

Christian Hope in the Journey of Addiction

Good morning,

Today, I want to talk about something that effects many of us. Something painful, and often isolating, Addiction. Recently the Health Research Board estimated that, there may be as many as 191,000 family members impacted by a loved one's addiction. For many, it feels like a cycle that can't be broken, a shadow that won't lift.

When someone is in the grip of addiction, it can feel like drowning. The guilt, the shame, the fear, and often the repeated attempts to stop, can convince a person that change is impossible. That's why hope isn't just helpful—it's essential. Without hope, there is no reason to try again, no reason to believe that tomorrow could be different. That's why how we talk to those struggling with addiction matters just as much as what we say. We communicate with empathy, not advice. Most people don't need quick fixes—they need to know they're not alone. Saying, "I'm here for you," or "You matter," can open more doors than any attempt to try to fix someone ever will. Hope begins when someone feels heard without judgment. With the challenges in life today there are so many types of addiction, hope is often the trigger that gives people the encouragement to begin seeking help.

Addiction can be a lonely place, for those in need with even the smallest amount of faith Christian hope when communicated with honesty and compassion can feel like they are accompanied on their journey. Christian hope looks at the brokenness and says, "This is not the end of your story. Pope Francis put it beautifully when he said: "Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!" Addiction tries to rob us of that hope.

Communicating hope, in the Christian sense, isn't naive optimism or wishful thinking. It's the firm assurance that God is walking with us, even in the darkest moments. It is the trust that no one is ever too far gone, that no one is too far for God's love to reach.

Faith gives great support and we have seen that in the many of our catholic-affiliated organizations that provide drug and alcohol recovery programmes, integrating faith-based approaches with evidence-based treatments. Cuan Mhuire, Crosscare and Cenaclo to mention a few.

In Pope Francis' message for the 57th World Day of Social Communications, speak with the heart is mentioned and our Christian hope allows us to communicate with our heart. Pope Francis also tells us "The hope of Christians has a face, the face of the risen Lord. His promise to remain always with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit enables us to hope even against all hope, and to perceive the hidden goodness quietly present even when all else seems lost".

Speaking of the Holy Spirit, my work takes me all over the island of Ireland to many schools and groups in preparation for confirmation. The Pledge is such an important window, it is an opportunity to talk to that age group and plant seeds in them that will support them in leading a Healthy Lifestyle. The Confirmation Pledge is something

many of us can look back on as a part of our confirmation. But how many of us thought of the pledge as a health initiative.

Another part of the message Pope Francis gave was “I dream of a communication capable of making us fellow travellers, walking alongside our brothers and sisters and encouraging them to hope in these troubled times”. Those in addiction or a young person struggling to fit in will always react positively when they know we are walking with them. When it comes to drug awareness we as parents, family, teachers or guardians have to communicate hope to our young people and continue to keep the door open so they know if they find themselves in a crisis they know we are there and can be the voice of reason.

We live in a digital world that is ever changing how we communicate. This is seen at its very best when we see the numerous and regular content issued by the Catholic Communications Office whose expertise in the field allows initiatives like the IBDI to create content to offer support and hope to all who we reach out to.

Archbishop Eamon when welcoming the statement from Pope Francis invited reporters to seek out and give a platform to uplifting stories during this Year of Hope. A good example of that would be Matt Talbot’s story, a man who struggled with alcohol addiction, Matt took the pledge and his regular prayer and attendance at mass gave him the belief he could beat his addiction. In a modern world that sees influencers having a big part to play in young people’s lives, we in the church in Ireland need to remember we have many influencers such as Matt Talbot.

We can all be communicators of hope

It’s very timely to be here speaking today as this weekend is the centenary of Venerable Matt Talbot, this weekend sees a number of services in Dublin one of which I am speaking at on Sunday, while researching it was very encouraging to read there are many Matt Talbot recovery groups far and wide from Sydney to Philadelphia and many in between. Matt gives Christian Hope to many who felt lost and unseen.

If you are in addiction, or walking with someone who is, remember: your story is not over. You are not defined by your addiction.

Christian hope isn’t just for the future—it gives us strength today. It empowers us to take the next step. Maybe it’s a meeting. A prayer. A confession. A conversation, all ways of communicating hope, one step forward, one day at a time.

And even when we fall, hope reminds us: God never gives up on us. That includes all of us. And to me that’s the promise of Christian hope.

Thank you.