

SIMPLE LESSONS

**ON SEX,
THE CATHOLIC FAITH,
GAY,
STRAIGHT
AND MARRIAGE**

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INTRODUCTION

Civil Law and Morality

Law in the United States reflects less and less any common moral world view, and so you really cannot rely upon it to shape your moral world view. What is legally permissible may very well be morally wrong. Morality comes from somewhere other than the law. It can be formed personally – by each individual for themselves. This will govern what they say and do, but it will not govern what others around them say and do. It provides no moral code that a community or society can rely on and expect to be held in common. It provides nothing for a stable social order. Morality can be revealed by God. This gives it an authority over personal opinion. Morality revealed by God governs what all those who believe in it say and do. Their common faith in God embraces a common moral code that, in turn, creates a stable community. There is predictability, expectations you can have of others, and accountability for what is said and done. This creates a stable social order – the kind in which you might like to live and raise a family. Seen in this light, the religious faith you share with your fellow believers may become your only chance to live in a sane and stable world.

This booklet describes the “meanings” defined by God that make marriage, “Marriage” for Catholics¹. These meanings are held by Catholics who believe the truth God reveals in the Sacred Scriptures of their faith. If you are Catholic, it is important to know your faith, and why you believe what you believe. It is also important to be able to share it with those who ask or are in need of the light and hope that faith brings.

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¹Actually, these “meanings” make marriage, Marriage for everyone. God didn’t just reveal His will for Catholics. It is God’s will for all. Catholics heed it, strive to embody it and, where possible, to proclaim it to others for their sanity and salvation.

THE ANATOMY OF SEX

How we use our genitalia is the reality God is “speaking to” in Catholic Sexual Morality. It is here we need to begin.

Men have penises. They are attached to scrotums. Within the scrotum sack, sperm is produced. It contains one half of what is necessary to form a human embryo and inaugurate a human life. The penis, while it eliminates urine from the human body, is uniquely designed to be able to inflate and form a long vessel that, with the aid of certain coordinated muscles can propel sperm from the scrotum, through the penis and outward. Women have vaginas. These are conspicuously designed to receive the male penis when it is erect. When the erect male penis is inserted in the female vagina and the muscles function properly, sperm is propelled out of the inserted male penis reasonably deep into the vagina. The sperm “swims” up along this passage way where, hopefully it encounters an egg released from the woman’s ovaries connected to the vaginal canal by two ducts. If a sperm encounters an egg and the two successfully join, a human embryo is formed which attaches itself to the uterus wall and begins to develop as a human being. It is pretty clear from simple observation of their construction that the male and female genitalia are designed for this purpose. It is also pretty clear that the male genitalia are designed to fit into the female genitalia, and there carry out their complimentary functions in the procreation of human life. To use male genitalia and female genitalia in this way and for this purpose could reasonably be described as rightly ordered by design.

An anus is a part of the human anatomy that is designed for the elimination of solid human waste. It is not designed to have a male’s penis inserted into it, or to have sperm propelled into it. Neither is the mouth designed to have a male’s penis inserted into it, or to have sperm propelled into it. Neither is the tongue designed to be inserted into a woman’s vagina. To use a human penis, vagina, mouth and tongue in these ways and for these purposes could reasonably be described as disordered by design. This is what the Catholic Faith teaches.

CATHOLIC SEXUAL MORALITY CORRESPONDS SENSIBLY TO DESIGN

A man and a woman’s complimentary genitalia are to be used for what they are designed for: procreation. God, the Creator and Designer of the genitalia, says in the Sacred Scriptures of the Catholic Faith that He finds using them other than for what they are designed “abhorrent.” (Leviticus 18:22-23) A person may disagree with what God says, but it is not irrational for God to say it. God is not talking nonsense. What God says corresponds to the sensible order and design in His creation.

The Catholic Faith has a high regard for what God says. The Catholic Faith also has a high regard for the order and design in nature. When the two correspond to each other, as they do in what God says about the use of human genitalia, it forms an intelligent and compelling moral imperative. A human being has intelligence and the exercise of will. The Catholic Faith knows aberrations occur in the order of nature, but it does not believe that those aberrations make for an excuse for a human being not to choose to use their genitalia in the way they were designed and only for the purpose for which they were designed. In other words, to live a life that honors the intended natural order.

THE PERSONAL CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD AND SEX

Why should God care so much about sex and what we do with it? The reason is because God has revealed that He becomes directly involved in the use of our sexual anatomy when it is used according to its design. The designed function of human sexual anatomy and the act of genital sex is the delivery of the seed (sperm) from the male to the egg in the female and, at their joining – male and female, sperm and egg – the formation of a human embryo. Catholic faith believes that at the moment of this joining and the formation of this human embryo, God pronounces a human soul into existence. In the Sacred Scriptures, God says:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...

God joins this divinely created human person to the now growing embryo – it becomes a human being, made “in the image of God,” who from that moment forward is called to grow into “the likeness of God.” In the Sacred Scriptures, God says:

*...before you were born I dedicated you.
Jeremiah 1:5*

Human genital sex was designed by God to involve God directly in a divine act of creation that would take place simultaneously with the human act of procreation. From the perspective of the Catholic Faith, God has a direct personal claim on human genital sex. Sex is sacred. For Catholics, therefore, how we order our sexual lives and how we conduct ourselves sexually is always a religious issue: it is an act of faith in God and the Truth God reveals.

PLAYING WITH THINGS

Human beings are fond of playing with things. When we discover that something can, in some manner, be manipulated to give us pleasure, we want to play with it. We can find a way to play with anything. Not all things are meant to be played with. The ancient Romans took pleasure in throwing people to the lions in their arenas. For them it was a form of play. Sadists take pleasure in causing pain to themselves or to others. For them it is a form of play. Sex has become a form of play for many human beings – something done for excitement and entertainment. The Catholic Faith asserts that this is not what sex is for.

When you play with something often enough, it can become an obsession. Human beings, to an alarming degree, have become obsessed with sex as a form of play and entertainment. The number of people obsessed with internet pornography is alarming. The number of businesses that cater to sex as play is staggering. Sexual obsession in one form or another is a major issue in sexual activity among people who are heterosexual, homosexual, single or married. Obsessions can be resisted and defeated with rigorous honesty, the exercise of will and the grace of God. The Twelve Step Programs testify to this. It is not easy to defeat sexual obsession and bring your life back into right order. Catholic faith believes that God has a particular love for those who strive to do His will, and draws near with power to those who call upon Him. The Church on earth understands itself to be a community of such striving hearts.

FOR CATHOLICISM, SEX IS BOUNDED, BUT LOVE IS UNBOUNDED

Catholic religion teaches that love is unbounded. We are called to love adults and children, persons of the same sex and persons of the opposite sex, single persons and married persons. We are to love them tenderly, affectionately, spiritually, mentally, physically – but we are to love them in accord with their full integrity (physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually) as a child, an adult, a man, a woman, as married or single. We are not free to play with our own or anyone else’s sexual equipment in the name of love.

It is designed for procreation. Only in marriage is a man or woman free to use their sexual equipment for the purpose for which it was designed. The act of procreation is intensely pleasurable, but even in marriage we are not free to turn its pleasure into a form of entertainment. There is nothing irrational about this. It is full of sense and sanity. It speaks to the integrity of things, the dignity of persons, and the full potential of human relationship in marriage.

Catholic Faith believes that it is possible to love a woman who is not your wife, a man who is not your husband, or a person of the same sex. The use of your sexual equipment, however, is reserved for procreation with a suitable sexual partner who is your spouse. And to this spouse you owe a priority of affection over all others that is necessary to establish trust between you and to secure a home (a stable relationship) in which to raise the children you conceive.

It is important to be clear about exactly what the Catholic Church believes about homosexuality. The Catholic Faith does not consider it a sin to be homosexually attracted. It is not considered sinful to express physical warmth, tenderness and affection to a person of the same sex. It is not considered sinful to establish a close personal bond of commitment to a person of the same sex. The Catholic Faith considers it sinful to engage in the deliberate sexual arousal of someone of the same sex and to play with the genitals of someone of the same sex. The reason is that God says so, and it makes sense why God would say so.

A UNIVERSAL SEXUAL MORALITY

The Catholic Faith does not have one moral standard for people who are heterosexually attracted and another for those who are homosexually attracted. There is not one moral standard for single people and another for married people. The complementary sexual apparatus of men and women is to be used for the procreative purpose intended, not played with for entertainment, not used as a drug to relieve tension, depression, or fatigue. In the Catholic Faith married people do not have an open license to entertain themselves with sex while single people do not. The Catholic Faith understands and celebrates sex in marriage as an expression of love between suitable sexual partners open to the conception of life.

One can always find someone who says they are Catholic and disagrees with this. It should be remembered, however, that in Catholicism the truth is something that God *reveals*, not something that a majority decides, or that someone necessarily agrees with. Historically, human beings have, in large numbers, not agreed with the truth about many things. The inviolable dignity of the human person and the enslavement of black people is one example. We usually disagree with the truth when it gets in the way of something we want to do or acquire. When we act contrary to the truth it results in a serious disruption of the life-giving order of things. In embracing a *revealed religion*, such as Catholicism, it inevitably comes down, at some point, to a choice between *What God Says* and *What I Think*, and a decision to choose *What God says needs to be done or shall not be done over What I want to do or don't want to do*.

MARRIAGE

Copulation is an arrangement that God came up with by design in His creation. Marriage is an arrangement that God came up with when addressing human beings about the context for their copulation. Marriage is God's invention. God declares woman a suitable sexual partner for man, and man a suitable sexual partner for woman (see Genesis 2:18-23). God defines marriage as a union between man and woman: "A man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) God says that marriage is a union between man and woman for human procreation: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:27-28). Jesus the incarnate Word of God, makes it clear that marriage is a permanent

bond between a man and woman (Mark 10:1-9).

There is no question about the prerogative of civil authority to establish the rules by which people can enter or dissolve contracts with each other. These are, however, civil contracts. They can appropriate the label, “marriage,” but of its origin and of its essence, marriage is the creation of God. In the Catholic Faith, marriage is considered a covenant between a man and a woman who are in covenant with God. This means that they submit themselves to the Will of God. Covenant with God in the Old Testament is expressed in these words: “All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do.” (Exodus 24:7) Covenant with God in the New Testament is expressed in the words of Jesus: “Father...not my will, but Yours be done.” (Luke 22:40) The marriage covenant can be understood as a man and woman declaring to each other: “I will be, what God wants and calls me to be for you.” A person may not accept this, but it is not irrational for Catholics to believe this on the basis of their Sacred Scriptures. It is also breathtakingly beautiful, and full of wonder.

SEXUAL OBSESSION DOESN'T GO AWAY WHEN YOU GET MARRIED

If you are obsessed with sex as entertainment before you get married, getting married will not take it away. That is why it is dangerous to marriage. Marriage does not tame an obsession with playing with sex. An obsession with playing with sex undoes marriage on many levels. Because of this, it is often as difficult for those who are married to live rightly ordered sexual lives as for those who are not married.

THE REAL ISSUE

The real issue is *marriage*, and what marriage is. Is marriage essentially about mutual support and the enjoyment of sex? If so, some would say, then why not gay marriage? Or is marriage essentially about a committed spiritual and sexual union between a man and a woman for the procreation and raising of children? The Catholic Faith teaches that genital sex is for marriage, and marriage is fundamentally for the procreation of children. For Catholics, marriage is a sexually and spiritually “suitable partnership” for the bearing of children. Marriage, in the Catholic Faith, knows both the joy of the sexual encounter and the support of the spouses and the children they conceive for one another.

THE CATHOLIC VISION OF FAMILY

Specifically because it has the conviction it does about the purpose and use of genital sex, the Catholic Faith sees family as a place for spouses and the children they bear to learn the restraint of their passions, mutual subordination to one another in love, personal discipline, heroic self-sacrifice and the art of entering genuine and full communion with each other. Obsession in any form is a huge obstacle to this. Obsession with sex as entertainment is devastating. There are those who want to say that detaching the conception of a child from its rearing makes no difference. Everyone who knows that they have been raised by an adoptive parent or parents, or a single parent, knows that this is manifestly not true. It is traumatic. Somehow we sense that we should have been raised by both, that we were supposed to be raised between both, that the unknown or absent biological parent, for good or for ill, holds a key to important questions about ourselves. We look to our biological fathers for a large part of the genetic and historical equation of what we are. We look to our biological mothers for a second large part of the genetic and historical equation of what we are. We look to each of them for similarities to what we find in ourselves: a strain of temperament, of aptitude or sensitivity, a legacy of doing good or bad, even a thread of suffering and struggle. This helps greatly in “figuring ourselves out.” We look to God

for the third and final part of the equation of what we are. It is God's immediate action on the union of the genetics of our parents that makes us unique from either parent, and different from our biological siblings. Finally, it is God's interaction with us through life that frees us from repeating the destructive choices of anyone who came before us.

This in no way diminishes the fact that adoptive parenthood is a breathlessly unique gift – distinctly its own. Yet before we can be grateful for it, we want to understand why it was necessary. The answer brings us peace and the ability to fully appropriate what the adoptive parent or parents offer of themselves. This is why there is something seriously disordered about anonymous, surrogate biological parenthood. It is a systematic contrivance to deny a human being awareness of and access to their genetics and the history of their forbearers. Such a contrivance is cruel.

A DISTINCTLY UNIQUE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Catholic religion claims a guarantee of the truthfulness of what it believes that other religions, even other Christian denominations, do not. Jesus said: "When (the Holy Spirit) comes...being the Spirit of Truth, he will guide you to all truth." (John 16:12-13) Catholics believe this to be a firm assurance that what we believe in, shape our character with, ground our lives upon, and discipline our passions and energy with, is actually and consistently true. It is also an affirmation of God's integrity as God. In other words, we don't put our faith in a "god" we make up for ourselves. God is not who we say God is. God is who God says God is.

This is the essence of *revealed* religion: God speaks to us to express the truth, and God means what God says. If we become confused or deluded, God's Spirit can and will lead us back to the truth consistently held, in its integrity. Catholics believe that this is God's gift to His Church. God is not so inept as to allow us to found our lives on one thing only to find out later that He allowed us for thousands of years to build our lives on a mistake, a misunderstanding, or a misinterpretation. God doesn't play games of hide and seek with the truth. Neither does God change His mind about the truth. The truth is as much the truth for God as it is the truth for everyone and all things else. The benefit of revealed religion is this: receiving God's revelation of the truth, embracing it and building our lives upon it places us in contact with the reality of the world the way it was created and designed to be. It shatters our illusions and the fantasy worlds we fabricate for ourselves. Because the truth God sets out corresponds to reality, it gives us control of our lives and our future. We are no longer victims of our existence, driven by forces beyond our control—either within us or outside of us.

CATHOLICS

The Catholic Faith has a very high regard for the integrity of God. It also has high regard for such things as common sense, the natural order, and the need to engage reality in its integrity. This is because the Catholic Faith possesses a profound sense of the unity of all things, and the truth that no one can be made whole without coming into right relationship with God, each other and the elements of the world around them. The Catholic Faith has a deep concern for how human genitalia are used. It has an equally deep concern for the act of procreation, the life conceived, the unfolding of the human potential in every life conceived, and the redemption and regeneration of any life brought to ruin. The Catholic Faith has its eyes fully open to the extent to which human nature is broken, handicapped and disordered. It names and addresses the extent to which obsession grips the human psyche and addiction drives human behavior. The Catholic Faith has a clear awareness of the far reaching extent of the consequences of sin in individuals, in human society, and on the natural world. All of this deepens our compassion for anyone in pain and facing the ruin brought upon their life by sin – their own or the sins of others.

While the Catholic Faith speaks candidly to the reality of what man and woman are, it speaks just as clearly to what man and woman are capable of being, and can be in a living relationship with Jesus. This fuels our desire to announce this “Good News” to all, and see them made whole. The Catholic Faith is not a religious accommodation to what we are, it announces a source of wisdom and power to become what we were created and are called to be. *It is, as the Scriptures say, for those with a journey to make. Isaiah 35:9*

SANITY

You can say that what acts out of order is the same and of equal worth as what acts in order. You can say that what is true is the same and of equal worth as what is illusion. But think carefully about whether you really want to. Because when disorder is equal to order, then there is no map to follow and no compass to guide you. Then there will be chaos. It was to draw us out of chaos that God spoke to humanity to begin with. It was to lead us out of chaos that the Word of God became flesh and drew near to us. He is with us still.

WE SEE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

We see the world as an integrated whole. We see it wanting to unfold in a loving design. We search for the life-giving relationship between all things. We approach each person with reverence for their integrity and the mystery they are. We know the angry defiance of the wounded heart. We see everywhere the scars inflicted by our disordered passions and our unbridled desires. We are highly sensitive to things out of right and life-giving order.

We believe that there is a God who is the Creator and Designer of all existence.

We believe that God spoke to humanity about what it was doing to itself and to the world in which it was placed to develop and prosper.

We believe that what God said to humanity is reasonable and corresponds to the way reality is designed. We do not believe that the way forward is to accommodate disorder, but to restore order.

We believe that self discipline is essential for human development, both individually and collectively.

We believe that bridling our passions, impulses and ambitions in conformity with a moral code applicable to all establishes the security of persons and property and the health of the planet.

We believe that God lends His presence and power to any woman or man who strives to embody His justice for the life of all.

We believe that “anything goes” is a recipe for chaos, which soon leads to the tyranny of one group over another.

HOW DO WE TREAT THOSE WHO DO NOT SHARE THE MORAL CONVICTIONS THAT WE HOLD?

We treat them with dignity and respect for their integrity as a person. We engage them with love and human warmth. While there is a wide range of ways in which a practicing Catholic is free to engage and interact personally and socially with someone who has made choices or embraced a lifestyle that deviates from those called for by Catholic Faith, nothing we do or say should indicate that we subscribe to, or support those choices or lifestyles. Perhaps it is helpful to offer a few examples:

To invitations:

“I am honored by your invitation; unfortunately I will not be able to attend your wedding.”

Nothing more need be said, but if asked:

“As a Catholic, I believe that the spiritual and sexual bond of marriage can only exist between a man and a woman. I do, however, honor your commitment to support each other.”

In business:

“We recognize the legal bond between you and honor the benefits that the law prescribes.”

To people we know who announce their union:

“I am happy that you have found someone to love and support.”

In same sex relationships: always the bonds of love and mutual support for each other are acknowledged and honored, never is the decision to engage in sex with each other approved or accommodated.

WE ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS HE HAS LOVED US

(John 15:12)

A believing Catholic has a profound respect for a man or woman dealing honestly with same sex attraction, and offers them every encouragement and support in the direction of leading a life in conformity with God's will, and establishing a rich network of relationships that are chaste, personally supportive and strengthening. The Catholic Faith calls for this as a principle of justice and love. To our brothers and sister, our friends and relatives, our coworkers and neighbors, and all people of good will, we offer a place at our side, and in the embrace of our love, as we strive for virtue together.

We are his witnesses.

Acts 3:15

As Catholics, we understand ourselves to be witnesses to the fact that God has something to say to humanity and something to offer humanity. For over two thousand years we have embraced our identity and carried out our mission in all manner of circumstances: in the rise of civilizations and in their fall, in times of abundance and times of destitution, among primitive peoples and in sophisticated societies, under persecution and enjoying liberty. Today, in the United States, the societal reinforcements of a Christian way of life are being withdrawn. What we believe and how we live are increasingly “out of sync” with the lifestyle of those around us. This has left some Catholic believers anxious and fearful. It certainly calls us to equip ourselves for the task given us in these new circumstances – a task that flows out of the beautiful way of life that is ours in Christ.

The essential content of our witness is simple. We witness to our fellow men and women that God, the Creator, has spoken to humanity sensibly about the right and life-giving relationship between things, and calls us all to live in accord with it for the enduring life of the whole. We witness to the fact that God, in the person of Jesus, has drawn near to every man and woman, to appeal to their heart and to offer healing and regeneration to a new life. This is “Good News” to those lives have fallen into futility and ruin, and who look for hope.

This booklet has set out simple explanations of the truth God has given us to witness to our society about sex and marriage. We witness to it in the manner in which we live our lives, in what we teach our children and in the answers we give to the questions people put to us. We are not the sexually perfect but by our striving we give witness to the life-giving order of things and the power of God in Jesus to bring all things within us and around us into that life-giving order.