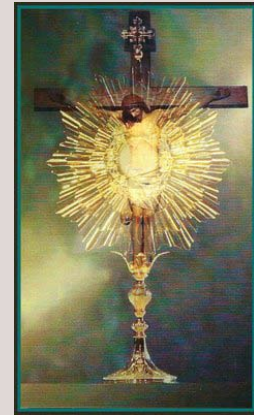


THE EUCHARIST: MODEL OF OUR SEXUALITY

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The Eucharist is the most perfect way to discover sexuality “on our knees”. This paper will consider the great sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist as a model of how to discover the fullness of our sexuality by give ourselves away. First, I will discuss the gift of the Eucharist in the Church, then the gift of human sexuality, to each person. Finally, how contemplation and imitation of the Holy Eucharist is the most perfect way to discover one’s sexuality.



The Church’s gaze is always towards Christ in the Holy Eucharist, where Christ remains present to us until the end of time. This is because, “The most holy Eucharist contains the Church’s entire spiritual wealth: Christ himself, our passover and living bread. Through his own flesh, now made living and life-giving by the Holy Spirit, he offers life to men”.¹ It is in the contemplation and reception of the Holy Eucharistic that one can begin to understand the great immeasurable love that the Lord has for them. His complete gift of self, His sacrificial love is beyond us; beyond our comprehension. Yet it is from this source of the Holy Sacrifice our fulfillment is found, formed and imitated. The image of Christ on the cross with his arms open, ready to receive us is the welcoming embrace of the Christ, the Bridegroom to His Bride the Church, to us. The sacrificial love of Christ is not beyond our imitation; rather it is our model of how we are to love. As the Second Vatican Council declared the Holy Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life”.² It is both where we are heading the culmination of our lives and the means to get there. His grace given to us through this sacrament is what sustains us on our earthen journey to Heaven. While the Israelites were given manna in the desert to sustain them; we have been given the true Bread of Life that will provide strength for the journey.

Our Sexuality is a gift from God, part of our identity and God given dignity. The sexual act is also a gift, intended for procreation and unity with a spouse. This union and communion of the two spouses’ calls to mind the union of the Blessed Trinity, and serves as a foreshadowing of the union we are to have with God. The union of the Blessed Trinity could not exist if one of the three persons did not fully give themselves away to the other members of the Blessed Trinity. Similarly, in the nuptial union the two become one; therefore neither of the two withhold any part of themselves in this gift of self, which is given in marriage. Unfortunately, our fallen nature tends to self-love and concupiscence which does not allow one to make a complete and total gift of themselves to the other. But with God’s grace one can grow in authentic love and self-mastery to overcome and deny these selfish desires. St. John Paul II speaks of the “law of the gift” in Love and Responsibility, the desire to belong completely to another and first to God. The Catechism tells us that “The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God’s creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity.”³ The means that the Lord allows us to prepare for our eternal life with Him already foreshadow what our union with Him will be.

Moreover, with this explanation it is easy to see why contraception is such an evil to the nuptial union. When one uses any form of contraception they are lying with their bodily actions. The nuptial union says with one’s body I give you my all and I hold nothing back; but contraception does not allow for this complete union because it withholds the fullness of the gift. Neither the fruitfulness of procreation nor the union of the sexual act is achieved when contraception is used.

Likewise the gift of one’s sexuality can also be given back to God, as a gift through the vow of chastity or a celibate lifestyle. This manner of life also calls one to make a gift of themselves, their whole selves to God and in service of his Kingdom and children. This means placing even the fecundity of one’s sexuality the full potentialities of the masculinity or femininity at the service of God. The greatness of the gift of one’s

sexuality calls for responsibility and a total donation of self; in whichever manner it is lived. The consecrated person is particularly drawn to learn from the Eucharist for their consecration to God is in imitation of Christ complete consecration to the Father.

After considering the gifts of the Holy Eucharist and Sexuality and how both are a complete gift of self, let us learn how to make a gift of self. This gift of self is demonstrated most clearly for us in Christ sacrifice on the cross. His complete gift of self to the Father, lacked nothing, he did not hold anything back. Even after his death his body was pierced with a lance where his very life source, his blood and his water poured out. The complete and total gift of Christ the Bridegroom was for the salvation of his Bride, the Church. His sacrifice stood as the consummation of this marital union of Christ and the Church. Therefore the wedding feast of the Lamb that we are able to participate in every mass is a foretaste of Heaven but also the act that merits our entrance into Heaven, God willing. "The Eucharist as the center of Catholic spirituality, presents a relationship with God from which Christians discover the meaning of their sexuality and find the source from which, all other relationships flow"⁴ The use of our sexuality can be a participation or imitation of Christ total gift on the cross. One must contemplate in the Eucharist, Christ sacrifice on the cross that complete gift which enabled his presence in the Host. This contemplation of the Eucharist is the most perfect way to discover sexuality "on our knees". The complete gift of self that is required by both the Eucharist and the gift of one's sexuality can be discovered, matured, formed and lived by the a deep gazing of Christ sacrifice on the cross.

Furthermore sexuality is a total gift of self and should be learned by the imitation of the greatest gift of self, Christ on the cross. Although this seems like a paradox; if we give ourselves away, only then will we be able to fully find ourselves. Jesus tells us in the Gospel of Luke "Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses it will save it".⁵ This seemingly paradox of gaining and losing is proved in personal experience. When we serve or make of our time, treasure and talent a gift we are more fruitful and not less because of it, in giving we receive. This passage from Luke's Gospel is the bases for the most quoted text in the magisterium of St. John Paul II; found in the Second Vatican Council Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium Et Spes*, "Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself." (GS, 24) Again the imitation of the communion of the Blessed Trinity, this is precisely what is happening in the inner life of the Blessed Trinity; each of the Divine Persons of the Trinity is making of themselves a complete and sincere gift of themselves, giving themselves away. The fruitfulness of giving themselves away creates new life. The selfish person cannot share authentic love their love for themselves is an obstacle to their happiness.

"Love is indeed "ecstasy", not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it", as Jesus says throughout the Gospels. In these words, Jesus portrays his own path, which leads through the Cross to the Resurrection: the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and in this way bears much fruit. Starting from the depths of his own sacrifice and of the love that reaches fulfilment therein, he also portrays in these words the essence of love and indeed of human life itself."⁶

Therefore authentic love must learn to make a gift of oneself to give oneself away to God and others. This giving away opposes the tendency to close in on oneself, it can be liberating to take the focus off oneself and serve others who are in need. As previously mentioned St. John Paul II taught frequently about the law of the gift; meaning your being increases in the amount that you give it away, opposite of the ways of the world. Fr. Baron explains the spiritual "physics" behind the law of the gift, "Since God has no need of anything, whatever is given to him returns to the giver elevated and multiplied. Anything returned to God breaks, as it were, against the rock of the divine self-sufficiency and comes back, super abundantly to the giver." Fr. Baron continues with the example of the Eucharist. "We bring tiny gifts to the Lord: bread, wine, and water. But they return to us infinitely enhanced as the Body and Blood of Jesus, and they serve to feed the deepest hunger

of our hearts."¹ Jesus present in the Eucharist is where we can contemplate and learn that in giving we receive.

Consequently the total gift of self in the sexual union is to be modeled after Christ's complete gift of self on the cross. Naturally we learn this love the extreme, this complete self-donation from Christ. The Eucharist being the source and the summit of our faith is where we go to learn this self-donation and only in the Eucharist are we given the grace and the strength to make of ourselves a gift to God, to our spouse or to those God has placed in our lives; those we are to love as our very selves. We go to the cross to learn from Christ and imitate him as his disciples. The Eucharist is the most perfect way to discover sexuality "on our knees", giving ourselves away as Christ did, going to him to learn and receive the grace to respond as he did not holding anything back.

1 St. John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter: Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, Vatican website, 2003, 1

2 Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium*, Vatican.va, 1964, 11

3 *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, St. Pauls, 1994, paragraph 260

4 Fr. Dominic Anaeto, *Holy Apostles College and Seminary, PS 908, Class notes, Week 15, May 5, 2014*

5 *Holy Bible, New American translation, USCCB.com, Luke 17:33*

6 Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Letter: Deus Caritas Est*, Dec. 25th 2005, Vatican.va, 6

7 Fr. Robert Baron, *Magnificat, Vol 16, No. 6, August 2014, A Light Unto My Path, p. 44*

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