

Redeemed Sexuality

By Theresa Notare

As Christians we should be grateful beyond words for the gift of our redemption. We believe that Christ's action on the cross has changed all things, for all time. We should seek to relate every aspect of our lives to how Christ has redeemed us and our world. When we consider the mystery – and contemporary confusion — of human sexuality, it is even more urgent for Christians to ask, “How has Christ redeemed human sexuality?”

Today our media features topics that not long ago would have been labeled science fiction, or pornography. Cloning, “casual” sex, getting pregnant by means of reproductive technologies, frozen embryos, adultery — the list goes on. Does anyone in the public square relate these issues to the spiritual? When those of us try to bring God into the equation, we are often told that “individual morality” must not be “imposed” on the public. But that should not deter the Christian.

Christ's work on the cross has restored all of human life, even human sexuality. That means that human sexuality is not “tinged” with sin, nor is it morally neutral. Although we can misuse even the best of God's gifts, that does not change the fact that sex is God's gift of life and love to us. Specifically, sexual intercourse was never meant to be directed to the individual. It's not a sport or game to be enjoyed on its own. Sexual intercourse is a powerful event of interpersonal communion — it is a sacramental event.

This makes more sense when we realize that Christian marriage is a sign of Christ's presence in the world. As Christians we accept on faith that human sexuality is caught up in Christ, uniting a man and woman in a union which reflects God's love in the world and is directed to others. With that starting point, it makes excellent sense to keep sex in marriage.

The redeemed nature of marriage was understood by the Church from our earliest history. Following up on Jesus' own words on the indissolubility of marriage, St. Paul likened Christian marriage to Christ's relationship with His Church. “As Christ loved the Church . . . so the husband should love and cherish his wife as he cherishes his own body; for husband and wife are

one body, as Christ and the Church are one body. This is a great mystery” (Ephesians 5:21-33). St. John Chrysostom (347-407) taught that the “one flesh” of the spouses is “not an empty symbol.” “They have not become the image of anything on earth, but of God Himself” (Homily 12).

“The love of spouses,” says the Catechism, “requires of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses’ community of persons, which embraces their entire life” (#1644). The root of this indissolubility is found in God Himself, who taught us of His fidelity through His covenant with Abraham. It is found finally in Christ, who united Himself with His Church.

In this age of continuous assaults on God’s design for life and love, it would do the world good if Christians reclaimed our rich heritage. Before we can do this we need to return to the mystery of our faith and meditate on who Jesus is, what He did for us, and how this has changed all life for all ages.

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