

## LESSON 53: SEXUAL PURITY

### **Revision from previous lesson:**

In the previous lesson, we learned about the several principles upon which the moral teachings of the Church are based. We also learned that living a moral life is more than just about observing the moral code of the Church; it is a necessary outcome of our belief in God and the faith of the Church. In this lesson, we will learn about the importance of living a life of chastity as part of the Catholic moral life.

### **Current lesson:**

1. In the 1960s, a sexual revolution (or sexual liberation) took place in the United States which also affected the rest of the world. This social movement challenged traditional behavioural expectations and human relationships. Sweeping changes took place in society, including increased acceptance of sex outside of traditional men-women, monogamous marital relationships. The use of contraceptives, legalisation of abortion, exhibitions of public nudity, dissemination of pornography, and practices of premarital sex, homosexuality, and masturbation, as well as the propagation of alternative forms of sexuality were consequences of this sexual revolution.

While many people in the West seem to look upon this phenomenon as desirable because it gives them “freedom” from traditional expectations, an honest observation would bring the realisation that most of the great social problems today are a consequence of the misuse of sex that was popularised and permitted since the sexual revolution. This has resulted in many social ills such as the worldwide pandemic of AIDS, a good number of sexually transmitted diseases, hundreds of thousands of abortions of unborn babies each year, abuse of women, sexual abuse of children, and unprecedented numbers of divorces.

2. Consequently, issues of sexual morality are some of the most controversial matters being debated inside as well as outside of the Catholic Church today. Society has become highly sexualised because of the sexual revolution, and this is exacerbated by the influence of the media, which has affected people’s senses of decency and morality. It seems like almost every controversial issue dividing people within the Church, as well as outside of it, relates to issues of sexual morality: sex outside marriage (fornication), abortion, gender identity, and divorce and remarriage, among others.

The Catholic Church has never been positively popular in history, but this is perhaps the first time in human history that the unpopularity of the Church is so centred upon matters of sex. These days, it is popularly assumed that the Catholic Church’s traditional teaching on sexual morality is impractical and unattainable. Some even accuse the Church of spreading unhealthy sexual practices through its teachings. They refuse to be told otherwise.

*G.K. Chesterton:* “I don’t need a Church to tell me I’m wrong where I already knew I’m wrong; I need a Church to tell me I’m wrong where I think I’m right.”



These next several lessons on the moral teachings of the Catholic Church will address some of these main issues arising from society's distorted view of sexual morality, although it is not nearly possible to cover every issue in existence.

3. Sexual morality is important because living according to God's laws makes us holy and truly happy. Trespassing the laws of sexual morality separates us from God because they are sinful acts. God loves us and desires for us to be happy by being obedient to laws that serve to protect the happiness of all human persons. A trespassing of such laws always inevitably brings about the victimisation of certain persons, whether they are other people or the self.
4. Sexual immorality always brings with it the danger of serious health effects. Sexually transmitted diseases affect more than half of sexually active people. There is also the problem of AIDS as well as rising rates of infertility as a result of sexual immorality. It is therefore important for society to turn back to God's ways and standards of morality.
5. We cannot think about sex among human beings in terms of how it works for animals because for the human being, sex is not just a physical or biological act as it is for animals. For human beings, "sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul" (CCC 2332). In other words, our sexuality affects even our minds and our souls, not just our bodies. This is because the human being is a unity of body and soul.
6. The opposite of sexual vice or sexual sin is *chastity*. Chastity means purity of action and of heart. It involves sexual acts that are legitimate and morally upright, those acts that are not disordered. Because humanity is prone to sinful sexual acts, chastity requires that a person practices self-mastery and self-control. When we allow ourselves to be governed by our passions, we become unhappy people. In other words, lack of chastity leads to lack of happiness and fulfilment.  
  
*CCC 2339: "Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. 'Man's dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint. Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions, he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end.'"*
7. Chastity is also a way of exercising charity or love towards others. It "leads him who practices it to become a witness to his neighbor of God's fidelity and loving kindness" (CCC 2346).
8. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* lists six types of sins against chastity:
  - A) Lust
  - B) Masturbation
  - C) Fornication
  - D) Pornography
  - E) Prostitution

F) Rape

9. **Lust.** CCC 2351: “Lust is disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure. Sexual pleasure is morally disordered when sought for itself, isolated from its procreative and unitive purposes.”

Sexual pleasure is not bad in itself. It is God who created sex and the delight that it brings when practised in its right context, that is, in marital relationships (CCC 2362). Furthermore, sex, when practised in its right context, has two important purposes: *uniting* man and woman in one flesh, and *procreating* new persons as a result of that union. However, lust separates the two aspects of sex that God has designed to be together. It pursues pleasure apart from the divinely instituted purposes of sex.

However, feelings of sexual arousal in themselves are not necessarily lust. Lust refers to the *wilful* arousal of our feelings and thoughts simply for the sake of pleasure without honouring the purposes of sexual union and procreation.

10. **Masturbation.** CCC 2352: “By masturbation is to be understood the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs in order to derive sexual pleasure. ‘Both the Magisterium of the Church, in the course of a constant tradition, and the moral sense of the faithful have been in no doubt and have firmly maintained that masturbation is an intrinsically and gravely disordered action.’ ‘The deliberate use of the sexual faculty, for whatever reason, outside of marriage is essentially contrary to its purpose.’ For here sexual pleasure is sought outside of ‘the sexual relationship which is demanded by the moral order and in which the total meaning of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love is achieved.’...”

If we condone masturbation and view it as normal, we are actually saying that it is right that sexual acts should be all about one’s personal pleasure. And since masturbation is usually accompanied by lustful fantasies, it cannot be seen as a “victimless crime” because some other human person is being thought of as an object in the process of the act. In the act of masturbation, not only is procreation impossible, but even love itself is impossible. Therefore, masturbation denies the whole meaning and purpose of sex.

It is true that there are modern psychologists who claim that masturbation is actually healthy for the mind and body. The world does indeed say that many sinful and disordered things are “good” because these disordered things make a person “feel happy”. Being people who are prone to sin, of course disordered things make us “feel happy”; but much like drug addiction, such “happiness” is not permanent. An act that focuses on one’s personal pleasure and disregard for what is truly good cannot be an act of love, much less an act that is healthy.

Just because masturbation may be a common practice does not make it right. We cannot justify the rightness of an act based on how commonly it is practised. The morality of an act must be judged based on how God’s design for human nature is to be respected.

11. **Fornication.** CCC 2353: “Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality



which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children. Moreover, it is a grave scandal when there is corruption of the young.”

Fornication also includes adulterous acts where one of the parties involved in that act of fornication is already married to somebody else. A person who commits adultery fails in his commitment to the rights of his spouse (CCC 2381), undermines the institution of marriage, and compromises the well-being of his children who need their parents to be in a stable union (CCC 2381). Therefore, adultery causes a person to sin against himself, against his spouse, against his children, and against society as a whole.

12. **Pornography.** *CCC 2354:* “Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials.”

Many people assume that consumption of pornographic material is limited only to boys or men, but this assumption is untrue because even girls and women are affected by it. Pornographic materials are not limited to images but also sexually explicit descriptions using words.

Accessing pornography is never just a one-off act. The producers of these material intend for their consumers to fall into addiction and lose free control over their own behaviour. Over time, the pornography addict requires more and more explicit (and often disgusting) content in order to attain the same level of arousal. Once this addiction takes control of a person, the consumer is no longer sensitive to the repulsive and immoral quality of the material. A person who is addicted to pornography is prone to viewing another human person as an object to be desired and enjoyed for one’s own pleasure rather than as a respectable equal. In most cases, consumption of pornography leads to habitual masturbation, and in some cases it leads to other illegal (and certainly immoral) acts.

13. **Prostitution.** *CCC 2355:* “Prostitution does injury to the dignity of the person who engages in it, reducing the person to an instrument of sexual pleasure. The one who pays sins gravely against himself: he violates the chastity to which his Baptism pledged him and defiles his body, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Prostitution is a social scourge. It usually involves women, but also men, children, and adolescents (The latter two cases involve the added sin of scandal).…”
14. **Rape.** *CCC 2356:* “Rape is the forcible violation of the sexual intimacy of another person. It does injury to justice and charity. Rape deeply wounds the respect, freedom, and physical and moral integrity to which every person has a right. It causes grave damage that can mark the victim for life. It is always an intrinsically evil act. Graver still is the rape of children committed by parents (incest) or those responsible for the education of the children entrusted to them.”

15. Saint Paul exhorts us in Philippians 4:8, “...let your minds be filled with everything that is true, everything that is honourable, everything that is upright and pure, everything that we love and admire with whatever is good and praiseworthy.”

This exhortation echoes the sixth Beatitude taught by our Lord, “Blessed are the pure in heart: they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). When our minds and wills are attuned to the holiness of God, we are happy and at peace. When our hearts are pure, it is a promise that we will see God face to face and be like Him. If we wish to attain the Beatific Vision of heaven, we must fulfil this condition of purity of heart.

16. Having a pure heart is difficult but certainly not impossible. Here are some important practical points to help us cultivate purity and chastity:

- A) We need to acknowledge that we cannot attain purity in our own strength, because we are weak and prone to fall into sin;
- B) We must be totally honest with ourselves (no matter how uncomfortable it makes us feel) and not try to justify areas of our lives in which we are prone to fall;
- C) We should establish a regular discipline of receiving the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, because this Sacrament has the power to help us resist the influence that Satan seeks to have over our lives;
- D) We should remind ourselves daily to surrender every aspect of our lives to God, including the disordered desires that we have in our hearts;
- E) We should make it a point to always place ourselves in situations that are conducive for holiness to grow in us rather than situations that possibly cause us to be tempted to sin;
- F) We should cultivate a strong habit of daily prayer in our lives, surrounding ourselves with sacred images to inspire us towards holiness;
- G) We should remember that we are not alone in this battle against sin, because the Holy Spirit is our Sidekick who strengthens us in the fight.

17. Chastity is not about repression. Repression means denying that our disordered tendencies are present. We need to acknowledge our proneness to sin and the disordered attractions that we may have. This acknowledgement should also be accompanied by efforts to overcome our tendencies to sin so that we can live in “glorious freedom as the children of God” (Romans 8:21).



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