

Chapter 9 – Sharing Jesus’ Passion in Our Dating and Marriage

High school dating had been a mixed bag. The early stages of relationships were always exhilarating: the flirtation, the thrill of a young lady being interested in me, planning the first date. Who doesn’t enjoy that? It was the rest of the relationship that gave me trouble. I found things within myself that I never imagined were there.

When I developed feelings for someone they were deep. And usually dating young ladies from my prayer group, God was part of our relationship from the start. Besides all of the usual activities that bond couples, we prayed and even evangelized together. I knew how unique that was, how few young people there were who *could* share that. I allowed that last point to skew my perspective.

I dated one young lady for a year and a half during high school. She truly cared for me, but was uneasy about labeling our relationship or making too deep of a commitment. Instead of just respecting where she was at and enjoying the time we spent together, I succumbed to this emotional “reflex” to latch on, to press to know exactly where I stood. With it came the question, “How could I share my heart with someone else the way I do with her?” I noticed that theme recurring in later dating relationships too.

On my part it was a lack of faith, and a lack of true love. Instead of trusting God to bring me together with the partner He had chosen, I let myself become consumed with questions like, “What if we’re meant for each other, and she’s missing it? What if we go our separate ways and never come back together?” Instead of fully loving these young ladies for themselves, I was also loving them for who they could be for me. And that is no way to love; I felt frustrated and so did they. I knew that as a Christian I was called to chastity; at the time I thought that just meant refraining from sex until I was married. But chastity isn’t about what we hold back; it is how we give ourselves away.

The Virtue of Chastity

Chastity means, “having the strength to use your sexuality according to God’s plan, whether you are single or married...Chastity is a virtue that defends love from selfishness and frees us from using others as objects. It

makes us capable of authentic love.¹³⁰ Defined as such, chastity is at the very heart of the Gospel. Through the Spirit, Jesus empowers us, at any point in life, in any situation, to love others – to show forth His passion for them. In dating we give our attention, time, and kindness to the person we are involved with – in the knowledge that God is molding us for the future, bringing out the image of His Son that much clearer.

There is nothing to fear in dating. We may experience heartache as we, or our partner, feel called down different paths; but we have a God committed to our well-being. We will never be unloved. Despite our emotional state on a given day, the truth is that we exist within Love Himself. And in the end, we will see that all roads converge before our Father's throne. No relationship is lost, simply postponed for a brief time to be picked up again and deepened throughout eternity.

The Theology of the Body

The *Book of Revelation* ends with the “wedding feast of the Lamb,” the consummation of Jesus’ courtship of the Church. Like Jesus, many of us experience God’s call to share our lives with a spouse. The Catholic Church recognizes the love of a Christian husband and wife as a unique participation in His spousal love for the Church:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her...no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one” [Gen.2:24].

This is a *great mystery*, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25-26, 29-32).

A *great mystery* – a *great sacrament* in Latin. Because of Jesus’ redemptive power, the marriage of Christians is *supernatural*. Through their vows to love one another till death do them part, they become sacrament – a material conduit of Jesus’ union with the Father and the Church. Let me say it

¹³⁰ Evert, Jason, *If You Really Love Me: 100 Questions on Dating, Relationships, and Sexual Purity*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 2003), p.17

again, because of a Christian husband's fusion to Jesus, he becomes the Lord's unique, chosen instrument for expressing the Lord's sacrificial love to his wife. The wife, in turn, becomes a conduit of Jesus' love for her husband. They share in His "passion" in the truest sense of the word: through one, Jesus pours Himself out to the other and for the other, unconditionally. The struggles they inevitably face become their participation in the "passion" of Jesus' suffering and death.

The transformation of marriage into sacrament is at the center of Jesus' work of redemption. Remember what we saw in our discussion of humanity's creation in the image of the Trinity? The love between a husband and wife is meant to be a sharing of all they are. It is so real, so completely imbued with life, that it becomes its own person – a son or daughter. The human family is a reflection of the God Who is Love, the Three in One! It is written into our very bodies; man and woman were made for union.

This view, expounded in great depth by Pope John Paul II, has come to be known as the *Theology of the Body*. It calls us to recognize the implications of Jesus' Cross and Resurrection for married life, placing sexual expression within the context of living as images of God. Sex is meant to be an icon of both the Love between the Father and the Son, and a participation in Jesus' Love for the Church. In the sexual act a man and woman *say to each other*, "I am making a complete gift of myself – my body, fertility, mind, and heart – to you, until death parts us." This type of married love is only possible if it is animated by the Spirit, the very Love of God.

As we look at the world around us, perhaps even within us, we see how God's plan for married love has been hi-jacked. Our culture has become obsessed with sex but terrified of commitment. We have allowed Satan to twist our vision of sexuality. Sex without the marriage bond, sex in which our God-given, God-imaging fertility is eliminated, is a bodily lie.

Historically Christianity has focused so much on the lie, the perversion, that it neglected to teach the infinitely more powerful, beautiful Truth that sex is the husband and wife's way of imaging the Trinity. It is only when we have comprehended the magnificence of the original that we can recognize the counterfeits. The Truth is where the Church needs to begin her proclamation, in chastity and the *Theology of the Body*. With that in place, the flaws in the counterfeits of non-marital sex, contraceptive sex, cohabitation, divorce, and homosexuality become glaring. Christians cannot be motivated