

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture Number 18

HOLY MATRIMONY IV

SEX

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INTRODUCTION

Some anthropologists like to say that all religion is based on sex. However, the reverse is closer to the truth. Sex is based on religion.

You have probably heard it said also that prostitution is the oldest profession. But it isn't. The priesthood is. Adam, before the fall, was the priest of creation; prostitution only came later after the fall.

The oldest artifacts in the world are small figurines, like the Venus of Willendorf. They are females with large breasts and hips, and they are usually pregnant. They date from as early as 35,000 B.C., and they come from all over the world.

Throughout the history of the human race, sex has been held in awe. Today we think we do not hold it in awe, but we are preoccupied with it, perhaps as never before, because it is in such disorder.

The return of romanticism has not liberated us from preoccupation with sex, but, if anything, has intensified that preoccupation. Romanticism is at bottom the worship of the Great Earth Mother. And it is no accident that along with romanticism has come the widespread practice of abortion.

For the Great Earth Mother, in ancient times, was always worshipped with infant sacrifice. Abortion is the sacrifice of the unborn child for the sake of the supposed well-being of the family or the society at large.

Adolf Hitler was obsessed with the intensely romantic music of Richard Wagner and was also able to send millions of Jewish men, women, and children to death for the sake of the nation.

FALSE DOGMAS ABOUT SEX

There are two false dogmas about sex which are at war with each other in our society and often *within* the members of our society.

- The first is the dogma that sex is nasty. We speak of “dirty” jokes, not “sexy” ones.

The ancient pagans believed that sex was basic and therefore *tabu*. To violate *tabu* was to bring a curse upon one's self. And Christians believe sex is a sacrament. And to abuse a sacrament is sacrilege. That is, the reason illicit sex is bad is because it is *illicit*, not because it is sex.

But the puritans, after the Reformation, denied the reality of sacraments. Nevertheless they still had the habit of considering illicit sex to be bad and all sex to be a problem. But they had abandoned the old basis for that attitude. So all that was left was to blame the badness on the *sexiness* of sex.

It is characteristic of puritanism to call the things of God's creation evil even though He calls them good. Remember their motto: "If it's fun, don't do it!"

Let me remind you of the distinction between *natural* good and *moral* good; They are not always the same. For example, it is a natural good to be able to run fast. But the circumstances under which one is running determines whether it is morally good or not in the particular case. Why is he running; from what or to what is he running?

Natural evil is a privation of a natural good. Moral evil is to prefer the less good over the greater good.

Sex done well is a natural good; clumsily done it is less of a natural good; brutally done it is a natural evil.

Whether sexual intercourse is morally good depends on the circumstances as well as on how it is done.

- The second false dogma is that sex is merely a natural bodily appetite which must be gratified.

This false dogma is a reaction against the puritanism of the 16th and 17th and early 18th centuries. The rationalists of the 18th century, the "Age of Enlightenment", decided that sex was not evil and it couldn't be holy since they didn't believe in holiness, so it must be just another bodily appetite which has to be satisfied.

However, unlike the appetite for food, not having sex does not shorten one's life or cause sickness. Of course if one is convinced he has to have sexual intercourse, then not having it can make him sick. But the same thing is true of bananas or pancakes.

Modern Americans are in a bind: they *think* sex is necessary, but they *feel* that it is dirty. So they are damned if they do and damned if they don't. It seems to be a necessary evil. But it is neither necessary nor evil.

THE TRUE DOGMA

The truth about sex is that it is neither nasty nor just natural. Sex is HOLY. Sex is a sacrament, a moment in time and space in which we are brought into relation with God.

Sex is obviously sacramental for the following reason. In the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion God uses human agents to accomplish re-birth and then the nourishment of the new life.

When the sperm unites with the ovum, an immortal soul comes into being. God does this through the agency of the mother and the father. So the sexual relationship is the most intimate

relationship between the father and the mother and between them and God.

Sex is powerful. And sex is dangerous. Because sex is a sacrament it is not something to be played with. That is, it is not something to be abused.

Sacraments always have an effect—for good or for ill. And so St. Paul says of the Holy Eucharist, “Whoever eats the Bread and drinks the Cup of the Lord in an *unworthy* manner will be guilty of profaning the Body and Blood of the Lord...anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the Body eats and drinks judgment (damnation) upon himself.” [I Cor. 11:21, 29]

The same principle applies to every act of sexual intercourse. The two participants are never left unchanged. There are always spiritual and moral consequences to every act of sexual intercourse. The abuse of sex always leads to the debasing of the participants.

Sex outside of marriage is evil, not because it is sexy but because it is the choice of a lesser good instead of a greater good. That greater good is family solidarity.

Among the Hebrews, marital infidelity was referred to in the same way as infidelity to the Lord. The worship of the *baals* or the *asherim* was called “whoring after strange gods”. And both offenses were punished in the same way—execution by stoning.

Furthermore, sex outside of marriage is sinful because it is irresponsible and in two ways:

- It is irresponsible, because sexual intercourse tends naturally to make babies. And every baby is entitled to a stable home environment with two parents of opposite sexes who are loving to each other and to the baby.
- It is also irresponsible, because sexual intercourse is the most profound way of affirming the worth of the other person. It says, “I love you,”—or else it says, “Dammit, give me your body; I want to use you!”

SEX IS FOR KEEPS

Sexual intercourse is for keeps.

It is devastating to have someone who has told you that he loves you to turn around and say that he does not love you after all. All teenagers know that it is easier to start a love affair than it is to end one.

Therefore only say “I love you” if you really mean it. And only start having sex with someone if you intend to keep on doing it *with that person for the rest of your life* and you are also in a position to carry out that commitment.

The thing that is wrong with fornication is not the *starting* of it but the *stopping* of it! This is the reason why the Church has recognized common law marriage.

So Christians take their proposed relationship to the Church and ask for her blessing upon what they are going to do. Then they go home and do it—they get married in bed!

The act of sexual intercourse establishes a bond of, a commitment to, mutual respect and responsibility. It is a sign of the mystical union between the Church and Christ who was faithful unto death.

SEXUAL DESIRE

Sexual arousal happens in the mind, not in the body.

Sex does not interest a person who is involved in something fascinating or important. For example, imagine a man fishing for trout in a mountain stream, and he thinks there is a big one just about to strike. Suddenly Miss America steps out of the bushes without a stitch on. What does the man do? He says, "Ssh!."

Sexual temptation is, frequently, the result of boredom. For example, imagine a young couple who have been seeing each other for some time. And, if you can imagine it, they have not been sleeping together yet, but they have done everything else they can think of which might be fun or interesting.

One night, Johnny says to Mary "Wanna go to the movies?" Mary says, "Not really." Then Johnny says "Wanna go bowling?" Mary says, "Not really...I know, let's go for a drive." And Johnny says, "I don't really want to." Well when all the possibilities have been exhausted, and there they are with the evening to themselves, there is always sex.

Sexual desire gets turned *off* in the head also. For example, imagine a boy and a girl in the living room of the girl's home about ten o'clock at night with all the lights off. They have been passionately necking for about fifteen minutes and they are really getting excited.

Suddenly, the lights go on! The girl's mother is standing there in the doorway, and she says, "Susie, don't you think it's time you came to bed and let that nice young man go home?" Now where is all the arousal?

The preoccupation with sex in our society is a sign of our society's spiritual poverty. We want more and more sex, because we have so little really good sex.

To illustrate, when I was in college, I belonged to a fraternity. Every evening, just before supper, several of us would walk down to the corner for a beer. One night I had more than one beer on my empty stomach. When we got back to the fraternity house, I discovered we were having one of my favorite dishes for supper, rice and gravy. But I was so drunk I couldn't taste it.

I remember having three servings of it trying to taste it. I *knew* it must be delicious, if only I could taste it.'

When the frequency of sex slows down, it is common for a newly married person to get worried and wonder if something is wrong. "Who is he doing it with? Certainly not with me!" But nothing necessarily is wrong.

There is an old proverb which says that if you put an English pea in a milk bottle every time you have sex during the first year and take one out every time thereafter, you will never empty the bottle. That is an overstatement, but there is some truth in it.

There is no certain amount of sex which is “normal”. It all depends on the circumstances.

Good sex takes time and energy. And a woman with children is likely to be tired at night, and a good mother may simply be contented.

The ready availability of sex tends to take the edge off the desire for it. For example, after a big meal a man does not fantasize about a steak. But a starving man may very well.

In the middle ages, because circumstances discouraged sexual intercourse, books on pastoral care used to tell priests to be sure to remind their people to have sex.

Many people find sex overrated and disappointing, because it is not handled right and done well.

GOOD SEX

The effect of sex, whether it is spiritually beneficial or spiritually destructive, depends on the attitude with which it is approached. It should be approached like any other sacrament.

The way to approach sexual intercourse, or any other sacrament for that matter, is expressed in these words: “Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbor...draw near with faith and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort, that is, your *strengthening*.” [BCP 1928 p. 75]

There is nothing at all wrong with saying your prayers and then getting in bed and having sexual intercourse—quite the contrary”

- First, “repent you of your sins.”

Jesus says, “Except ye be converted and become as little children...” [Matthew 18:3] When children play, they are practicing being grown-up. Sexual intercourse is the practice of being holy, of being at one with your spouse and with God. So sex is adult play. This is not the same thing as “playing-around-with” sex.

Just as the play of children is for them serious business, so is sex for adults. But that does not mean that it should be self-conscious, but just the opposite. In sexual intercourse we need to be as unselfconscious as possible. We want to “lose” ourselves in the other.

Since we are never more ridiculous than when engaged in sex, we are especially vulnerable. So one should always treat his or her partner with dignity and respect, never with ridicule.

If one exploits his spouse, the result will be a guilty conscience. And a guilty conscience causes self-consciousness. For example, Adam and Eve, after they have sinned, for the first time are aware that they are naked. So one needs to have a clear conscience as he or she approaches sexual intercourse.

If your sex life is not what it should be, maybe you need to make your confession.

- Second, “Be in love and charity with your neighbor.” No one is closer to me, more my

neighbor... than is my spouse during the sex act. St. Paul says, “Husbands love your wives...as (your) own bodies.” [Ephesians 5:25-28] So my sex belongs to my wife not to me. It is my gift to her.

What everyone wants out of sex is for the other person to say, “Wow! you’re the greatest!” For example, the secret of Don Juan was that the girl had a great time in bed, and he made her feel like she was someone very special in his eyes.

If physical gratification were all that mattered, then masturbation would be preferable.

Good sex is when I seek the pleasure of my wife, to “pleasure” her, to use the old expression. And bad sex is when I focus on my own pleasure. But, of course, if she is going to get the full pleasure from it, I must allow her the gratification of giving me pleasure.

The greatest pleasure in sex is giving pleasure. It really is more blessed to give than to receive. Selfish sex is a common source of unhappiness and discord in marriage.

- This brings us to the third ingredient of good sex: “draw near with faith...”

Good sex involves an appreciation of the depth of the mystery of what we are doing. We are inviting God to join with us, if it pleases him, in the creation of a new human being made in his image. This does not rule out the carefree playfulness of sex. The creation of the universe was not God’s work, but really his play.

LOVE-MAKING

Almost everyone has *fetishes*, things that tend to arouse them, such things as breasts, perspiration, the smell of soap, black nighties, feet (which is one reason women wear high heels), etc. But one person’s “turn-on” may be another’s “turn-off”. Recognize your spouse’s fetishes and use them for his or her delight.

How does a couple go about deciding to have sex on a particular occasion? For example, If Johnny says, “Hey, Honey, let’s have sex.” Mary might say, “Well, all right,...I guess.”

Suddenly Johnny doesn’t want it.

If I have to ask my spouse to say, “I love you,” it doesn’t mean nearly as much as when she says it spontaneously.

If sex is never asked for, then it is never refused and no one loses face. There are ways of communicating without communicating, ways that is, of being deliberately ambiguous.

For example, when Johnny comes home and gives Mary a four horsepower kiss and she responds with a two horsepower kiss, he realizes that she has things she has to do, or she is tired, or she has something on her mind, etc. But if she responds with a six horsepower kiss, then it will occur to Johnny that something just might develop.

Any man is a fool and irresponsible who lets twenty-four hours go by without embracing and kissing his wife passionately at least once. He is neglecting his *duty* to love her.

ABORTION

Until about 1930, there was no serious debate at all among Christians on the subject of abortion. It was universally considered to be unthinkable. That was **not** because it was a brand new invention either; it had been around since ancient times and had always been something an ethical doctor would not have taken part in.

There are some absolutely basic facts which must be remembered in considering abortion:

- First, all life belongs to God, and all human life belongs to God.
- Second, all human life bears the image of God.
- Third, it is always better to exist than not to exist. And yet there have actually been law-suits brought against the parents on behalf of children born deformed for not having had abortions to prevent the birth of the children. That is crazy!
- Fourth, my body is not *my own*, and a woman's body is not her own "to do with as she sees fit". We have been given to God, body and soul, in Baptism, and we have, in the Eucharist re-presented our selves, Body and Soul, to God to be reasonable, holy, and living sacrifices.

So, even if it were true that the fetus were nothing more than "tissue", just a part of the woman's body, it would still be God's business if she were to mutilate her body by removing it, or to mutilate her body in any other way, for that matter.

The father of the unborn child is also responsible to God for its well-being. In this connection there is real irony in the 1986 surrogate mother law-suit. Up until then, the courts had been saying that a woman could have an abortion no matter what the father of the child wanted. But in the Mary Beth Whitehead case, the Supreme Court recognized that the fact that the sperm had come from the baby's daddy gave him a claim on the child which she could not resist.¹

The birth of a new person made in God's image is always good news, in itself, no matter how terrible the circumstances which surround the birth might be. So the responsible thing for Christians to do is try to make the circumstances as good as possible once the conception has occurred, rather than to attack the unborn child.

And the thing for people to do who are concerned about unwanted or inconvenient births is to help make the life of those children as healthy as possible.

There are long waiting lists of people who cannot have children and want to adopt them, while at the same time millions of babies are killed through abortions every year.

Every childless couple should consider adopting the children which would otherwise be aborted.

And all of us should be doing a lot more towards arranging matches between mothers who think they cannot keep their child and those who could adopt their children.

Certainly, if you know of someone who is considering abortion, suggest that they give the child

for adoption, as an alternative. And offer to help arrange it. Speak to me about it. I can almost certainly make it possible for the mother to avoid an abortion.

The high number of unwanted pregnancies is one indication of the high rate of irresponsible sex which is occurring in our country. There is no secret about how babies are conceived. Abortion has simply become a popular form of birth control.

Another terrible consequence of the present situation is that women with unintended pregnancies are frequently led to believe that having an abortion is the “thing to do” and that there is no harm in it, only to discover—after the fact—that they have a tremendous sense of guilt and regret about it. And then they spend the rest of their lives carrying that burden, thinking about the child that isn’t.

But even that burden of guilt can be taken away through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

The Church is very much in favor of sex. She has been accused of having sex on the brain. Nuns wear wedding rings. The language of sex has been used by all the great mystics down through the centuries to express the union of the soul with God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ declares that sex is intended by God to be, and it can be incredibly wonderful.

As with everything else that God has given us, the best is yet to come!

1. **Baby M**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

Baby M was the name given to the child in an American custody case between the [surrogate mother](#) hired to carry her, and the child's biological father.

Mary Beth Whitehead, the surrogate mother, was [artificially inseminated](#) with William Stern's sperm. Contrary to popular belief (as well as what was stated in the surrogacy contract), Mr. Stern's wife, Elizabeth, was not infertile, but rather there was a possibility she had multiple sclerosis. A medical colleague of hers warned her that his wife, who had multiple sclerosis, suffered temporary paralysis during pregnancy (Steinbock, 1988). On [March 27, 1986](#), Whitehead gave birth to a daughter, who she named "Sara Elizabeth Whitehead", and refused to give her up to the Sterns. A [New Jersey](#) court awarded custody of Melissa (as the Sterns had named her) to the Sterns in [1987](#), but this ruling was overturned by the Supreme Court of New Jersey on [February 2, 1988](#). The Supreme Court awarded William Stern custody and Mary Beth Whitehead visitation rights.