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- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

TOO LATE

They say timing is everything. It's probably mostly true. Monsignor Lavin, who was on the faculty at St. Thomas for almost 50 years and was renowned for his willingness to share time with students in the dorms and camping trips, told me in his later years, "There is a charism of age. There are things you can do and be effective at when you are young that you can't when you get old." What he said was true. There is a sweet spot for learning, experiencing and establishing habits of life, that if we miss, it can be very difficult to go back and redo.

I have just finished listening to Garret Johnson from Fight the New Drug (FTND) speak for the second time in two nights. The first was to a group of parents and teachers. The second was with our ninth and tenth graders. Garret is a great guy, an engaging speaker, and has his facts down when he communicates in non-religious terms the damage that pornography does on our brains, hearts, and the world. It is compelling, and gives the many people and families affected by it a place to begin to talk about it and seek healing. FTND is providing a valuable service to our culture in a way that is not condemning or self-righteous but tells the truth.

As I listened to him share his own story with our teens, I could not help but be grateful that he was telling his story, but hopefully, also helping to develop a platform for families to deal with a problem before it happens or gets completely out of control. Timing is everything. If teens and pre-teens understand the damage that pornography can cause, and how and why, it goes beyond, "This is a bad thing. Don't do it." They are also given the tools to be prepared when it attacks them on their electronic devices, which it eventually will. Timing is everything. The pornographers know this. They know that if they can trap a curious pre-teen, they likely have a customer forever. That's why their target market is eleven-year-old boys.

When trying to establish habits of virtue and faith, timing is everything. Yes, through the grace of God, we can overcome vices and lack of faith at any time, but in the natural order, establishing virtues and knowing and living faith early on has the best chance of making them life-long habits. Knowing our faith early is critical to being able to live it on a long-term basis. The later we try to teach and inculcate it, the harder it is. After someone is entrenched in an addictive behavior like pornography, the chance of them reacting with shame or indignation is much higher. When we have been influenced by behaviors and ideas that are not rooted in the truth of who we are, it is very hard to assist someone in changing directions. Either they don't believe it is a problem, or because they don't believe, they can change.

The risk, of course, is that we deliver the messages too late, which we often do in matters of behavior and faith. When I do funeral preparation, it is not an uncommon thing that some people in families want to divide or spread the remains of their loved ones. Because of our belief in the resurrection of the body, the Church requires remains of the deceased to be interred together and in a sacred place. It is not simply an arbitrary rule, but something that emphasizes the core teaching of the faith in the resurrection of the body. Too often funeral planning is the first-time people have heard that teaching. I can tell you from experience that once a decision is made, it is hard to convince them otherwise. It's too late. If they had been taught about the sacredness of the human body and the resurrection of the body years earlier, it would have had a much better chance of sinking in.

The list can go on. Marriage preparation often brings out issues of behavior that are against the plan of God but asking couples to change behavior that is already entrenched often sounds borderline offensive to them. If they knew it before the behavior started, they would still have to compete with the world's messages, but at least they would have a chance.

When forming people in the faith and virtue, timing is everything. We need to do all we can to make sure we are not too late.