

"Human Sexuality and Marriage"

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae*, states that "human life, as a gift of God, is sacred and inviolable. . . The meaning of life is found in giving and receiving love, and, in this light, human sexuality and procreation reach their true and full significance" (no.81). This deeply profound and pregnant insight represents a compendium of the Church's teaching on human sexuality and sacramental marriage.

Love is a constant theme in modern culture. Modern music, cinema, newspapers, radio, and television constantly assault our senses with stories and features about love. Unfortunately, the attributes of authentic human love, that is, the values of fidelity, exclusiveness, dependability, stability, childbearing, the establishing of a nuclear family and love of children are downgraded, while the values of sexual compatibility, amorous passion, and emotional ecstasy are given special attention. In modern parlance, the term "making love" has come to mean having sexual intercourse, and its value is measured solely in terms of erotic intensity and sexual climax. This understanding of "lovemaking" makes no attempt to characterize sexual intercourse as an expression of genuine self-giving and sharing of life. It completely ignores the fact that sexual love forms bonds of communion with others in caring, faithful, and lifelong relationships based upon selflessness, sincerity, and fidelity. Contemporary society has, in essence, separated love from sex, thus creating a chasm of moral ambiguity from which emerges a plethora of disordered sexual desires and carnal appetites.

The restoration of a true and proper sense of sexual expression must begin by reuniting human love and sexuality so that the unity between sex and faithful life-long love, the unity between sex and procreation, and the unity between sex and marriage between one man and one woman, are revived. Sex, then, will be rooted in the solid foundation of God's divine love, and it is this love which will allow humanity to

"recognize the voice of God which urges him 'to do what is good and avoid what is evil'" (CCC no. 1706).

Man must return to his senses. In order to develop a proper understanding of human sexuality, we must first develop an appreciation of the dignity of the human person which "is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God" (CCC no. 1700). Since this divine image is present in every man and woman, "the human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit" (CCC no.1704). The Spirit fills man's soul and permeates his intellect and will. By virtue of our soul and our spiritual powers of intellect and will, we are endowed with authentic freedom and the innate ability to direct our lives toward our Ultimate Good. In short, we find perfection in seeking and loving what is true, good, and beautiful (cf. CCC no. 1704-1705 and *Gaudium et Spes*, no.15). As the image of God, men and women are created for love, and this love is profoundly manifest in consecrated sexual intimacy.

Pope John Paul II's approach to human love and sexuality envisions sex not as something purely biological, but as a component of the innermost being of the human person. He sees sexuality as a physical giving of oneself to another which reaches its true and full meaning when it expresses itself in the intimate communion of persons through the sacramental sign of marriage:

Love is a gift of God, nourished by and expressed in the encounter of man and woman. Love is thus a positive force directed towards their growth and maturity as persons. Love is also a precious source for the self-giving which all men and women are called to make for their own self-realization and happiness. In fact, man is called to love as an incarnate spirit, that is, soul and body in the unity of the person. Human love hence embraces the body, and the body also expresses spiritual love . . . realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 11).

To the Holy Father, sexuality is a fundamental component of personality, that is, one of its means of expressing and of living out human love. This gift of love is transformed

through the power of Christ's redeeming grace, and we become partakers in His divine nature: "as an incarnate spirit, that is, a soul which expresses itself in a body and a body informed by an immortal spirit, man is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the human body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love" (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 11). Sexuality has love as its intrinsic end and its meaning must be understood in light of Christian revelation: "sexuality characterizes man and woman not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual, making its mark on each of their expressions. Such diversity, linked to the complementarity of the two sexes, allows thorough response to the design of God according to the vocation to which each one is called" (The Pontifical Council for the Family, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality: Guidelines for Education within the Family*, no.13).

When love is lived out in marriage, both spouses "through this union, experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48). Love between a man and a woman is achieved when they give themselves totally to each other in the marriage covenant where God has willed that human life is to be conceived, nurtured, and developed. Sexual giving, then, belongs to married love alone where "the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and a pledge of spiritual communion" (CCC, no. 2360). This expression of life-giving love in the conjugal act has two inseparable aspects: union and procreation. As Pope John Paul II states:

By its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, capacitates them for the generation of new lives, according to the laws inscribed in the very being of man and of woman. By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards man's most high calling to parenthood. (John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, 432).

Sacred Scripture provides keen insights into the nature of human sexuality (see Leviticus 20:11, 17, 21; Romans 1:18; 6:12-14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:16-23; Ephesians 4:17-24; 5:3-13; Colossians 3:5-8; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; 4:12; and 2 Peter 1:4) and its proper ordering in the sacrament of marriage (see Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18; 4:1-2; 5:1-2; Matthew 5:27-28; 9:15; 19:3ff.; Mark 2:11-20; 10:2ff.; Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29. cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:27; and Revelation 19:7-8). It provides the foundation for the Church's teaching on sexual intimacy: "the biblical Word of God several times urges the betrothed and the married to nourish and develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love and undivided affection" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 49). Pope John Paul II examines a number of scripture passages which discuss the nature of human love and sexuality, paying particular attention to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and the Creation account in Genesis 2. The Holy Father's anthropology of the human person is rooted in Sacred Scripture: "thanks to [the biblical narratives] we have been able to find the nuptial meaning of the body and rediscover what it consists of as a measure of the human heart such as to mold the original form of the communication of persons" (John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, 125).

The 'contraceptive mentality,' which permeates much of modern society, undermines the intrinsic unity of sacramental marriage. Contraceptives separate sexual intercourse from its inherent openness to life-giving love, and increase the propensity and the temptation to separate sex from fidelity, permanence, and exclusive relationship. In essence, contraceptives facilitate the separation of sex from love. Vatican II reminds us that "harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, which respects the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love, is possible only in the virtue of married chastity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 51). Pope Paul VI confirms this in *Humanae Vitae* and is a constant theme in the teaching of Pope John Paul II.

The truth of the language of sexuality is also missing in sexual relationships between people of the same gender. Homosexual acts themselves, not the person with a homosexual orientation, are objectively and gravely immoral because there is no communion of body and spirit which facilitates openness to the procreation of new life. Homosexuality undermines the truth, fullness, and wholeness of sexual communion. This has always been the clear teaching of the Church and is rooted in Sacred Scripture (see especially Genesis 19:1-19; Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:10, 1 Timothy 1:10). The Church's teaching on homosexuality is often misunderstood or misrepresented by many in society. Catholics are often accused of discrimination against people of homosexual orientation. The truth is that the Church recognizes the dignity of every human person and condemns social discrimination in all its forms. However, when these efforts place homosexual relationships in complete social, legal, and moral parity with heterosexual relationships, the Church reiterates that "the deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage, is essentially contrary to its purpose" (CCC, no. 2352). Homosexuality occurs outside of the sexual relationship which is demanded by the moral order and in which the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love is achieved. Consequently, homosexual persons are called to chastity and it is the Church's sincere hope that "by the virtue of self-mastery (and) by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection" (CCC, no. 2359).

Modern society, with its secular, humanist tendencies, often views the supreme expression of communion between man and woman in the sexual act as something as casual and trivial. The true meaning of human sexuality must be rooted in the objective good which seeks to perfect in its totality. It must also be properly ordered to and sanctified in the sacramental bond of marriage where the practice of chastity, through which conjugal love finds its fullest expression in mutual self-giving and openness to new life, gives dignity and value to the human person. Human sexuality, through which

we participate in the mystery of loving communion with God, is both unitive and procreative. Therefore, the disordered sexual expressions found in contraception and homosexuality undermine the intrinsic nature of human sexuality. Ultimately, human sexuality can never find its full expression apart from the intimate partnership of life and love established by the Creator in marriage, where the husband and wife become one heart and one soul, and together obtain their human perfection (CCC, no.2364 and Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no.9).