

“Male and female he created them” [Gen 1:27]

Message Of Hope

Is sex just a recreational activity? Is the body just a product to be bought and sold, used and abused? When is sexual intimacy appropriate? Do I have to be sexually active in order to be really happy? Should I wait till I am able to say the things that marriage says? What is the meaning of this kind of ‘body language’?

There are many voices in the modern world that overestimate the importance of sex – as if no-one could be happy who had not had sex in the last few hours – or trivialise or underestimate its power – as if it were no more humanly significant than any other bodily function. But deep down most people know the body, sexuality and fertility are precious and important things which can be used to express some of the noblest things about human relationships, or which can be used instead to hurt and exploit.



Marriage union celebrated by Bishop Anthony Fisher OP

This was the context in which Pope John Paul II gave his wonderful series of teachings on the gift and meaning of human sexuality at the beginning of his time as Pope. This series of Wednesday audience talks has been collected together under the title “The Theology of the Body”. Many people have found it very rich in insights into the meaning of their own bodies and sexuality.

This ePILGRIMAGE explores various ways that this very positive message about human bodily life and love have been expressed in the Catholic tradition -- right back to the Song of Songs in the Bible through to Pope Benedict’s recent encyclical ‘God is Love’; from the living testimony of the loving pilgrim mother back to the ancient site of pilgrimage in Cana, where Jesus celebrated marriage by turning water to wine and celebrated family by saving a child’s life.

As we start a new year and make various ‘resolutions’ about how we are going to live better lives in 2007, we too can be redeemed through the grace of Christ and restored - in our bodily lives as much as in our spiritual lives - to God’s original plan for us.

+Anthony Fisher OP

Coordinator of World Youth Day 2008



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Faith Foundations

The human body, marriage and the Eucharist

The people of the Old Testament believed that the Lord God, the almighty Creator, loved the nation of Israel with the passionate love of a bridegroom.

The later prophets wrote that God’s love was for “all the nations,” for all humanity.

This beautiful image of the loving and all-good God inviting people to “draw near” to Him so that He can unite Himself to them and thereby heal and “fulfill” every desire and good is represented symbolically in the Bible in a passionate wedding poem called The Song of Songs.

The Book however is not only a celebration of God’s love for us, but a depiction of the way God has shaped men and women that He has made.

Pope John Paul II says in his rich Theology of the Body, that our hearts, minds and especially our bodies have a “nuptial meaning”. We are made to be given in a total, decisive, life-long, faithful gift back to God. Here on earth, God calls each person to be that type of gift through “self-giving” vocation – be it marriage, consecrated virginity or some service as a single person.

Each vocation is based on and tries to perfect the building up of a communion of loving “persons”. These dedicated communions bring into our world the unimaginably powerful and saving love of God – that loving communion of Divine Persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit (The Blessed Trinity).

Each Christian knows that they are unable to join these communities and respond to these vocations of love without the assistance of God. This is why God sent His only Son, “as a man” Jesus Christ, into human history and existence. Christians are “baptised” so that they can be re-made in Jesus Christ and united - that is “wedded” - to Him.

In Baptism we are made “one” with the Saving Love of God in Christ.

In order to keep alive our Baptismal vows, Christians need to be “fed” by Christ directly – the Sacrament of Christ’s direct presence is called the Eucharist or Holy Communion. Here Jesus feeds his “Bride” the Church, and each Christian man and woman, with his own Body and Blood. They become “one flesh” with him.

Those who are receptive to these gifts and live in goodness and grace are strengthened to carry Christ to others in the world - they bear “fruit” from their oneness with Christ.

Christian couples are also invited to give themselves in marriage Eucharistically. They dedicate their sexual loving, their service, their parental powers, their bodies and their hearts to each other in an act of self-giving love “until death” – as did Christ their Lord.

This sacrament becomes not only a good relationship, but a deepening and “saving mystery” which reveals to each other, their children, their relatives and their society an intimate and concrete “communion” and God’s unconditional love. Their love tells the story of Jesus’ total self-giving to the Church; and Jesus’ fidelity to his bride the Church shows them how to live with generosity, forgiveness, self-satisfaction and intimacy. All this helps to explain why Christians take sex so seriously and have such high ideals for what they do in their bodily lives.

Click here to explore these teachings further

<http://www.theologyofthebody.net> and http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P50.HTM



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Pilgrim Prayer

Prayerful reading of Song of Songs

The Song of Songs is a book of erotic love poetry, with dialogue between a 'lover' and the 'beloved', and with commentary by a 'Poet' and a 'chorus'. Wonderful for weddings and for married couples to read and pray together, it also describes – as highlighted by many saints – the spiritual relationship of Christ with the 'soul' (each of us), as well as Christ and the Church.

A prayerful reading of this Divine Word of God can be a rich means for the redemption of our sexuality:

...blow upon my garden
that its perfumes may spread abroad.

Beloved Let my lover come to his garden
and eat its choice fruits.

Lover I have come to my garden, my sister, my bride;
I gather my myrrh and my spices,
I eat my honey and my sweetmeats,
I drink my wine and my milk.

Poet Eat, friends; drink! Drink freely of love!

Song of Songs 4:16; 5:1



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Inspired Writings

Deus Caritas Est - “God is love” - Pope Benedict XVI

Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. Eros, reduced to pure “sex”, has become a commodity; a mere “thing” to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man’s great “yes” to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used and exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness. Christian faith, on the other hand, has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter co-penetrate, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True, eros tends to rise “in ecstasy” towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.

Click here for the full text of Deus Caritas Est – ‘God is Love’ – by Pope Benedict XVI

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html



Pope Benedict XVI

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Testimony Of Faith

Kate, Archdiocese of Melbourne



My experience of being on pilgrimage in Rome for World Youth Day in the year 2000 was very different to what I imagined. Being over six months pregnant, I trusted with my husband Justin that the Lord would watch over me and prayed that my health would be good, with the promise of long walks and high temperatures. Leaving our son James at home with his two sets of grandparents was also another big thing for us. We knew he could not have been in better hands and more loved and with the Lord's presence near to him and to us, we trusted all would go well.

The Lord certainly delivered once again and he was very good and brought joy to many people.

It was quite incredible to be aware I was carrying someone else with me on pilgrimage. One priest, Father Waheed, was really beautiful and every time he saw me he blessed my stomach and said "Praise the Lord!" There were certainly challenges being pregnant on pilgrimage in Rome and I certainly was not able to do everything that I would have liked. But within my state the Lord gave me a real grace to enjoy what I was able to do and accept the rest.

Elisha is our daughter who was in my womb on World Youth Day. She was born in a bit of a hurry at home, delivered by Justin, in a precious and unique experience for the three of us. We also travelled overseas for our friend's wedding when she was six months old. On this trip Elisha was blessed by Pope John Paul II at the Chrism Mass in St Peter's Basilica. We are sure these beautiful experiences with our Elisha were little gifts from God, perhaps a fruit of our WYD pilgrimage and our Yes to this blessed experience.

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Saints and Witnesses

The first modern married couple beatified together- Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi

Before they met each other both Maria and Luigi were already committed social activists and reformers who pursued higher education and were involved in Catholic lay groups. Luigi studied law and became a lawyer and public administrator. Maria, who grew up in the great cultural treasure house of Florence, became a professor and public speaker in education and had a particular interest in music and art.



Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi

They both considered their real vocations began when they found each other. Their family home in Via Depretis in Rome became the centre of deepening faith, their social apostolate and charity work. Maria's last pregnancy with Enrichetta, was a life-threatening one. Her doctors pressured her to have an abortion to save her life. Maria and Luigi refused and dedicated their child to God in a vigil of prayer. Both mother and baby survived. The Beltrame family had a lively and happy family life; people often joined them on camping and hiking holidays near their holiday house in the hills.

During the Second World War, the Beltrame home became an accommodation centre for refugees and the dislocated: a drop-in centre for anyone in need. People were given support, food and a place to stay and were invited to join the family's regular Rosary, Holy Hours and other prayers.

In addition, both Luigi and Maria assisted in establishing programs of Catholic adult education, catechesis, marriage preparation, and retreats. Together, they founded a scout group for disadvantaged boys. The couple had an intense prayer life and both in different ways contributed to the reconstruction of Italy after the devastation of the Second World War. Luigi became the deputy attorney general for Italy, Maria assisted in the foundation of the Sacred Heart Catholic University in Rome.

Luigi died in the well-loved family home in Rome in 1951, Maria died at 81 being held by the daughter she had refused to abort.

Blessed Luigi Beltrame Quattrocchi

Born: Catania, Italy - 12th January, 1880 Died: 1951.

Blessed Maria Corsini

Born: Florence, Italy - 24th June, 1884

Died: 1965

Married: 25th November 1905.

Children: Fillippo (Don Tarcisio), Stefania (Sr. Cecelia), Cesare (Fr Paolino), Enrichetta.

Shared Memorial Day: Rome, November 25th (their wedding day).

Patrons: the family, the mission of the laity, difficult pregnancies.

Represented As: Often as an elderly married couple holding arms & facing each other.



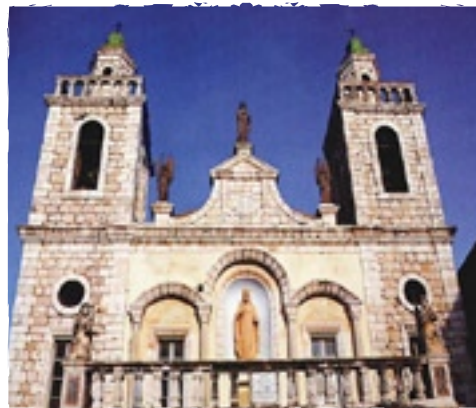
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Place of Pilgrimage

Cana, Galilee (now Israel)

John’s Gospel records that Jesus performed his first public miracle at a wedding feast in the town of Cana, to which He and His mother were invited (John 2:1-11). It seems that the Virgin Mary is the first person to tell her Son about the wine shortage at the banquet. Without intruding on her Son’s mission, she instructs the waiters to follow her Son’s instructions. The waiters fill the enormous wine jars with water and without any apparent outward sign, they find to their amazement that the water has been turned into the finest vintage wine. St John writes, “Jesus did this as the first of his signs, in Cana in Galilee, and so revealed his glory...” (John 2:11).

The town of Cana “of Galilee”, which is mentioned several times in St John’s Gospel, is marked by a Franciscan pilgrimage Church in a town called Kafar Kenna, a few kilometres northwest of Jesus’ home town of Nazareth. This church is near a spring of water sometimes associated with the miracle of Cana.



Cana is within walking distance to Nazareth and it is likely that Jesus was very familiar with the town. One of the first men to join him as a disciple was Nathaniel “of Cana”. The Gospel of John mentions Cana and Nathaniel to mark the beginning and end of Christ’s ministry before the Resurrection (1:45-51 and 21:2).

St John’s Gospel mentions Cana again (4:46-54) and describes how Jesus was staying in the town, when he healed a seriously ill boy who was in another town. Cana therefore links marriage to the raising of children.



Hundreds of years later, Saint Jerome, commemorated the first miracle of Jesus by taking a group of pilgrims to the town of Cana where he reported that after prayer he was able to re-enact the miracle of changing water into wine.

In the Catholic Church, the name “Cana” is often associated with marriage preparation and celebration. Jesus’ actions are sometimes seen as a symbolic blessing of all weddings and marriages. In the Church, marriage is a Sacrament in which the couple in giving themselves to each other participate in Christ’s faithful, sacrificial and spousal love for His Bride, the Church. The blessing of the “new wine” at Cana is a sign of Jesus’ presence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. During the Mass, the Holy Spirit changes the “old wine” into the Sacrament of the Blood of Christ.



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Towards WYD 2008

Youth Leaders Formation Course (YLFC)

Do you feel called to serve Christ... grow in faith... change the world?

As Australia and New Zealand prepare to receive the world's pilgrim youth, the extraordinary nature of the gift and the enormity of the task of WYD08 are beginning to emerge.

The YLFC is a three month intensive course from 3 March to 3 June 2007 for young Australians and New Zealanders aged between 18-30 years who are seeking to serve in the local and national preparations for WYD08, the WYD08 week and to be active in the life of the Church in the future.

To download the PDF flyer and to read more about the course planning and content, click here http://www.wyd2008.org/index.php/en/australian_parishes_schools/youth_leaders_formation_course

REGISTRATIONS CLOSE 31 JANUARY 2007 - so visit the website to get instructions on how to apply for this faith and pilgrimage formation opportunity of a life time.

'If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away and he gives you everything.' Pope Benedict XVI at WYD 2005, Cologne

