

Joseph Sciambra: How Our Lord Jesus Christ Saved Me From Homosexuality, Pornography, and the Occult

My Former "Gay" Life in Porn

I was born in 1969, not far from San Francisco. I attended Catholic parochial schools from kindergarten to the Twelfth grade. This was the 1970s and 80s, when the Church was feeling the first repercussions from the Second Vatican Council, *Humanae Vitae*, and the world-wide sexual revolution. I remember learning very little from my Catholic religious education, though I can still recall all the lyrics from "The Sound of Silence" taught to us by a smiling guitar-strumming sister. One peculiar incident that also always stood out from the fog of the past, was a priest telling my class that the best Catholics are those that question everything. He didn't explain this concept, that would have been difficult as we were all still only pre-teens, he just threw it out there. Well, it stuck in my mind. Later on, as a young adult, I think I never really knew Jesus, therefore I could not believe in him. But I doubted everything the Catholic Church held as sacred: and the only place I knew these dogmas was when we recited *The Creed* during Mass. While being forced to go to church, either by my parents or as a part of some school function, I stopped saying it all-together.

Once I turned eighteen, one of the first solo trips that I made was to the Castro in San Francisco. For those who may not be familiar with this neighbor, it is the epee-center of the gay world. Ever since I had been exposed to pornography at a very young age, I was perpetually confused about my sexuality. Was I straight, gay, or bi? I thought I could find out in the homosexual mecca. That day, I planned on meeting a friend there, but until he arrived, I had a few hours to kill. I walked around the area, stopping into the various antique stores and bookshops. In one place, that was crammed with old posters, antique bronzes, and furniture, I saw a beautiful watercolor hanging in the very back of the room. I could tell that it depicted several nude men standing around a lake. As I got closer, I was shocked to see that all the figures sported grossly enlarged genitals. This experience, though I could hardly realize it then, spoke much of what I would later find in gay culture: a longing for beauty and the divine that somehow always becomes base and materialistic.

In the spirit of further exploration, I started picking up female prostitutes and visiting the legal brothels in Nevada. I enjoyed myself, but the risk and the cost became too much for me. Since I was already hooked on porn, I found some cheaper relief at local adult bookstores and theaters. I thought I was lucky, when I discovered that you could have anonymous and free sex with various men at these sordid dives. Thus began my dark descent into the world of homosexual promiscuity. Soon afterward, I started hearing strange voices. They told me to do things; to go to places that I had never been before. One of the first locations they guided me was a gay sex-club. I would make many such trips to that one and other such haunts around the Bay Area. I met my first lover there. He was older, wealthy, and kind, but equally deceptive. He introduced me to the kink sub-cultures. Once we tired of each other, I moved on to some of his friends. Many of them liked to be video-taped while having sex. At first I loved it, then I became bored. For gay man, there is this constant sort-of restlessness. Its pervasive and all-encompassing. The wounds that we can not admit to, are ever present. In our mind, the only remedy: is another man. For we lack the innate masculinity that should be present within us.

One day, a friend told me about an amateur pornographer who paid guys to masturbate in front of his camera. I thought the idea rather tame, but I gave it a try. The adoration and praise that I received, if only from a third rate-porn pusher was intoxicating. From there, I entered the universe of BDSM (bondage, discipline, and sado-masochism.) To keep my interest, I needed something more hard-core. Other men recorded our dungeon rituals. Then watching porn was a much more involved affair. You could not just click your finger, you had to actually get into your car and buy the stuff or order it through the mail. Back when I was in porn, pornography, especially gay porn, was a more inclusive and cultish affair. I was a part of the coven. From that point, I couldn't stop. I felt myself always falling further and further downwards. I wanted some meaning in my life. Foolishly, I thought I found what I was yearning for in the occult. It started by dabbling in the New Age, that progressed to pagan ceremonies and eventually satanism. It fit neatly with the quasi-religious practices and symbolism that was everywhere in the gay culture: the sex act was the new sacrament. My new obsession gave me a fleeting sense of power, but everything only got worse.

Near death, vomiting up gallons of blood in a hospital emergency room, the demons finally came for me. At first, I cursed at the Lord, then I became frightened. I did not want to go to hell. For the first time, in many years, I called out to God. That instant, the demons left. For the next few days, I was catatonic. I didn't know what to do. The only Church I had ever known was the Catholic Church. Could I go back? Did I even want to? Thankfully, our Blessed Pope John Paul II had published *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* since the time I left the Faith. Thank the Lord, my mother owned a copy. I turned to the section on homosexuality. There was hope. From my childhood, I remembered something about going to a thing called Penance. I tracked down a kindly priest I once to a liking to during the beginning of my fall, and confessed my sins. It all seemed too easy. Things were still not right with me. I felt sullied and evil. I clung to all that I was. I could not accept the love of Jesus.

I spent the next few years, running to and from different religious communities. I knew, deep down, that I did not have a religious vocation, but I felt safe in remote monasteries surrounded by religious and priests. I thought the devil could not find me there. I was wrong. Suddenly, I was forced to return to California and face my past once again. Through the Grace of God, a newly ordained priest was giving a series of talks on the occult in my hometown. I decided to go. Once he was finished, I spoke briefly to him. He seemed to already know much of my story. He asked me to follow him into a little room in the back of the church. I didn't know what was going to happen. I sat down, he placed his stole on my head and prayed over me. I was delivered from the devils still causing my fear and lack of trust in the Lord. Now, I could love Jesus with my whole heart. Occasionally, the forgotten whispers of my past will echo through my head. When I am under stress, anxious, or depressed, they sound almost melodious. They call me back. But the world that I once inhabited is a place I can not go back to; for there, only death awaits me. The struggle to remain next to Jesus is often a heavy burden. I believe that gay men are given a very special opportunity to carry the Cross with Our Lord and share in his most intimate sufferings. For we too, have known rejection and hatred. But we have a choice: we can surrender to our weaknesses and let ourselves be crushed or the weight can become light and joyful. Onetime, before Jesus saved me, I met a sickly man riddled with AIDS. He was not angry or bitter because he knew what had brought him to that state. Then, I thought his cheerful demeanor very strange. Only he had accepted the truth. His suffering was joined with Our Lord. He was doing what he had to do. And he died in peace.

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