

## **Chastity: This Only One Kind of Love**

To be transformed into Jesus is to live fully the theological virtues, and to live by and experience the happiness of the Beatitudes. In subsequent conferences, we will reflect upon our commitment to the evangelical counsel of Poverty and relate this commitment to the virtue of Hope which directs our eyes to God alone, so that possessing little, we look forward to possessing all: all that we need in the here present to carry us onward into the ALL of the Hereafter. Then, we will reflect upon our Promise as lay Carmelites to be obedient as Christ was, and made our reflection on obedience in relation to the virtue of Faith and to the Beatitude of meekness.

Now we will reflect upon the evangelical counsel of Chastity, and do so in relation to the theological virtue of Charity. My Promise to live chastely is based on my belief and hope that in striving to love as Christ did, I will be blessed with purity of heart by which alone I can see God as the SOUL of my and my neighbor's soul. In God and in God's love we find a basis for a truly satisfying relationship. In the love of my brother / sister, my spouse / my friend I find the measure of my love of God, and make God present to me and my loved one.

"It is the love of my lover, my brother/sister, or my child that sees God in me, and makes God credible in me. And it is my love for my lover, my child, my brother/sister that enables me to show God to him or her in himself or herself." (Thomas Merton)

God is Love. Divine Charity is God's Life. Creation is the effusion, emanation, and outpouring of God's Love, its manifestation. God created all out of Love.

The essence of the intimacy of the soul with God is in the exercise of the Theological virtues, and especially in the exercise of Charity, called by spiritual theologians, the queen and formative principle of all virtues, the bond of perfection that unites and harmonizes the virtues and the Holy Spirit's Gifts in the divine unity of Love. Our love of neighbor is a manifestation of our intimate love relationship with God. It is the effect of that love, an outpouring of that love. In the intimacy of our relationship with God, loves wells up and pours out towards others. The love of others springs from this outpouring.

The Bible is through and through the story of God's unending love for men and women and of their vocation to love God in return, and to love each other, and their fellow men. God made man and woman in order that they might love. And in their love, be a sign of His Love, as we shall see.

Jesus told those to whom he preached that he came to fulfill the law and to point to its focus. When he was asked:

"Master, what is the greatest of the commandments?"

Jesus replied that the first and the greatest commandment, which gave the whole of the law its

final focus, is to love God with one's whole being, and the second, He said, was like unto the first: to love one's neighbor as oneself. That focus of Charity is the basis for Chastity.

All true love must be ultimately focused in God, and if it is, then it will be chaste.

Our love for another will be chaste when it is based on the reality of the other being created in the image of God; when our love of the other is dedicated to that other's well being. The "other's well-being", by the way, is the motivation for fraternal correction. When we truly love another chastely, the Spirit is able to use us as an instrument toward transforming the other into that image of Christ the Father is calling the other to be. Becoming what God desires us to be is indeed well being.

Chastity is the counsel specifically governing human sexuality. Human sexuality is a legitimate power given to us by God primarily for the sake of creating community and as a means of ourselves being in relation to others, in friendships or, more exclusively, the particular love relationship of marriage. Like any power it must be used as its creator wills it to be used, that is, toward its proper end. As such, it must be like all powers, regulated and directed. This is the work of the virtues.

More specifically, the virtue of chastity comes under the cardinal virtue of temperance, which seeks to permeate the passions and appetites of the senses with reason, and so bring them under control. However, Charity is the form of all the virtues. Under its influence, the self-mastery of temperance is prevented from being repressive, and chastity becomes more a love-gift of self than a withholding of self. Imbued with charity, chastity becomes the joyous affirmation of someone who knows how to be truly self-giving in a relationship, whether of friendship, or of married love. The chaste lover is not self-centered, not involved in selfish relationships with other people. Chastity aids and abets mature relationships. It promotes a purity of mind and body which helps develop true self-respect and at the same time makes one capable of respecting others, because it makes one see in them persons to reverence, insofar as they are created in the image of God and through grace are children of God, re-created by Christ who called them "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

St. Paul tells us that all laws, including laws regulating the Christian's sexual life and sexual relationships must be governed by this great commandment of charity. In Romans, he writes:

“All the commandments - you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and so on - are summed up in this single command: You must love your neighbor as yourself.” (Romans 13:9)

Using more positive terms, St. Paul provides us with a wonderful working definition of chaste love in I Corinthians, chapter 13. That love, St. Paul specifies, is patient and kind; it is never jealous; it is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offense and is not resentful. Chaste love takes no pleasure in other people's sins, but delights in the truth. It is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes.

Chaste love in other words is love with no strings attached. It is unconditional love; love, which

is a gift. It is in fact, true love, for true love can only be a gift. "Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked." (The Song of Songs)

Chaste love is love which overcomes a smothering need to possess, and which goes beyond passion. "Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away." (Song of Songs)

Love, Thomas Merton writes, "... is a certain special way of being alive."

Chastity, we might say, is a certain special way of loving. It leads to a simplification of love by purifying our way of loving of all selfish motivations which tend to complicate being in love. This can result in an intensification of love and thereby an enhancement of life.

To designate Chastity as a certain special way of loving is to equate it with God's way of loving. When we love chastely, we love divinely. We love as God loves us: without measure, without conditions. Nothing we can do can separate us from God in His love for us, can stop God from loving us, because God is love. It is His nature to love. Meister Eckhart, the 14th C. Dominican priest and mystic, expressed this wonderfully in one of his sermons:

"God loves. 'What a mystery!' What is God's love? His nature and His being: that is His love. Whoever would take away God's love for us would take away His essence, because His Being is dependent upon His love for us.... What a mystery that is! God loves me with His whole Being - His Being depends on it - God loves me as if his being and his becoming depend on it. God knows only one kind of love and with exactly that same love with which the Father loves His only begotten son, with the same love He loves us."

This is the essence of chastity: this only one kind of love that God knows. It is a detached love, a love innocent, a love unspoiled, a love free of the debauchery and wantonness inherent in the kind of love motivated by self-interest, self-seeking and all forms of self-centeredness. It is a love which gives itself in hope of possession, but which does not impose possession as a condition of its giving. This is the kind of love that Jesus revealed to us in his humanity. He loved as he experienced himself being loved by the Father, and he called his followers to love each other as he loved them.

What an ideal! If we are as truthful as someone like Therese, we have to admit that it is impossible for us to love in this way. Therese admitted that her sisters' faults, failings, natural characteristics experienced as being so often in conflict with her own, continually threatened to block her efforts to so love. So, she discovered that in order to follow the Christian commandment of love, she must love her sisters, her neighbors, as Christ loved them, with His love.

When we make our Promise of Chastity, we are promising to strive to love all chastely as Christ does. We are promising to strive to love all creation with purity of heart: our spouses, our children, our friends, our enemies, our work, all of material creation, and above all, God.

Our Constitutions tells us that the promise of chastity binds us to the practice of this virtue according to our state in life, and that in no way does this promise call for a change in the

practices proper to our particular state in life: whether married, unmarried, widowed or celibate by vow. Whatever our state in life, we are called to exercise the virtue of chastity in our relationships with others. (Cf. Constitutions II, 13)

We have to recognize that the practice of chastity is not a denial of our sexuality. It is not a repression of our sexuality. It is to provide direction to our sexuality. It brings sexual love with its energy into focus, that focus we mentioned which is the focus of charity: to love God with our whole being, and that means with all our powers and energies, including our sexual energy. In one of the stanzas of the Spiritual Canticle, St. John of the Cross writes:

“... all my energy in His service

.... my every act is love.”

In his commentary on this verse, the saint explains that by "all my energy," he is referring to the sensory part of ourselves. He writes:

“... By directing the activity of the interior and exterior senses toward God, [the soul's] use of the body is now conformed to His Will.” Spiritual Canticle, 28, 4

In regard to this conformity of will, we note that our Constitution indicates that the promise of chastity expressing a conscious intention to respect the law of God in a way proper to the unmarried, married or widowed state. “By this promise the Secular Carmelite also expresses the conscious desire to respect each person as required by God’s law and one’s state of life, as a single person or married or widowed. This promise does not prevent a change in state of life.” (Op. cit.)

Our state in life is our vocation - our call from God to seek him within the freedom and demand inherent in that state. If God calls a person to be totally and exclusively his own physically as well as spiritually by vow, public or private, then that is the highest state in life for that person and his or her way of perfection. It is for that person the way that imitates the essence of Christ's way: His way was to do the will of the Father. Likewise, if God calls a couple to be his own through the medium of union with one another in a love which strives to become one, in a marriage of flesh and spirit, then that is the highest state in that couple's regard and is the way by which they will reach perfection.

I do not think we need to elaborate on this point. Vatican II clearly states that whether we are called to a relative or absolute practice of chastity, “...all the faithful, whatever their condition or state--though each in his own way--are called by the Lord to that perfection of sanctity by which the Father himself is perfect. (Lumen Gentium, #11)

When we make our promise of chastity as individuals living in the world in the married, unmarried or widowed state, or as professed celibates, we are witnessing to this teaching of the Church that all are called to the perfection of charity. For that perfection of charity is a charity that springs from a pure heart, a heart purified by the consuming fire of God's love. God's love consumes us but does not destroy us. It allows us our individuality and indeed brings us to the

perfection of our individuality. God loves us without violating that freedom of will He gave us, which makes us like unto Himself. He loves with no strings attached, unconditionally.

No matter how deficient or half-hearted our efforts or even our desires to respond to that love may be, God continues to love us with His whole being. He loves us chastely and calls us to love Him and others in Him in a like manner. There is no room for lust in our love for God. Our love for Him must go beyond limited concepts and images of who He is and beyond the sense experiences of His gifts. Empowered by God's grace and surrendering to the attraction of His love, we must allow ourselves to be drawn into that focus of love and live there, as Elizabeth of the Trinity exhorts. That focus of love is intimacy with God, and we spiral towards it as we conform our wills to His in and through all our relationships. Just as we 'shall see God' only if we have purity of heart, so we will come to appreciate the dignity of others only if we relate to them with chaste love. We become unchaste in our relationships, marital or otherwise, when we violate the freedom of others by striving to manipulate them for self-benefit, when we allow sensual desires to have primacy so that we use our relationships with others primarily to gratify our own desires and self-interests.

To be chaste, we must ever trust in the primacy of God and order all our material and human relationships as a manifestation of that trust. We must not violate the integrity, freedom and uniqueness of those persons God provides us as our friends and/ or spouses by using them for self-gratification. Likewise, a chaste regard for the right use of those material things God gives us must be sought. We love and use material creation chastely when we relate to it as God intended, that is, by using material things to sustain and enrich our lives and to assist us in fulfilling the ultimate purpose of our existence - the praise and glorification of God.

There is a sacramental quality to chaste love in that its presence in a relationship is an efficacious sign of intimate union, because such a love effects such a union. In human relationships, such a union is sacramental in a real and full sense only in Christian marriage because only a monogamous commitment can provide the condition for its growth and development. The inherent beauty of married love lies in this signification. Male and female God created humanity, Genesis tells us. When a man and woman join together to truly complement one another, they become one body. Sexual love is an energy that impels the two into this one fusion - not a coupling, but a union of being, physical and spiritual, with a creative potential of creating community, as the eternal love fusion inherent in the Divine Relationships of the Trinity is creative.

How beautiful and holy sexual love becomes when seen in this light. So holy and beautiful that St. Paul points to married love as the sign of Christ's love for the Church. So holy and beautiful that sexual love is used as an expression of the highest intimacy - the soul's union with God.

In conclusion: our Promise calls us to observe the virtue of chastity in accordance with our state in life and to observe it with the conscious intention of practicing it according to God's will for our respective states. Another element noted in our Constitution concerning the observance of Chastity is the one we have been emphasizing. It is that our promise binds us to practice this

virtue in order that we might seek " ... the freedom to love God and neighbor unselfishly<sup>1</sup> giving witness to the divine intimacy promised by the beatitude 'blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God.' (Mt 5:8)." As I mentioned in the introduction, Vatican II has insisted that the order of the Counsels should return to an ancient tradition in the Church of presenting them, namely, chastity, poverty and obedience. The return to this tradition is meant to stress that first of all we are to strive to give ourselves to God totally with undivided love, and then we will want to live as the poor Christ and will be willing to be obedient as He was in carrying out the Will of the Father, even unto death.

#### EXERCISE:

Holding a tiny acorn in her hand one day, Julian (of Norwich) thought:

"In this little thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it; the second is that God loves it; the third is that God preserves it.

"But what did I see in it? It is that God is the Creator and the Protector and the Lover.

"For until I am substantially united to God, I can never have perfect rest or true happiness, until, that is, I am so attached to God that there can be no created thing between my God and Me."

When I love other things chastely, then they are not created things between my God and me. They are one with me in this only one kind of love, this certain special way of loving we call CHASTITY.

#### REFLECTION:

The TRUTH is:

My House comes to rest in loving You,  
and loving all in and with You.

Open my eyes ... my ears ... my heart, O Lord.  
Help me to see, to hear, to love  
In TRUTH.

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<sup>1</sup> Precautions 1 and 6