

Chastity and Mercy 6: River Rising

‘...Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, in order to present her to Himself as a radiant Church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.’ (Eph. 5:25-27)

Jesus reveals His self-giving to the church and world through a host of icons—relationships whose chastity makes Him known in ordered, exuberant love. St. Paul in the above passage uses the whole-enough love of a man for a woman to make earthy and evident Jesus’ cleansing love for His Church.

God gives us little room to write off such a parallel as lofty mysticism; rather, He insists that we embody the truth of the Gospel by offering ourselves generously and humbly to each other as His Spirit secures and empowers us. ‘Our bodies are a Bible,’ insists Christopher West.

Our beautiful challenge? Always and everywhere we offer ourselves as either male or female, blessed with bodies that long for union. Here we discover that it takes God—we who drink deeply of His mercy and revere His truth---to reveal God. We can only master the unwieldy elements of our sexual desire when we are aligned with His desire for the other’s good, not merely with what feels good to us. Owning that goal and the gift one is makes us chaste, one day at a time.

And oh what divine strength and beauty flow from the chaste! No conflict here with virility and fragrant womanhood. Chaste sexuality creates a ‘glow of the true and the good irradiating from the ordered state’ (Pieper) which feeds the souls it encounters, surpassing the adrenal kicks of sexy idols. Icons need not flaunt; they reflect glory from their depths. The Creator shines through His ordered creation and invites the world to know Him through them, through us.

We’ve all tasted and seen God’s goodness through His human ‘windows.’ Seasoned male friendship has been for me, in the words of the Catechism, ‘the witness of God’s fidelity and loving kindness’ (#2346). Merciful faithfulness assumes the face of Jesus through friendships forged in Him. Such friendship empowered this icon (however ‘chipped’) to pursue a particular woman. Annette and I responded ‘to God’s call to give life by sharing in the creative power and fatherhood of God’ (#2367).

Yes, our chaste union is about God’s provision for us. And it is equally about creating and raising them—our kids, made and parented in His image as male and female. We are now a gender mosaic, distinct parts yet composed together in the whole of our lives, a glimpse for others of how Jesus’ love makes His members strong, fragrant, and fruitful.

My starting point en route to chastity was homosexuality; others begin with more traditional failures or just the nagging lie that ‘I will never be a good gift.’ We gather before Him as one Church before the one Cross where we welcome His flood of blood and water. As we bear one another’s

burdens, the river rises--first ankle deep then up to our knees, climbing to our waists and then some until we are immersed in love (EZ. 47) and confident that the chaste One will complete our chastity. Along the way we become the flood, exquisite witnesses in humble frames whose very clarity and purity releases living water to all who thirst.

'And where the river flows, everything will live' (Ez. 47: 9b).

'Thank You God for taking our frustrated gift-giving and drenching it in mercy. We just wanted to overcome shameful problems but all along You wanted to enjoy intimacy with us, and to make our joy full by making us Your witnesses. May we delight in the good gifts we are becoming--the clarity of sight and affection we are experiencing. Help us to see others as You do and to love them accordingly, beginning with our most basic commitments. Free us to become a life-giving flow of chaste love, at once tender and bold.'