and what they do from the research that I have done. For more information about these addictions, consult your family doctor and/or experts in the field.*

When discussing addictions, people usually point to the “usual suspects”:

#### Alcohol

The book of Proverbs warns us to “be not among drunkards” (Proverbs 23:20) and St. Paul says, “do not get drunk with wine, for this is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). There are various places in the Bible that speak about the danger of alcoholism, as the people of the time faced this problem (*and without television and other media – let’s face it – they had time to indulge*).

From a young age, people can be exposed to alcohol with their parents and grandparents at home, either with beer or wine. The temptation to start drinking begins usually with peers who say “it’s cool”, usually linked to it being illegal for children to drink. There are various kids that want to cross the border to Quebec, as the age of consumption is not 19 (as it is in Ontario), but 18.

Alcohol might not seem like a risk; however, *Mothers Against Drunk Driving* and the *RIDE program* exist because alcoholism (especially during the holidays and amongst young adults) is a big problem in society. MADD estimates that 1,074 out of the 2,575 driving fatalities in 2009 were impaired-related. Further, it estimates that there are about 3.4 to 4.1 deaths per day related to people being impaired. MADD also suspects that there are about 174 injuries caused *per day* that deal with impairment-related crashes. (Overview - Statistics, 2012)

### Smoking

In chapter six of St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (*I keep referring to that – maybe some good reading for Lent!*), he says, “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Cor. 6:19-20) Since our body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit, we should take care of it and not harm it. Yet, smoking is just that: a passion that harms our bodies.

Tobacco and nicotine, two of the 4,800 chemicals in cigarettes, helps making smoking extremely **addictive**. Statistics indicate 75% of teenage smokers were smoking 7-9 years after they started, despite saying they would “quit after 5 years”. 90% of smokers say they began the habit as teenagers. However, smokers are not the only ones affected: it affects those around them, too. Second-hand smoke kills about 3,000 non-smoking adults every year, along with bringing their likelihood of heart disease up 25%. Worse, 300,000 cases of bronchitis and pneumonia in babies under 18 months are related to second-hand smoke.

Smoking has a direct correlation with drinking, as teenagers who smoke are three times as likely to drink alcohol and smoke marijuana and 22 times more likely to use cocaine. (Mahoney, 2012)

### Substance Abuse

Christ tells us in the Gospel of Luke that, “nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known” (Luke 12:2). With substance abuse, there are many people that think they will never be found out and unscathed. Usually, they are – by family, friends, the police...the list goes on.

Also referred to as “grass”, “pot”, “weed” and “Mary Jane”, we have already mentioned **marijuana**. A drug that some people (even political parties) would like decriminalized, its most active ingredient is THC, which causes “relaxation, altered time-space perception, alteration of visual, auditory, and olfactory senses, fatigue, and appetite stimulation.” (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2012)

**Stimulants** usually affect the brain, mainly including amphetamines. **Sedatives** or **Hypnotics** work opposite to stimulants, depressing the nervous system and the brain. Pregnant mothers can cause their babies to be born with birth defects, behavioural problems and withdrawal symptoms. **Hallucinogens** or **Psychedelics** affect the brain, causing a person to lose touch with reality. These include LSD, PCP and other drugs. Effects are unpredictable, with long-term effects possibly including brain damage, impaired memory and mental confusion. **Narcotics** include opium, morphine, codeine and heroin. Some are used medically as pain relievers, others are used illegally. *If a person is hooked to these substances without any help, the end result being death is more and more likely as the days pass.*

Yet, addictions are not restricted to smoking and drinking.

### Gambling

In the past, gambling was restricted to the odd Lotto 6/49 ticket, instant-win tickets at one's local store and even an occasional bet with a friend. Today, gambling has taken a completely different nature: while the aforementioned still exist, there are new ways that the out-of-reach gambling centres feel as if they are your next-door neighbour. Casinos (Fallsview, Rama – and every casino that is online), sports betting sites and the stock markets of the world (not merely the TSX, the NASDAQ and the NY Stock Exchange) are merely some locations where gambling has taken a hold of people. It is the hope of “easy money” – a quote by Mr. Burns from the Simpsons: *I'd trade it all for a little more*. Yet, gambling does not bring immediate happiness and success – *the House always wins* and that is why gambling is a tricky and disastrous game to play.

In his first letter to Timothy, St. Paul says: “those who desire to become rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For money is the root of all evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Timothy 6:9-10) One cannot serve God and money, as Christ says (cf. Luke 16:13). This is a big reason that many people fall away from their love of God – they are busy satisfying their “other love affair” rather than being with the One who will grant them eternal life.

### Technology

One last addiction I want to discuss this evening is one that I mentioned briefly in another part of tonight's presentation. **Technology** is a blessing from God, as we are able to learn more about God and His wonders through it. Yet, it's also the haven for various addictions. Some of them include: *pornography*, which has found a new home in the internet; *computers and the internet (in general)*, which take away time from family and friends, as both kids and adults spend endless hours online (even “The Fifth Estate” had an entire special about online games and the break-up of marriages); *video games*, with some children running away from home due to their parents taking away their games (such as Brandon Crisp from Barrie who ran away from home after his parents

took away his Xbox – as he had failing grades due to his overplaying of “World of Warcraft 4” – and was later found dead).

These addictions are the ones I wanted to discuss tonight, as I believe that all of us are affected by some (if not all) of them – directly or indirectly. Yet, we need to ask the question, *why does it happen?*

### **Number of Reasons: Why it happens**

Why addiction takes a hold of people is different for everyone. There is no one reason why it happens.

Dr. Karl Menninger, a world-renowned psychiatrist who has helped many homeless children, discusses the lives of people that are affected by difficult social and emotional adjustments: “When caretakers [parents, teachers, extended family, etc.] fail to meet a child’s most basic needs, the child learns that they are unpredictable and unreliable. Some children reach beyond their families in search of substitute attachments with other adults or peers. Those more seriously damaged become “relationship-resistant,” viewing even friendly, helpful adults with distrust.” (Brendtro, 2002)

A short list (which needs no explaining, in my opinion) of *why these problems exist* includes:

- Family (quality of parenting)
- Friends (peer pressure)
- Quality of life
- Attitudes and beliefs
- Physical and/or sexual abuse
- School factors
- Socioeconomic status
- Stress

One final reason that these addictions might take hold of us is that there is no (or weak) *faith* and a lacking relationship with Christ. If He is the Centre of our lives and if we no longer live, but Christ lives in us (cf. Galatians 2:20), how can addictions take hold of us? Our spiritual relationship with Christ needs to be renewed every day. It is not a one-time “conversion experience” and then we are “saved”. Faith in Christ needs to be reborn and cultivated constantly. If there is no relationship, why should any person (i) care for their body, (ii) respect themselves and their neighbour or (iii) hope in the “life of the age to come”? Without Him, things will continue to spiral out of control; in Christ, the vicious cycle can be stopped because hope has dawned in a person’s life again. It won’t happen “cold turkey” and “in one shot”, but through a process.

### **Giving Autonomy: Stopping the vicious cycle**

A Boston pastor wanted to rid his town of a local drug dealer. This true story has been said many times, but it’s worth another repeat:

*“Sir,” he said, “I want to help the youth of this community, but nothing I do seems to attract any youth.”*

*“Yes,” the drug dealer replied.*

*“But I notice,” responded the preacher, “that your youth ministry is doing quite well.”*

*“Yes,” replied the drug dealer.*

*The preacher then asked his question: “What, may I ask, is your secret?”*

*“You really want to know?”*

*“I do,” the preacher nodded emphatically, “I really want to know what makes you so successful.”*

*“It’s simple,” declared the drug dealer sincerely, “I’m there ... and you’re not. When Jamal comes home from school, I’m there and you’re not. When Susie wants excitement, I’m there and you’re not. When Mark wants a job, I’m there and you’re not.”*

If we want to stop the vicious cycle, **we have to be there for people that are suffering.**

Those who deal with addictions usually do so in silence because there is no one there to hear them. At a mission here in Toronto, there was a girl who walked in for three years before she told someone that she had been doing drugs and was on the road to destruction. She felt she could trust no one because she suffered emotional and sexual abuse at home. This is why **we need to be present and live the Gospel, not merely preach it.**

It is important that we minister to people both physically and spiritually, because «ασθενεί το σώμα, ασθενεί μου και η ψυχή» (*diseased is the body and the soul*). This was done by St. Basil the Great and his visionary complex, Βασιλειάδα – a place people were fed both spiritually and materially. Not only teaching people about the faith, St. Basil taught Christian compassion through Βασιλειάδα – a great Cathedral Church, a shelter for the deprived, a house for the aged, a hospital (with many doctors and nurses to help those suffering), a residence for the poor, a leper colony.

Spiritually, the programs we should offer must begin with a renewed look on the spiritual relationship with the Church. The Sacramental life of the community (the Eucharist, Repentance and Confession, etc.), along with things such as *Re-Catechism*, Bible studies and other information sessions on the Faith (in person or online, like *iEcclesia*, *iSermon* and other programming found on websites such as *Ancient Faith Radio*) should help people who are already involved in the Church learn more about Christ and His love for humanity.

Along with feeding people spiritually, we need to make sure the programs are there to feed people materially. **Social Work, Counselling and Crisis Intervention** are three big areas where we need to help people with the emotional scars or other problems they might be facing. Our communities have people who need to hear about the love of Christ and ways for them to stop their addictions (be it alcohol, drugs, or anything else), to help deal with the problems they might be facing with family, friends and/or other relationships. This is something we, unfortunately, have not really focused on as a Church. If we are to continue as a Church to minister “to all nations” in our local

community, this is a necessity. Whereas secular counsellors are “problem-focused”, we should have a more holistic approach, with an overarching goal being *spiritual betterment*.

Obviously, this program must be dealt with by the proper people. A person without the right training cannot deal with people who have suffered drug problems, alcohol abuse, suicide, etc. That is why people in our community hopefully will receive a calling to assist the parish priests with this very important ministry. Orthodox Christians should feel a sense of mission by the commandment of Jesus Christ: “love one another as I have loved you.” That is why we shouldn’t hold back in asking these people – doctors, psychiatrists, counsellors and others – for their help. They can create a world of difference for those who are suffering!

The rest of us can support these programs by supporting them by spreading the word to people that we know are in need (advertising is always important), financially (because “if we have two tunics, give one to your neighbour” – and we have many tunics we can give for these neighbours who are in need) and through...

### **Evaluating Faith’s part in the process: Jesus as Physician**

Jesus is the Compassionate One, ο Ελεήμων, for humanity. In the Liturgy, St. John Chrysostom refers to Him as, «ο Ιατρός των ψυχών και των σωμάτων ημών» (“the Physician of our souls and bodies”). The greatest gift of God, though, is that we have *free will*. He even tells us in the Gospel: “whosoever wishes...let him take up his cross and follow Me.” (Mark 8:34)

Yet with that freedom, Christ makes a promise: “Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I Am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest in your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

He is there for those seeking healing. Although it will be a difficult journey (“*because nothing happens overnight*”), He is there with us. His presence is amongst us is especially prevalent **during the divine services linked with healing**: The theme of *healing* arises in various sacraments and services, such as the *Blessing of the Waters* (or *agiasmos*) service, the *Supplication* (or *Paraklesis*) service to the *Theotokos* and the Sacrament of Holy Unction. These services are there to ask God to heal our soul and body. The Sacrament of Holy Unction is a bit of a play on words, as well: *έλαιον*, or oil, sounds a lot like *έλεος*, or mercy. We ask God for His abundant mercy when we experience illness (not merely physical illnesses, but illnesses of the mind and heart). One of the prayers says it beautifully:

*Master, Lord our God, physician of souls and bodies, who cure chronic sufferings and heal every disease and sickness among the people, who wish that all should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, who do not desire the death of sinners, but rather that they be converted and live.... Therefore, good Master, who love mankind, we too confident in accordance with your faithful promises, beg and implore you at this hour: Harken to our supplication and accept it like incense offered to you, and visit your servants.... Because there is none who will live and not sin, for you alone are without sin, your righteousness is righteousness forever and your word is truth. Because you did not fashion humanity for destruction, but for the keeping of your commandments and inheritance of incorruptible life. (Ephrem, 2008)*

Usually linked with this is **approaching our spiritual father** (in confession or otherwise). In confession, our spiritual father offers us the advice and consolation that we need to hear as spiritual children. No one was born with a manual, as we said before; similarly, no one is born with a “manual” that has the spiritual direction one needs to attain the Heavenly Kingdom. This relationship can assist us when it comes to the various addictions we seek. Many addicted people just want someone to hear them and help them get out of their difficulties. How many times have we heard of suicides and people becoming gravely injured because no one was there to talk to them? Our spiritual fathers are there to hear us – we just need to start a conversation.

Finally, on the spiritual level, the **Eucharist** is of utmost importance in our communion with God. Without partaking of His Body and Blood, what type of Christians are we? St. Basil the Great partook four times a week! We should go often and prepared, so that our hearts can become His throne.

As we finish tonight, we still haven't scratched the surface of this problem. Addictions are very difficult and tricky to deal with. There are no "cookie cutter solutions and answers" for all the questions that surround them. Every case is unique and must be dealt with that way. However, tonight's presentation was just to give a general overview about them and how we, as Christians, can see warning signs, help in our way and never forget who we are dealing with: *our brother and sister, made in the image of God*. When we remember this, we will help everyone and anyone caught in this vicious cycle and help rise them out of it, with the grace of God, just as:

- Christ brought Peter out of the waters as he was sinking and later made him Prince of the Apostles (with St. Paul),
- St. Mary of Egypt was brought out of the vicious cycle of selling her body and put her on the path to salvation,
- St. Silouan the Athonite turned from a person who would frequent taverns and inns with vodka, to a man who heard the voice of Christ and saw the uncreated light on Mount Athos.

Everyone can change, everyone can go "from glory to glory". It's up to us to make that choice.