

Liberating Chastity

Chastity has taken a lot of hits lately. Many would deem this ‘successful integration of sexuality within the person’ (#2337) a failure, the prospects dim for unifying one’s best spiritual aspirations with bodily desires. As Church sexual abuse scandals drone on like a dirge, we are stumbled in our stewardship of ‘these powers of life and love.’ If our fathers who claim to represent Jesus have faltered to the point of wrecking children’s lives, and their fathers (bishops) cover for them in order to defend ‘holy’ banks and appearances, what hope for us?

Hypocrisy fires our anger, which readily goes south to ignite dark longings for justifying our own lusts—you screw up ‘holy’ man, I’ll screw up worse!

Eloquent fools rush in. I just read with sobriety and incredulity LGBT activist Frederic Martel’s ‘outing’ of the last four popes and their Roman administrations: ‘In the Closet of the Vatican.’ Pretty intense stuff; more later. What alerted me to Martel’s interpretive key was this one line skewering Pope Emeritus Benedict, whose commitment to sexual orthodoxy is consistent and much hated: ‘He was haunted by the fact that someone else might be having pleasure...’

Huh. That’s Benedict’s legacy, his own chaste life (and there’s no evidence to the contrary) so curdled by conflictual desires that he spends his life spoiling others’ ‘gay’ revelry? That’s Martel’s cause and cure: ‘out’ these collared hypocrites and party on! Unwittingly, Martel ‘outs’ himself and shows he knows nothing about genuine chastity. Only in discovering more about this misunderstood virtue can we rescue it from such a caricature.

Chastity is about uniting the good of our bodily desires for pleasure and creativity with a desire to dignify other lives. This is not a virtue of children but of adults who must lay aside childish things in order to own good and lusty longing for human connection then decide, with ongoing training, to assert the upper hand on what drives them; desires channeled to achieve life, not destroy fun.

No stranger to lust-propulsion, I through Jesus’ mercy discovered a longing greater than sexy idols—that is, a peaceful composure that invited me to explore a range of relationships fully-clothed in which I learned to open my mouth and heart, not my pants. It was fun--pleasurable, if not sensational. I grew up without sensual limits so biblical boundaries saved me. A clear unbiased reading of Scripture led me to conclude that ‘Jesus committed to only one model of sexual union, opposite-gender monogamy...He regarded all sexual activity outside of marriage to one person of the opposite gender as capable of jeopardizing one’s entrance into the Kingdom.’ (‘The Bible and Homosexual Practice’, Dr. Robert Gagnon). To follow Him meant to commit to the same. Scary stuff.

Yet I needed the fear of God in regards to what I did with my body, precisely because of its impact on others. Masturbation hid me from others, porn demonized my vision of God’s children, and immoral acts violated the trust of holy friendships.

Two keys from the work of St. John Paul II helped transform fear into expectancy. The first is his philosophical 'personalism' which invites all persons into an interior journey toward actualizing the truth in their lives, one that requires self-awareness and commitment to a process of development. Chastity, endowed by this 'personalism', is 'how the subjective desires of the heart come into harmony with the objective norm' (Christopher West).

That norm involved acting upon the second key. I learned through Theology of the Body that I was a 'gift' to others and that my design, however damaged by homosexual lust, was still inclined toward the other gift: woman. Then I discovered a pretty good relationship with a real one; I marveled at the difference between lust-propulsion and the emerging chastity in me that could open to Annette's gender gift and grow to appreciate its exquisite rhythms. As I did, sexual ardor increased in a way that I can only describe as integrated. St. John Paul II's insists that chastity applies as readily to marrieds as to singles. We do not marry in order to avoid or channel lust; Jesus calls us in the spirit of St. Paul to love her like Jesus loves His Church. That requires nothing less than integration—the gift of slow-growing chastity.

Hypocrites and rumors of hypocrites aside, I can take responsibility for my own happiness. That requires loving free from the fetters of childish desires. Chastity liberates that happiness. Long may she live and grow in us.

Please take time to watch our new video and become '[Chaste Together](#).'