

be almost second nature to husband and wife. If a couple shares sex together before marriage, they will most likely not develop these more selfless loves as habits. Selfishness will tend to creep in, as it so often does with anything so pleasurable as sex. Couples not having sex before marriage are far more likely to be willing to serve each other in *agape*, to be able to express their love by affection without always having to move into sex from there, and to develop the common interests that are at the heart of every good friendship. In fact, sexual involvement before marriage can hide the fatal flaw of a fundamental lack of friendship, so essential to a good marriage.

By constantly reminding oneself of these values the person can, in a sense, graft reason onto the appetite, to the point that the appetite in time will appear to participate in reason. The values of chastity must be "objectivized," internalized, such that the will is "constantly confronted by a value which fully explains the necessity for containing impulses aroused by carnal desire and sensuality. Only as this value takes possession of the mind and will does the will become calm and free itself from a characteristic sense of loss" (LR, p. 198). This is the peace of chastity.

Another way of putting this is that one must, after converting the mind, "convert the heart." A sign of an unconverted heart is a person theoretically wanting to live chastity, but doing nothing to avoid the dangers of sins against chastity. Some, while accepting the Church's teaching on sex, either out of boredom or attachment to the thrill of sex, insist on at least flirting with sex. For example, a couple will continue prolonged kissing on the couch, even though this has led to serious sins before; or one will invite the other to stay the night ("but nothing is going to happen!") knowing this is the near occasion of sin. Or, a married man will have dinner alone with an attractive woman. Such persons have already sinned seriously against love (and prudence) by deliberately and needlessly placing themselves in temptation. What person who really loved God would walk at the edge of a cliff like this and then say "Oh, I hope I don't fall off!"

Self-control must serve as a parent to the sexual appetite until it is trained, but self-control is not a

full-fledged virtue in itself, since it involves a constant battle. Chastity, on the other hand, is a true virtue, since it wins the appetite over to reason, thereby eliminating the battle. With chastity the person has head and heart united in pursuing the more noble values of a relationship with the Lord, the truth about the sacredness of sex, and the dignity of the human person.

"Chastity is a difficult, long-term matter; one must wait patiently for it to bear fruit, for the happiness of loving kindness which it must bring. But at the same time, chastity is the sure way to happiness." (LR, p. 172)

Thus, returning to our original question: Is chastity possible? Yes, absolutely. It may not be easy in our sex-soaked society, but with the grace that comes through the Mass, the sacraments and prayer, it *is* possible. And, with grace comes not only chastity, but... eternal life.

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Is Chastity Possible?

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To answer our question we must consider three questions: What exactly is chastity? What behavior is implied by Christian chastity? And, how does one live chastity?

WHAT IS CHASTITY?

What is chastity? Drawing from Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle, we may define chastity as *the habitual moderation of the sexual appetite in accord with right reason*. Notice it is not just the regulation of **behavior**, which would be self-control, but of the very desires that lead to sexual behavior. Note too, the norm is "right" reason, i.e., reason in conformity with God's Eternal Law, not merely worldly reason, which sees any sex which avoids unwanted pregnancy or disease as "reasonable."

WHAT IS CHASTE BEHAVIOR?

Now what behavior does Christian chastity call for? First, we look to the words of Jesus in the Gospel: "It is from within, from men's hearts that evil intentions emerge: *fornication*, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, malice... All these evil things come from within and make a man unclean" (Mk 7:21-23; also see Mt 15:19,20). St. Paul adds, "...you can be quite certain that no one who actually indulges in *fornication* or impurity or promiscuity ...can inherit the kingdom of God" (Eph 5:3-7; also Gal 5:19-21). [Fornication is any voluntary sexual intercourse of an unmarried person with another unmarried person of the opposite sex.]

Thus, Scripture is quite clear about extramarital sex. Some seek to rationalize their way around this but that is ultimately a denial of Christ's teaching and that of His Church. The denial of a Scriptural teaching is far worse than a sexual sin committed out of weakness. What about invincible ignorance? What true Christian could be blamelessly ignorant of the Bible's moral code?

The Catholic Church adds precision to this biblical theme: "The use of the sexual function has its true meaning and moral rightness only in true marriage" (**Declaration on Sexual Ethics**, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1975, para 5). In the same document (para 10) we find: "The moral order of sexuality involves such high values of human life that every direct violation of this order is objectively serious." (This clearly follows from the quote from Paul above: One is not excluded from the Kingdom for *venial* matter.) Drawing from this and other Church teachings, we may conclude, any voluntary sexual arousal or act outside of a normal (uncontracepted) marital union of husband and wife is seriously sinful. This would include masturbation, fornication, extramarital foreplay, adultery, homosexual acts, and even lustful thoughts (Mt 5:28). To our oversexed world this may seem outrageous but Christ's moral teachings have always been a stumbling block to the world. The world has no use for crosses.

Why are these things wrong? Briefly, because 1) sex is a symbol of committed marital love (and foreplay is to prepare for sex) and 2) sex may produce children, who should be conceived and raised in the stable love community of marriage.

HOW TO LIVE CHASTITY

How does one live this? How does one develop the **virtue** of chastity whereby one habitually lives this way without a struggle, or, as Thomas Aquinas put it, "joyfully, easily and promptly"?

Certainly, as a fruit of the Holy Spirit chastity is not something one arrives at without considerable prayer and effort. The fruits of a tree appear last, and so it is with the Holy Spirit's fruits: they require a good deal of cultivation through God's grace. So to begin to live this in our world requires a strong spiritual life. Fifteen minutes of meditation daily (rosary or meditation on the gospels) plus frequent Mass and reception of the sacraments would seem essential to anyone hoping to arrive at this virtue.

But are there any methods one may employ to effectively use the grace received from spiritual exercises to develop chastity?

Yes there are. One must begin by observing with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas (**Summa Theologica**, I, q 81 a3), that the sexual appetite listens not only to reason, but to the senses and the imagination as well. Thus, one must first be careful what he/she looks at or watches. Viewing sexually explicit movies or videocassettes, or pornography, or even focusing on provocatively dressed members of the opposite sex is poison for one seeking chastity. The worst of these is using pornographic materials, since pornography depicts sex as merely recreational and women (or men) as mere objects of enjoyment. Both are terrible lies.

The imagination is another potential danger area. When one becomes aware of an impure thought he/she should immediately try to crowd out the thought with another colorful thought, such as a ball game, or a beautiful sunset, etc. In addition, one should take the advice of St John Vianney to make a sign of the cross to drive away the temptation, and with St Catherine of Siena, say the name of Jesus repeatedly in the heart (which is how she fought off a series of foul temptations). An uninvited impure thought is not sinful, but once a person wills its continuation, sin enters in, and as Jesus pointed out, one can sin seriously in the heart.

In addition, since there are competing voices for the control of the sexual appetite, it doesn't work for reason to deal with the appetite "despotically," simply saying "no" to the appetite's appeal. If it does, it will repress the appetite into the unconscious where it will await a chance to explode (Pope John Paul II, in his pre-papal **Love and Responsibility**, henceforth **LR**, Ignatius Press, p. 198). At a moment of weakness the appetite will indeed explode with an outburst of sexual activity. This is seen in the person who contains himself/herself for several weeks but then goes on a spree, and repeats this cycle over and over.

The intellect must deal "politically" with the appetite, setting forth the values which will be gained by living chastity, to make up for the value of the sexual pleasure which is sacrificed.

CHASTITY'S VALUES

What are some of these values (goods) of which one should remind himself/herself so as to alleviate any interior resentment and find peace in the chaste decision? First and foremost is the most precious gift we have as Christians: our personal love relationship with Jesus Christ. To freely and knowingly violate chastity is to destroy that relationship with the Lord, a relationship which is our source of life and our way to salvation. It's a great price to pay for a few moments of pleasure.

Another value retained by opting for chastity is that of upholding the sacredness of sex, so sacred that it belongs only in marriage. By living chastity one avoids trivializing sex as something merely recreational, so that when he/she does participate in it within marriage, a sense of its profound intimacy and uniqueness will be experienced.

A further value is that by opting for chastity, we will be living up to our own human dignity as persons created in the image and likeness of God. As such, we are empowered to live by reason, rather than be controlled by our urges and impulses (as are animals). In exercising this power we live out our noble dignity as persons in God's image.

By refraining from sexual activity with another person, one is also able to uphold the value of the person as a whole, rather than fall into the tendency (resulting from original sin) to see the other as merely an object of enjoyment. The value of sex is meant to be just one of a rich storehouse of values a person has, a profoundly precious one to be sure, but only one of many. To partake of sex before marriage gives rise to the natural tendency, particularly in the male, to look at the woman as primarily an object of enjoyment, rather than as a person, as his equal and as one worthy of love, not mere use (**LR**, p. 41).

A further value is the importance of developing some of the most important types of love during courtship. Self-giving love (*agape*), friendship and affection are the loves that will hold a marriage together. They should be developed into habits while dating so that by the time the marriage begins, and sexual relations are meant to come into play, these other, less exciting but more fundamental loves will