

Why Chastity?

Chastity allows us to love as God intended.

I. “God is love” (1 John 1:4:8). God created us to receive love and to give love.

“God created man in His own image” (Genesis 1:27).

God created us in His image by creating us with an immortal soul. This means by way of our spiritual powers of intellect and will we can think, freely choose and love in a human way as God thinks, chooses, and loves in a divine way. Being a “person,” created with a body and a soul, who is not just some *thing*, but *someone* who can know and love God, gives man and woman a special worth or “dignity.” We are created by God to be in relationship with Him. (*Catechism*, paragraphs 362, 364, 366, 357. 1704-1706 Hereafter CCC).

The Blessed Trinity exists as a relationship of Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and because we are created in the image of God, we are made not only to be in relationship with Him but also with others. We are called to act like God by loving others, receiving their love and living by the Golden Rule. The gift of friendship involves an exchange of love that is selfless, following the example of Christ and putting the other person first. [Of course, before we can love ourselves and others, we have to know personally that we are loved by our parents or others and by God.] It is in loving and serving others, especially those in need that a person can fully find himself.

“Male and female He created them...Therefore a man clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 1:27, 2:24).

God created persons as male and female. The sacred gift of human sexuality is a fundamental component of each person that leads to giving and receiving love, which involves **selfless love** and sacrifice. Man and woman were created by God each for the other, to be a union of persons in an exclusive, faithful and life-long marriage. This gift of self, both body and soul, is a mirror of God’s love. God unites spouses that, by forming “one flesh,” they can become participants with Him in the creation of new life. God’s plan is that sexual union belongs in marriage. Therefore, chastity implies abstinence for those who are not married. For priests and consecrated persons, chastity frees the heart to give the gift of themselves totally to God in the service of others. They participate with God in building up the spiritual life of others. It is important to note that every woman is called to be a spiritual mother and every man is called to be a spiritual father.

II. Due to the effects of original sin, we are unable, with our own strength, to love as God intended.

Each person inherits the effects of Original Sin. “Our human nature has not been totally corrupted but is wounded in the natural powers proper to it” including a weakened intellect and will, disordered desires and an inclination to sin that is called “concupiscence.” (CCC n. 405). Personal sin harms our relationship with God and causes disharmony in human relationships. Sin damages our ability to love as God loves. Ignorance of the fact that we have a wounded nature sets us up for greater sin and difficulties in understanding our need for God’s grace to overcome sin.

Due to our weakened state we have to struggle against our own fallen nature which began in the Garden of Eden when our first parents succumbed to the seductions of Satan (see Genesis 3:1-6). In the area of sexuality, disordered desires can lead us away from genuine love to lust: we can be tempted to use another person or be used as an object for sexual pleasure in pre-marital or extra-marital relations or by viewing pornographic materials. Such disregard for human dignity is harmful and leads away from God’s love. Fortunately, our wounded nature does not deprive us of the goodness God intends for us. Neither does our fallen nature deprive us of our freedom to choose that goodness through cooperation with God’s grace.

III. Jesus asks us to love as He loves with the grace He provides.

Jesus is “the Way” of authentic charity (John 14:6). He desires us to love one another as He has loved us (cf. John 15:12). Jesus’ example shows us the true path to happiness, calling us to a love that challenges us to be selfless. But because of the effects of original sin, this way of love is humanly impossible without God’s supernatural help.

Through His Suffering, Death, and Resurrection, Jesus makes it possible for us to be united with Him in a relationship of selfless love. Jesus restores sanctifying grace to the soul which is our means of being united with Him in a relationship of love. By the power of God’s grace received in the Sacraments, and our cooperation with this grace, we are able to love God, others and ourselves as Jesus loves us.

IV. To love as God loves, we are called to live the virtues. Chastity is “the Safeguard of Love.”

Chastity is a virtue. A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. The development of a virtue or good habit requires practice, prayer and God’s grace. Every effort must be made to develop a virtuous life which imitates God’s love and thereby protects the dignity of the human person. This is best accomplished when the virtues are practiced and developed throughout life. The foundational virtues – the Theological Virtues of faith (belief), hope (trust in God and His

promises) and charity (self-giving love), along with the Cardinal Virtues of prudence (right judgment), justice (right relationships), fortitude (courage) and temperance (self discipline or self control) – free us to love as God intended.

Chastity, which flows from temperance (self-control), is the virtue that allows us to do what is right, good, and loving in the area of sexuality. Due to the effects of original sin, chastity requires us to develop self-mastery. The virtue of chastity helps us to resist temptations of sexual desires outside of marriage. Chastity developed as a good moral habit is a positive virtue and is the joyful embrace of a life that fully accepts the gift of sexuality by protecting it from selfish exploitation and integrating it into a lifelong covenant of love. Therefore chastity is referred to as “the safeguard of love.” (Pope John Paul II)

In order to live chastity, purity of heart is required. Purity of heart enables us “to see according to God, to perceive the human body – ours and our neighbors – as a temple of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 2519, 1Cor 6:19). The calm effort necessary to resist temptations and lust entails purifying the heart and practicing temperance. With the help of God’s grace received in the Sacraments and through daily prayer, we can discipline our feelings, imagination and senses – especially what we look at and listen to – seek the true good of each person, and remain pure of heart. All this leads to authentic peace and joy and contributes to true Christian femininity and true Christian masculinity.

To possess purity of heart, the practice of modesty is needed. Modesty involves setting chaste boundaries in relationships and keeping decency in words and actions. Modesty protects the intimate center of the person by not dressing or acting in a way that draws attention to one part of the body and away from the person, which could denigrate personal dignity.

With chastity, purity of heart and modesty, human sexuality is honored according to God’s plan. Persons who have developed these virtues are better able to perceive God’s call and to give themselves totally to their vocation, whether that be marriage, priesthood, the consecrated life or the dedicated single life. They experience a peaceful strength within their vocation which allows them to bear the fruit God intended for them in this life and to reach Heaven in the next.

V. In teens, formation in chastity integrates the awakening sexual awareness so that it is understood in the context of God’s plan for marriage and does not violate purity, love and respect.

The truth that we are created for a relationship with God emerges in the awareness of young people during adolescence as an “ache” deeply felt in the heart. Sadly, young people too often turn to sexual activity as a counterfeit answer to the longings they feel. In truth there is a “God-shaped vacuum” in the heart that only He can fill.

Further, God created us as male and female with natural desires for authentic love. During adolescence, these natural desires merge with the sexual urge. The sexual urge in the girl is often manifested as a desire for emotional intimacy. The sexual urge in the boy is often manifested as a desire for physical intimacy. The energy coming from desires for emotional and physical intimacy needs to be channeled to other important aspects of life and friendship through joyful self-mastery. These desires need to be correctly ordered, not physically expressed outside of marriage – because this can only lead to the violation and weakening of oneself and one’s relationships, even if at first it appears to feed a relationship.

VI. In marriage, chastity contributes to building up the “civilization of love”.

“The marital relationship between a man and a woman is essentially a relationship of authentic love. In marriage, self-giving expresses, through the body, the complementarity and totality of the gift of sexuality. Married love thus becomes a power, which enriches persons and helps them grow and, at the same time, it contributes to building up the civilization of love. However, when the sense and meaning of gift is lacking in sexuality,” such as when a spouse is used as an object for sexual pleasure contrary to respect and authentic love, “a ‘civilization of things and not of persons’ takes over, ‘a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used’” (*The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, Guidelines for Education within the Family*, Pontifical Council for the Family, n. 11, www.vatican.va /Type in English, then name of doc.).

Therefore, actions or materials that prevent or deter us from this proper respect of human sexuality are harmful. Any form of printed, audio or video materials that have sexually explicit content or sexually obscene language should not be part of one’s private and/or public life. These items stimulate lustful feelings and images like a drug, causing long-lasting effects on the entire person and becoming a breeding ground for sin.

Young people need help in dealing with sexual desires by: acknowledging the desire, relating this desire to God in prayer, receiving the grace needed in this situation (see 1Cor 10:13) and responding to that grace. This means acting with respect and charity toward the other person, avoiding occasions of sin and making right choices. Living this way strengthens chastity, leading to a deeper yes to God’s plan for authentic friendship, love and happiness.

In summary, to live chastely is to live in accord with God’s will. Therefore, formation in chastity is imperative. All persons must work to form themselves and the children in their care in the virtue of chastity, which allows us to love others as God loves us, living a truly joyful life as God intended!