

Session 5

THE HEART: A BATTLEFIELD BETWEEN LOVE AND LUST

1. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS SERIES

Key points from Session Four: "Man and Woman He Redeemed Them"

- Lust is the inversion of sexual desire which resulted when the first man and woman closed their hearts to divine love. Shame, as a response to lust, is a natural form of self defense against the danger of being treated as an object for sexual use.
- Christ calls us to rediscover a *pure* way of looking at others capable of respecting the "gratuitous beauty" of the human body in its masculinity and femininity.
- Christ did not die on a cross and rise from the dead to give us more "rules" to follow. He came to change our hearts so that we would no longer need the rules. To the degree that God's law (*ethic*) is written on our hearts (*ethos*), we are *free from the law* – not free to break it, but free to fulfill it.
- The redemption of the body is the foundation of everything John Paul II teaches in his TOB. It refers not only to the hope of resurrection at the end of time, but is a power at work in us *now* able to do far more than we think or imagine. It is able to transform our experience of the body and sexuality.

2. THE SECOND "KEY WORD" OF CHRIST

Adultery in the "Heart"

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:27-28).

- Christ's words are not so much a condemnation of the human heart, but a calling.
- They call us to another way of seeing the body, another way of understanding and living the gift of human sexuality.
 - 2a.** Whoever allows these words to act in him will "hear in his innermost [being] the echo, as it were, of that 'beginning,' of that good 'beginning' to which Christ appealed on another occasion" (TOB 46:5).

2b. Christ's words "demand, so to speak, that man enters into his full image" (TOB 25:2). Man "*must rediscover the lost fullness of his humanity and want to regain it*" (TOB 43:7).

Christian Ethos: A Living Morality

"Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). "You blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean" (Mt 23:26).

- We all know it is possible to be fixated on merely following rules. But such "legalism" or "moralism" does not, in itself, lead to holiness.
- As Pope Benedict XVI insists: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice." It's the result of "the encounter with ... a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (DC 1).

2c. Ethos refers to "the inner form, the soul, as it were, of human morality ... To reach it, it is not enough to stop 'on the surface' of human actions, but one must penetrate precisely the interior" (TOB, 24:3).

2d. The ethos of redemption is a "living morality ... in which the very meaning of being human is realized" (TOB 24:3).

2e. "It is impossible to keep the Lord's commandment by imitating the divine model from outside; there has to be a vital participation, coming from the depths of the heart" (CCC 2842).

2f. "Christian ethos is characterized by a transformation of the human person's conscience and attitudes ... such as to express and realize the value of the body and sex according to the Creator's original plan" (TOB 45:3).

3. THE MAN OF CONCUPISCENCE

A Three-Fold Lust

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 Jn 2:16-17).

- The "world" St. John refers to here is not the "very good" world God created for man, but what results when man breaks the covenant with God.
- "Concupiscence" refers to the disordering of our passions that resulted from original sin. As St. John indicates, concupiscence is broader than the disorder of the sexual appetite, but often refers to this.

POINTS TO PONDER

Our society has come to champion sexual indulgence as a right. And we wonder why molestation, rape, abortions, "fatherless" children, adultery, divorce, pornography, and STDs are rampant. Could it be because human beings, both men and women, are behaving like animals?

POINTS TO PONDER

The media and even mental health professionals have fostered the notion that sexual restraint is inherently bad for us – and many of us have believed them. But does this make sense? We encourage self-restraint all the time: don't hit your sister, share your toys, don't eat the whole cheese cake, don't pass gas in public. These, and a great multitude of other restraints, are considered normal and healthy. But why do people cry "pathology" as soon as someone suggests restraint for the sexual appetite?



- Concupiscence comes from sin, inclines to sin, but is not itself a sin. It “cannot harm those who do not consent” to it (see CCC 1264).
- Only when a person has engaged his will to follow the promptings of concupiscence has he sinned. Simply recognizing those promptings within one’s heart is not a sin.

3a. “Concupiscence is to be explained as a lack, as a lack, however, that plunges its roots into the original depth of the human spirit” (TOB 27:2).

3b. It “is as if the ‘man of concupiscence’ ... had simply ceased ... to remain above the world of [animals]. It is as if he experienced a specific fracture of the personal integrity of his own body, particularly in that which determines its sexuality” (TOB 28:4).

Fallen Man is Depraved (But Not Utterly Depraved)

Original sin caused “a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature *has not been totally corrupted*: it is wounded ... and inclined to sin” but not utterly depraved (CCC 405 emphasis added).

3c. “The first Protestant reformers ... taught that original sin has *radically perverted* man and *destroyed his freedom*.” In this view, “the tendency to sin (concupiscentia) ... would be insurmountable” (CCC 406 emphasis added).

3d. “The human body in its masculinity and femininity has almost lost the power of expressing this love in which the human person becomes a gift.” We add the adverb “almost” because the “spousal meaning of the body has not become totally foreign to that heart: *it has not been totally suffocated in it by concupiscence, but only habitually threatened*. The ‘heart’ has become a battlefield between love and concupiscence. The more concupiscence dominates the heart, the less the heart experiences the spousal meaning of the body” (TOB 32:3).

3e. [paraphrasing] We must learn with perseverance and consistency the meaning of our bodies, the meaning of our sexuality. We must learn this not only in the abstract (although this, too, is necessary), but above all in the interior reactions of our own “hearts.” This is a “science” which cannot really be learned only from books, because it is a question here of deep knowledge of our interior life. Deep in the heart we learn to distinguish between what, on the one hand, composes the great riches of sexuality and sexual attraction, and what, on the other hand, bears only the sign of lust. And although these internal movements of the heart can sometimes be confused with each other, we have been *called by Christ to acquire a mature and complete evaluation allowing us to distinguish and judge the various movements of our hearts*. “And it should be added that this task can be carried out and that it is truly worthy of man” (TOB 48:4).

Summary

- It is not enough to follow God’s commandments in an exterior way. Christ’s words about lust in the heart call us to a new ethos, a new way of life. We must come to realize the lost fullness of our true humanity and long to regain it.
- “Concupiscence” refers to the disordering of our passions that resulted from original sin. Concupiscence comes from sin, inclines us to sin, but is not itself a sin. Concupiscence is the cause of a great battle in our hearts between love and lust.
- We have almost lost the power of expressing that love in which the human person becomes a gift through his body. We must relearn the true meaning of our sexuality not only in the abstract, but above all in the depths of our own “hearts.” With God’s help, this task *can* be carried out and it is truly worthy of man.

STUDY QUESTIONS FOR: SESSION 5: THE HEART: A BATTLEFIELD BETWEEN LOVE AND LUST

1. What is the relationship between the “new ethos” of redemption and the purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages of the interior life?
2. How can we regain the lost fullness of our humanity? What does this entail day to day?
3. How was Christian morality presented to you growing up? Did you consider Christianity to be a list of rules to follow?
4. What are the dangers of reducing Christianity to a legalistic following of rules? Why do you think Christianity is often perceived as such?
5. Everyone can recognize the “pull” of concupiscence within himself. What does Christ call us to do about it in the Sermon on the Mount?
6. What are the hidden dangers of conceiving of the human being as “utterly depraved”?
7. What practical steps can I take to learn that “science” (as John Paul II calls it) of discerning the inner movements and reactions of my heart?

DEAR JESUS,
You are the fully restored Adam, and through your death and resurrection, you fully restored Eve. Show me the path of restoration. Show me the path of sexual redemption, of true sexual liberation from all that keeps me bound. By the power of your death and resurrection, untwist in me what sin has twisted so that I might experience sexual desire as you created it to be, as the desire to love in your image. Amen.

