



Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents
with young adults.

*God created man in his image, in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it."
~Genesis 1:27*



Have you ever heard someone say, "I wish I had known this when I was younger. This would have made things so much easier?" This is the usual response parents share after learning about the Theology of the Body for the first time. Their reaction is expected because the truths that are found in this exciting Catholic teaching answer a lot of questions about what it means to be human and to love.

What exactly is the Theology of the Body? In a nutshell, it is a collection of 129 lectures given by Pope John Paul II between September of 1979 and November of 1984. It is a full course of study that unpacks the greatness for which we are created. It is not an explanation of rules and standards that we should follow. Rather, it is a clarification of God's intent to bring joy and peace to His earthly children through the respect for and the appreciation of the way they are created, body and soul.

The first key teaching from Pope John Paul II explains that the body is united to an immortal soul. The simple truth of this reality can be summed up by saying, "we are more than a body – we are more than our biology." The body is the visible part of the person while the soul is the invisible part of the person. Using the words of John Paul II, "The body, in fact, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine" (General Audience 2/20/80). Because the body and soul are fully integrated as one nature, both are considered good and deserving of honor. The Theology of the Body dispels the myth that the soul is good and the body is bad. It also reminds us that the human person is more than just a body.

Another wonderful teaching found in the Theology of the Body is that God intentionally created human persons with a gender: male and female. The physical differences between males and females are not accidental. Rather, it is precisely the masculine and feminine differences that make it possible for a husband and wife to give and receive love in a bodily way. Their "sexual complementarity" makes it possible for a man and woman to become a mutual gift to each other. This ability to become a gift is stamped in the beauty and mystery of the body as either male or female.

Finally, the desire to become "gift" is the third truth that Pope John Paul II wanted to tell us about. Becoming gift refers to our ability to be a helpmate - to totally give ourselves in service to the other. And, it implies that what we give is totally received by another. It is a mutual exchange of love as service where nothing is lost or left behind. The Pope said it this way, "... man is the only creature in the visible world that God willed for its own sake...man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself" (General Audience 1/16/80).

These three truths of the Theology of the Body teach us that the body speaks a language. When a person's body expresses these three truths, it is speaking "honestly" - its language is true. But if a person uses his or her body in a way that contradicts any one of these truths then the body expresses a lie.

There is one more relevant teaching that comes from the Theology of the Body. It is an understanding of the term "language of the body." This term means that every person's body communicates that which comes from the inside. In other words, the body speaks for the soul which is the place where we connect with our Creator. If the body speaks a message about these truths, it is speaking honestly. But, if it speaks any message other than these truths, it is lying.

In today's culture there is a growing movement to have youth deny the truths that they are created as either a male or female, with a body and soul, and an innate desire to become a total gift of self. Society is inviting young adults to deny these fundamental realities and is promoting a campaign of gender neutrality. This movement is enticing our young to use a language of the body that is dishonest. It is asking them to speak a language that is not in agreement with God's meaning for masculinity and femininity.

Parents need a practical awareness of the Theology of the Body so that they can see how it is being degraded by today's culture. They need to know how they can share these truths with their children. The end game of this segment is to share the truth about masculinity and femininity with families so that our sons and daughters do not have to say as adults, "I wish I had known that when I was younger. It would have made my life so much better."

From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

God created each person as either a male or female for a _____.

The sexual differences allow a man and woman to _____ each other.

Common attributes for a man include _____, _____ and _____.

Common attributes for a woman include _____, _____ and _____.

The traits that are common to each gender are not _____.

Continue the Discussion

Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.

1. When you were in your teen years, did you think that your body was good or that it was bad? Explain.
2. Other than the physical differences, how do men and women differ?
3. By God's design male persons have the common attributes of strength, service and production. Give examples of how you have seen men express these attributes in your life.
4. By God's design, female persons have common attributes of wisdom, community building and nurturing. Give examples of how you have seen women express these attributes in your life.
5. What benefits come from having men and women present in each of these areas; in the home, in the workplace, in society, in the Church?

Make a Plan

For The Parent

You are a parent of either a son or daughter. Sons are designed by God to be masculine and demonstrate strength, focus and the ability to produce. Daughters are designed by God to be feminine and to demonstrate wisdom, community building and a nurturing nature.

Both sons and daughters are called by God to use their common attributes in service of others rather than in self-serving ways. For example, sons should never use strength, focus and their ability to produce in order to possess or control another person – especially a woman. Likewise, daughters should never use their attributes of wisdom, community building and nurturing nature in pursuit of perfection which demands perpetual busyness, hyper monitoring and micromanagement.

As a parent, your job is to guide your sons and/or daughters towards their authentic demonstration of masculinity or femininity that is stamped into their very nature. Here are three steps to help you provide solid guidance in this area.

1. Watch the 12 minute video “Made for Each Other” that was produced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. You can find the video on-line at <http://www.marriageuniqueforareason.org/sexual-difference-video/>

2. After you have watched the video, answer the questions below.

Do you think the sexual difference, between men and women, is understood and appreciated by your young adult? Why or why not?

How can you help your child value the importance of the sexual difference? List your ideas.

Sexual differences don't compete. They complement each other. How can you help your child understand this concept?

3. Discuss the video and your answers with your son or daughter.

Make a Plan

For The Student

You are either a male or a female. Your parents look at you as either their son or their daughter. Sons are designed by God to be masculine and demonstrate strength, focus and the ability to produce. Daughters are designed by God to be feminine and to demonstrate wisdom, community building and a nurturing nature.

Whether you are a male or a female, you are called by God to use your common attributes in service of others rather than in self-serving ways. If you are a male, you should never use strength, focus and your ability to produce to possess or control another person – especially a woman. Likewise, if you are a female, you should never use your attributes of wisdom, community building and nurturing nature in pursuit of perfection and constant control of everyone and everything.

God created you as a male or a female for a reason and it is your job to find healthy ways to demonstrate the masculinity that is stamped into your very nature if you are a male or the femininity that is stamped into your very nature if you are a female. Here are three ways to learn how to do that.

1. With your parent's permission, watch the 12 minute video "Made for Each Other" that was produced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. You can find the video on-line at <http://www.marriageuniqueforareason.org/sexual-difference-video/>

2. After you have watched the video, answer the questions below and then discuss them with your parents.

Why did God create persons in two different bodily forms; male and female?

How do you value the sexual differences between males and females?

Sexual differences don't compete. They complement each other. What do you think this means?

3. Discuss the video and your answers to the questions with your parents.

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