



HUMAN DIGNITY

DIGNITY OF THE BODY

A CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING
SERIES FOR YOUTH LEADERS

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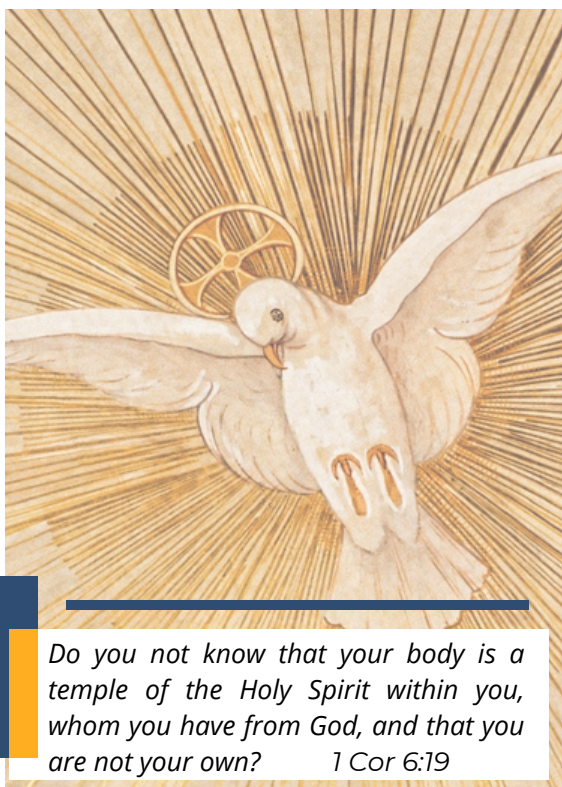
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HUMAN DIGNITY

Background



Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 1 Cor 6:19

In the previous document, Human Dignity: Anthropology, we explored the Church's teaching on human dignity, grounded in its biblical and traditional sources. Building upon that foundation, we now turn to a more specific aspect intrinsically connected to human dignity: the dignity of the human body.

During the early years of his pontificate (1979–1984), Saint Pope John Paul II delivered a series of profound addresses presenting an integrated vision of the human person. He emphasized that the human body is not merely physical but serves as an expression of the human person, offering profound insights into the meaning and purpose of authentic human love. These teachings collectively became known as the Theology of the Body (ToB).

Several interconnected factors influenced the development of ToB. Saint John Paul II's personalist philosophy, which underscores the dignity and relational nature of the human person, was foundational. Furthermore, his pastoral experience as a priest and bishop in Poland provided firsthand insights into the struggles of married life, interpersonal relationships, and moral questions concerning sexuality and marriage. On a broader scale, the cultural shifts in societal attitudes toward sexuality, marriage, and family life posed significant challenges to traditional Christian teachings, prompting the Church to offer a renewed understanding of the human person in the context of modern society.

The Theology of the Body is also deeply scriptural, rooted in the vision of humanity as created in the "image of God" and called to a vocation of love and communion. Key biblical passages shaped this teaching, including Christ's discourse on marriage and divorce (Matthew 19), Saint Paul's reflection on the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6), and the analogy of Christ's relationship with the Church as a model for marital love (Ephesians 5).

Far from being merely a critique of contemporary cultural trends, the Theology of the Body offers a constructive and transformative vision of human dignity. At its core, it presents love as central to God's divine plan. The ToB rejects both hedonism, which identifies the pursuit of pleasure as life's ultimate goal, and puritanism, characterized by an austere approach to human conduct and religion. Instead, it emphasizes the unity of body and soul, affirming that the body possesses a "nuptial meaning," which reveals humanity's vocation to self-giving love.



Catechetical Points



DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN BODY

- The foundational principle is that humans, body and soul, are created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27). This means that every person possesses inherent dignity from conception (CCC 1701-1703). (see previous document)
- Temple of the Holy Spirit- The body is not merely a vessel, but a *temple of the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor 6:19). This emphasizes the sacredness of the body and its role in relationship with God and others.
- The Body-Spirit Composite- Our bodies and souls are deeply connected, not separate. Our physical bodies as a way for our inner spiritual selves to be seen and expressed. Think of it like this: your actions and how you treat others (your body's expressions) can show the love and goodness in your heart (your soul).
- Vocation to Communion- The *ToB* highlights the body's capacity for communion, particularly in the context of marriage. The body expresses the person and their call to give and receive love.
- Human Freedom- The Catechism teaches that human dignity is tied to freedom. Our ability to make choices, using our intellect and will, is an "outstanding manifestation of the divine image." (CCC 1705) The body is the vehicle through which we enact those free choices.
- Moral Action- Our bodies are integral to our moral actions. How we use our bodies reflects our inner selves and our relationship with God and others. Therefore, our bodies are subject to moral law.
- Incarnation & Resurrection- God become flesh, Jesus Christ unites his divinity with our humanity. He elevates the dignity of the human body. In his bodily resurrection, he affirms the eternal significance of our physical existence. Our bodies are destined for the glory in union with God.

HUMAN BODY AND LOVE

- Rooted in the self-giving love of God, humans are invited and challenged to love in a similar way. True love involves a gift of oneself. *ToB* emphasizes that the body itself is capable of expressing this self-giving love, especially in the context of marriage.
- Intrinsically linked to communion, love transcend the physical and desire for unity with another person on spiritual and emotional level as well.
- Human love is meant to be a reflection of God's love. God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and he created human to share in his love. True love is therefore, rooted in this Divine love and finds its fulfillment in him.
- The body is not simply a physical entity, but a "sacrament" of the person, capable of reveling the inner self and the capacity to love. This is the "language of the body".
- True love must be freely given. It is not forced or coerced. This freely given love respects our endowed free will and dignity.



HUMAN BODY AND SEXUALITY

- Sexuality as a gift- a beautiful gift from God, sexuality is intended for the expression of love and the procreation of life within the context of marriage.
- In this sacrament of marriage, the union of man and woman is understood as a deepening of the bond between spouses and openness to the possibility of new life.
- Sexual chastity- a virtue that calls all people, regardless of their state in life, to integrate their sexuality in a health and holy way.
- For married couples, this involves fidelity and responsible parenting. For single persons, this involves abstaining from sexual activity.
- While the Church upholds its teaching on sexuality and marriage, it condemns all forms of unjust discrimination.

TAKE AWAY MESSAGE



INHERENT DIGNITY:

- Your body, as a part of your whole personhood, possesses inherent dignity because you are created in God's image and likeness. This dignity is not earned, but is a gift from God.

BODY AS A TEMPLE:

- Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. This means it is sacred and deserves respect. This understanding should influence how you care for your physical and mental well-being.

BODY-SPIRIT COMPOSITE:

- Pope Saint John Paul II even said that our bodies can make the unseen parts of us, like our spirituality and connection to God, visible to the world. So, in a way, our bodies can be a sign of God's love.

SEXUALITY AS A GIFT:

- Sexuality is a beautiful and powerful gift from God, intended for the expression of love and the creation of new life within the context of marriage. It is not merely a physical drive, but a fundamental part of who you are.

MARRIAGE AS A COVENANT:

- Marriage, as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman, is the proper context for sexual expression. It is a lifelong commitment of faithful and fruitful love.



CHASTITY AS FREEDOM:

- Chastity is a virtue that calls you to integrate your sexuality in a healthy and holy way. It is not repression, but rather a path to true freedom and authentic love.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY:

- Your body "speaks" through your actions and choices. The Theology of the Body emphasizes that sexual intercourse is a powerful expression of self-giving love, which is why it belongs within the context of marriage.

LOVE AS SELF-GIFT:

- True love is a gift of self, a desire for the good of the other person. This is the model of love that Christ offers us. It is not about taking, but about giving.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNION:

- You are created for relationships and communion, both with God and with others. Healthy friendships and relationships are essential for your personal and spiritual growth.

DISCERNING RELATIONSHIPS:

- In your youth, discerning relationships is very important. Seek out relationships that are rooted in mutual respect, shared values, and a desire for the good of the other person. Protect your heart.

GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE:

- Knowing that God loves you unconditionally is the foundation for healthy self-esteem and healthy relationships. His love empowers you to love yourself and others with dignity and respect.



Saint Gianna Beretta Molla

1922 - 1962 A.D.





Reflection

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION WITH THE YOUTH



1. When you look at yourself in the mirror, what aspects of your body make you feel grateful? How does the idea that your body is a 'temple of the Holy Spirit' change the way you think about taking care of yourself?
2. Knowing that you are created in God's image, how does that impact the way you view other people, especially those who are different from you?
3. What does it mean to you to 'give yourself' to someone? How can you express love in your friendships and family relationships in a way that is truly self-giving?
4. How does our culture portray sexuality? How does that compare to the Catholic Church's teaching that sexuality is a beautiful gift from God? What challenges do you face in living out that teaching?
5. How do you think your body 'speaks' to others? What messages do you want to convey through your actions and choices?
6. The Church talks about chastity as a way to true freedom. How do you understand that connection? How can practicing chastity help you to have healthier relationships?
7. What qualities do you look for in a good friend? How can you build friendships that help you grow in your faith and as a person?
8. How do movies, music, and social media influence your understanding of love and sexuality? What are some ways you can be more discerning about the messages you receive?
9. How can you show respect and compassion to those who are struggling with their sexuality or relationships?
10. How do you experience God's love in your life? How does knowing that God loves you unconditionally affect your self-esteem and your relationships with others?

SAINTS AS ROLE MODELS



- Saint John Paul II
- Saint Maria Goretti
- Saint Valentine
- Saint Gianna Beretta Molla



LET US PRAY



Loving Father, Creator of all, we thank you for the gift of our bodies, temples of your Holy Spirit. We praise you for creating us in your image, male and female, and for the gift of our sexuality, a source of love and life. Lord Jesus, you who became flesh and dwelt among us, help us to see the beauty and dignity of our bodies and the bodies of others. Teach us to love as you love, with a love that is self-giving, pure, and true. Holy Spirit, guide us in our relationships, that we may build them on a foundation of respect, trust, and love. Help us to live with chastity, understanding it as a path to true freedom and authentic love.

May we always remember that our bodies are destined for glory, and may we strive to live in a way that honors you, in all our thoughts, words, and actions. Through Christ our Lord. Amen

References



REFERENCE TO SCRIPTURE



- **Genesis 1:26-31, 2: 4-24** - The Creation Stories & Marriage
- **1 Corinthians 3:16-17** - Temple of the Holy Spirit
- **Psalms 139:13-14** - God created my inmost being
- **Matthew 19:4-6** - Creation of man and woman and permanence of marriage
- **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** - Honoring our body as a temple
- **John 3:16** - God so Loved the World
- **1 John 4:7-20** - God is Love
- **1 Cor 13** - The Gift of Love

CATECHESIM AND OTHER DOCUMENTS



- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCC 355-384: Creation of Man • CCC 1601-1666: Sacrament of Matrimony • CCC 1700-1789: Human Dignity • CCC 2331-2400: Sixth Commandment • CCC 2514-2533: Purity of Heart | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiaris Consortio (On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) by St. John Paul II • Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love) by Pope Francis • Humanae Vitae (On the Regulation of Birth) by Pope Paul VI • Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth) by St. John Paul II |
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FROM THE MARONITE LITURGY



You have united, O Lord, your divinity with our humanity and our humanity with your divinity, your life with our mortality, and our mortality with your life. You have assumed what is ours and you have given us what is yours for the life and salvation of our souls. To you be glory for ever.

WATCH A SHORT VIDEO



[THE UNITY OF THE BODY & SOUL](#)



[WHAT CATHOLICS DO \(& DON'T\) BELIEVE ABOUT THE BODY](#)



[WHY GOD GAVE US BODIES](#)



HELPFUL WEBSITES



[HUMAN LIFE INTERNATIONAL](#)



HUMAN DIGNITY







OFFICE FOR MARONITE YOUTH

EPARCHY OF ST. MARON OF BROOKLYN



www.myoeparchystmaron.org



office@eparchystmaron.org



[myo.eparchystmaron](https://www.facebook.com/myo.eparchystmaron)



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