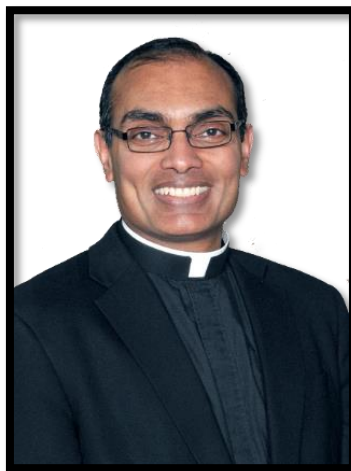


# **“Glorifying God: Mind, Body, and Soul”**

## ***Men’s Retreat Notes***

**April 17-19, 2015**

**Led by: Fr. John Antony**



## **At the Feet of our Feet**

### **Introduction to “Theologies of the Body Retreat”**

Modern people have a love/hate relationship with their own bodies. Sometimes, we love our bodies. When was the last time you passed by a mirror without glancing at your reflection? We know we should care for our bodies, at least that’s always the top New Year’s Resolution every year: get more exercise, lose some weight. Make your body better. We even pamper our bodies with “comfort food” (like fried chicken), and comfy clothes (like our favorite jeans). Even St. Paul agrees, saying, “For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it” (Eph. 5:29).

On the other hand, we don’t always love our bodies. Sometimes we feel like Hamlet who felt burdened by his body and longed “to shuffle off this mortal coil” (*Hamlet*, III, 1) so he could be “free” from his body. We despise and delay the natural deterioration of the body by fighting hair loss and wrinkles and sagging muscles. People today even blame their bodies for their depression by engaging in “cutting,” taking out their anger and anxiety on their poor bodies. We’re not quite sure what to do with our bodies; we feel like a stranger in our own skin.

This confusion toward the body is captured in Oscar Wilde’s classic novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The story is a terrifying telling of an impossibly handsome man named Dorian Gray, who meets a famous artist named Basil Hallward. Basil paints a portrait of Dorian and depicts him as a Greek hero or mythological figure (think Brad Pitt in the movie, “Troy”). But Basil’s unscrupulous foil, Lord Henry Wotton, beguiles the impressionable Dorian into believing that he’ll soon lose his looks and charm. Dorian grows so worried and obsessed about losing his best qualities that he curses the painting, and in despair,

pledges his soul if only the painting would bear the ravages of time and trials instead of him. And so it happens. Dorian leads a profligate life – with wine, women, song and eventually murder – while his portrait (hidden in the basement) suffers the consequences of his misdeeds. Finally Dorian’s conscience awakes and he resolves to take a knife down to the basement to destroy the painting, and gain some measure of peace. There is an ensuing loud crash, and when Dorian’s servants enter the basement, they find the painting unscathed, but the face in the painting is that of Dorian as a handsome young man again. On the floor lies Dorian with the knife run through his heart, and his own face now horribly disfigured. (Sorry, no “spoiler alert.”) Don’t many modern men and women feel like Dorian Gray toward their own bodies? We don’t know whether we should love it or hate it.

Pope Saint John Paul II, however, gives us another way to look at the body, namely, as our “teacher.” He believed that we don’t need to love or hate our bodies, but rather, we have much that we can learn from our bodies. He wrote something commonly called “the theology of the body” and encouraged us to sort of “sit at the feet of our own feet” and humbly learn from the master, our own body. He believed the body could even teach us about God, and so he called it a “theology,” a study of God under the tutelage of the body. Here’s how the pope put it: “The body, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine.” The pope even insists that this is precisely why God bothered to make the human body to begin with: “[The body] has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it” (*Man and Woman He Created Them*, 19:4). In John Paul’s opinion, the human body is one of the best theology professors in this world; we would do well to learn from it.

In the following talks, may I suggest that our real “retreat master” will be our own bodies? Let me encourage you, like the pope, to “sit at the feet of your own feet” and learn what the body has to teach you. The pope himself readily acknowledged there are other things to learn from the body besides about God. He wrote, “These reflections [the theology of the body] do not include many problems... (e.g. the problem of suffering and death)” (*Man and Woman*, 133:1). I would like us to learn at least 6 lessons the body teaches, that will be the content of the five talks of this retreat.

In the first talk, “Body by Michaelangelo,” I will provide a larger context within which the pope’s reflections hopefully become clearer and simpler. Anyone who has tackled the pope’s original work quickly sees it is rather dense. We will enlist the aid of the Renaissance master Michaelangelo’s fresco of “The Last Judgment” in the Sistine Chapel. On the day of the re-dedication of the Sistine Chapel, after the frescoes were restored, the pope proclaimed: “The Sistine Chapel is precisely – if one may say so – the sanctuary of the theology of the human body” (Homily from Dedication Mass, April 8, 1994). We might say that our bodily theology professor’s official classroom is the Sistine Chapel! Here we’ll learn the loftiest lessons our body teaches us. In the second talk, “Body by Scriptures,” we will follow the pope’s key insights about how the body can help us understand the Bible. Considering the key concepts of being “naked without shame” (Gen. 2:25), the experience of “adultery in the heart” (Mt. 5:28), and the real possibility of “no marriage in heaven” (Mt. 22:30), we’ll see how the body is the best interpreter of the Bible. In this second talk, the body will become a Scripture professor! The third talk, “Body by Erikson,” will explore how the astute psychologist, Erik Erikson, and his wife, Joan, became students of the body and learned from the human body their ground-breaking “nine stages of life.” The Eriksons help us see

how the body can become a psychology professor! The fourth talk, “Body by Sacraments,” will be a fresh way to understand the seven sacraments. The pope called marriage, “the primordial sacrament,” (*Man and Woman*, 19:5) meaning it is like a key to unlock the mystery of all other sacraments. Just as the body is essential in marriage, so it plays a central role in each of the other six sacraments. Indeed, the body was made specifically for the sacraments and the sacraments were designed precisely for the human body. In this fourth talk, the body will serve as a sort of spiritual director, helping us make the most of the sacraments. In the fifth talk, called “Body not Birds and Bees,” I will present an outline of how to give “The Sex Talk,” to teens. Once parents appreciate how beautiful and brilliant the body is, human sexuality will truly look like good news, not bad news, and it will become easier to talk about.

It may sound somewhat simplistic to think of our own bodies as a professor, but our bodies are great teachers. After all, doesn't the fact that we have two eyes and two ears but only one mouth seem to suggest strongly that we should spend 80% of our time watching and listening and only 20% of our time talking? That's something that our bodies teach us but many of us miss. As a young lawyer, Abraham Lincoln would read the daily newspaper out loud. His law partner, William Herndon, asked him why he did that. Lincoln replied, “When I read aloud, the information enters my mind not only through my eyes but also through my ears. I will retain more of the information that way.” Abraham Lincoln had not studied John Paul's *Theology of the Body*, but he was a student of many lessons his body would teach. Indeed, didn't his deep conviction about the equality of all men and women proceed at least in part from seeing the similarities in the bodies of all men and women?

My hope for this retreat is not to teach you everything the body has to say, but merely to awake a desire to learn more from your body. This personal professor you will always have with you, wherever you go. Don't love it too much, and don't hate it needlessly. Just learn from it. Let's take a seat now at the feet of our own feet.

## **Body by Michaelangelo**

### **Stepping into the professor's classroom**

One of the most original movies of the 1990's was "The Matrix." The whole movie hangs on the choice that Neo, the main character must make between a blue pill and a red pill. Neo's mentor, Morpheus, explains the consequences contained in each pill: "You take the blue pill, the story ends. You wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes." But before Neo decides, Morpheus warns him, "Remember, all I'm offering you is the truth. Nothing more." I'll give you one guess which pill Neo took. The "truth" that Neo learns is that everything he thought was true – everything presented to his five senses, the buildings he enters, the food he swallows, even the people he talks to – has been generated by a computer called the Matrix, while the real world is dramatically different than he had ever dreamed. The real world that Neo discovers is dark and deadly, nevertheless, he prefers the truth over the illusion.

But the character in "The Matrix" I find far more fascinating is "Cypher." He has also partaken of the red pill and knows the difference between the computer-created cosmos and the real world. Surprisingly, however, even though he knows the difference between reality and illusion like Neo, he prefers the pleasures of partial truths, he likes the lie. In a stunning scene of betrayal, Cypher meets with "Agent Smith" (a kind of computer cop) at an elegant restaurant to discuss the plans to betray Morpheus. As Cypher is about to bite into a piece of steak, he pauses to look at it lovingly, and says, "I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy, and delicious. After nine years, do you know what I realize?" He bites into the steak, and concludes: "Ignorance is bliss." At that point it becomes clear what is really at "stake" (pun intended): throughout the movie, there is a kind of tug-of-war between truth and falsehood, between knowledge and ignorance, and between reality and illusion, and each character must choose on which side he or she stands. Just

as much as Neo desires to know the truth no matter how hard or sacrificial it may be, so Cypher prefers the passing world of ignorance and illusion, where he thinks he'll find bliss.

Pope Saint John Paul II, like Morpheus, also invites us to reconsider what we've always taken for granted as the "real world" and to follow him into a kind of Wonderland. If we follow in the footsteps of the Holy Father, we realize that he's really offering us a glimpse of heaven. Only in heaven will we experience what is fully and finally the real world. To be sure, the world we currently inhabit is created by God, and it is very real and very good. You'll remember that after God created everything in Genesis, he looked at it and said, "It is very good" (Gen. 1:31). At this point "The Matrix" analogy sort of breaks down. Ultimately, all analogies "limp," meaning they all contain similarities but also differences. But where "The Matrix" analogy is extremely helpful is in helping us see that the pope offers us his own version of the "red pill," namely, the human body. If we take the human body seriously, and sort of "swallow" it, it too will teach us the truth about heaven and earth, the real world in which we live. Like the characters in "The Matrix," we, too, will confront an ultimate choice: at times you may feel like Neo and want to know the whole truth no matter what the cost, but at other times you'll feel like Cypher, and prefer the partial pleasures of illusions instead. Indeed, we make this choice all the time, even if we don't realize it.

Now, catching the difference between fact and fiction – sifting truth from the illusion – is not as easy as it sounds. Would that it were as easy as taking a pill! Let me share with you a personal example. I am originally from India, and my family moved to the United States when I was seven years old. I remember very little from those first seven years. I suspect that the shock of moving to another country was probably so great, my mind blocked out the first seven years. As a child growing up in Little Rock Arkansas, I attended a Catholic elementary school, and was always surrounded by little white children, usually with German last names, like Beck and Gangluff and



Uekman. When I was twelve years old, my family visited India, and we spent a week in my home state of Kerala. As I stared at the faces of the Malayalees (the people from Kerala), I was astounded, and exclaimed, “They all look just like me and my brother and my sister! They could all be our relatives!” Funny thing is many of them were! Now, that may seem a rather obvious fact to you, but to me it was mind-blowing. Why? Because I had begun to think that since I grew up surrounded by little white children, I was a little white kid, too! Funny, isn’t it? Looking back on that episode, however, I’ve learned something else: all those little white kids wished they looked like me, and had my skin with the deep island tan! As a twelve year old boy, I saw myself as “white” as the children around me. An old adage says, “We see what we want to see,” but what we “want to see” is not always the full truth of things. This is precisely what the pope is proposing to us: if we take our bodies seriously, and learn from it, it will teach us amazing truths, so that we will no longer languish in illusions of things are not real.

John Paul II invites us to look at the human body not so much as a “pill” but as a “professor,” who can teach us a lot. One of the very first things the human body teaches us, if we take it seriously enough, is that it is “incomplete,” it doesn’t stand alone; it is only “one partner” of a pair. That is, a male body needs a female body to be complete, and vice versa. The pope doesn’t stop there. He insists that it’s not just for the sake of completeness that man needs a woman (and vice versa), but for the sake of joy. Reflecting deeply on the book of Genesis, he writes, “For the first time [after the creation of woman] man shows joy and even exultation for which he had no reason before” (*Man and Woman*, 8:4). The pope is referring to Genesis 2:23, where Adam first beholds Eve and exclaims: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” In other words, we should not look at the body merely as one piece in a “tetris game,” where the shape of one piece must compliment and “fit together” with the shape of another. Rather, the body is really a person, and as a person, we experience not only completeness, but also “joy” in beholding another person like us – like the joy and

exultation I experienced when I saw other Malayalees. I didn't just behold other brown bodies; I found brown brothers and sisters! Our bodies tell us we are not alone in this world, and we were not meant to be alone. This point is paramount for the pope: the body is a person. Try to think about it this way: the body is not so much an "object" but rather a "subject," it's not a "what" but rather a "who," and in the world of nouns, it's a "person," instead of a "place" or "thing." Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from our would-be professor is that the body is a "someone," and not a "something." Our body is not something that we "have" but something that we "are." Your body is constitutive of you; your body IS you.

With these preliminary points in mind, the saintly pontiff catapults us beyond the confines of this world into the heavenly wonderland. How does he do that? Recalling that the Bible claims that man is created in "the image of God" (Gen. 1:27), John Paul asserts: "Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion" (*Man and Woman*, 9:3). There are, of course, lots of ways that human beings are "like" God – in our intelligence, in our freedom of choice, in our appreciation of beauty, etc. – but the preeminent way we're like God is in our "communion," in the "unity" of a man and a woman. And nowhere else does that completeness between man and woman reach its culmination than in sexual intimacy. The pope puts it plainly: "The unity about which Genesis 2:24 speaks ('and the two will be one flesh') is without doubt the unity that is expressed and realized in the conjugal act" (*Man and Woman*, 10:2). In other words, we're talking about sex!

But before we get too excited about sex, Scott Hahn quickly clarifies: "Sex is not good. Campbell Soup is good. Mmm, mmm, good! And sex is not great. Frosted Flakes: they're great! No, sex is sacred, and it is holy" (Scott Hahn, "Sex, Lies and Sacraments,"). In the pope's language, sexual intimacy makes man and woman a "communion of persons" and that's how they become the best image of God on earth. We all remember from our elementary catechism classes that God, too, is a

“communion of Persons,” the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, whom we call “the Holy Trinity.” The pope, therefore, is urging us to look closely at the human body, at its maleness and femaleness, and ultimately at the sexual embrace, and is saying that there, in the complementarity, intimacy and joy of human love, is found the best image of the Trinitarian God. This is how our professor, the human body, teaches us about the real world, as well as the wonderland of heaven, and even about God himself. Could this be why John Mayer sang so suggestively: “Your body is a wonderland”? Okay, maybe not.

On April 8, 1994, Pope John Paul II unveiled the newly restored Sistine Chapel, and in his homily commented extensively on Michaelangelo’s fantastic fresco, “The Last Judgment.” If the body is to be our professor, then which human bodies should we be looking at to teach us? I don’t know about you, but that better not be MY body! Where is the body at its best? The pope answers: see the body through the eyes of the Renaissance master, Michaelangelo. During the restoration process, the Holy Father directed the artists and scientists to return the frescoes to their original splendor, and he specifically directed them to leave off most of the later-added loin clothes that “strategically covered” the private areas of the figures. The pope explained in his homily why Michaelangelo decided to depict the innumerable figures covering the walls without any coverings for themselves! That is, all the images were nudes – an extraordinary decision for the Counter-Reformation Catholic Church of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The pope preached at the dedication Mass: “It seems that Michaelangelo, in his own way, allowed himself to be guided by the evocative words of the Book of Genesis which, as regards the creation of the human being, male and female, reveals, ‘The man and his wife were both naked yet they felt no shame’ (Gen. 2:25)” (Homily from Dedication Mass, April 8, 1994). You see, Michaelangelo had embarked on the same mission as John Paul II: to show that the human body, especially the naked human body, has the same potential as Morpheus’ “red pill.” In other words, the body is the means to glimpse the real world, the wonderland of heaven, and ultimately to gaze upon God.

Unfortunately, not everyone shared Michaelangelo's enthusiasm for the naked human body. The master of ceremonies of Pope Paul III (the pope at the time), Msgr. Biagio da Cesena, criticized Michaelangelo and his frescoes, saying, "It was most disgraceful that in so sacred a place there should have been depicted all those nude figures, exposing themselves so shamefully" (Wikipedia, "Last Judgment, Michaelangelo"). He said Michaelangelo had turned the chapel into a bordello. But Michaelangelo would have the last laugh. One of the figures in hell, the judge of the underworld named "Minos," bears a striking resemblance to Cesena; it is undisputedly Cesena's face on Minos. But so that Cesena would not "expose himself so shamefully," Michaelangelo had a serpent wrapped around Mino's body, and the serpent's mouth devouring Minos' genitals. No joke; check it out next time you're in the holiest chapel in all Christendom. When Cesena complained to the pope, the pope jokingly answered that his jurisdiction did not extend to hell, so the painting would have to remain as it was. And so it did.

Newly restored to its original glory, the Sistine Chapel becomes in a sense "the best classroom" of our professor, where the human body teaches us truths about heaven and earth, and especially about the human person, his origins and destiny. May I conclude with a rather lengthy quotation from the Dedication Mass? It will also serve as an apt summary of what we've said thus far. The Holy Father explains why the Last Judgment should be a kind of "Exhibit A" in our professor's classroom, that is, why the body is at its best when seen through eyes of Michaelangelo: namely, because Michaelangelo saw the body as seen through the eyes of God. The pope preached:

If we are dazzled as we contemplate the Last Judgment by its splendor and its terror, admiring on the one hand the glorified bodies and on the other those condemned to damnation, we understand too that the whole composition is deeply penetrated by a unique light and by a single artistic logic: the light and the logic of faith that the Church proclaims, confessing: "We believe in one God...maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen." On the basis of this logic in the context of the light that comes from God, the human body also keeps its splendor and its dignity. If it is removed from this

dimension, it becomes in some way an object, which depreciates very easily, since only before the eyes of God can the human body remain naked and unclothed, and keep its splendor and its beauty intact.

When the Holy Father says, “the whole composition is deeply penetrated by a unique light and a single artistic logic: the light and logic of faith that the Church proclaims, confessing: ‘We believe in one God...maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen’” he means that seeing the human body, we can glimpse the unseen, namely, the real world, heaven and God himself. This is how the body works like the “red pill,” helping us enter the real world. Now maybe the next time you walk into the Sistine Chapel, you, too will know how Adam and Eve were able to look at each other in their nakedness, and feel no shame.

## **Body by Scriptures**

### **The body becomes a Scripture professor**

One of the great challenges of being a priest, but also a surprising blessing, is presiding at funerals. Before a funeral, I find it helpful to visit with the family to learn something about the deceased so I can speak personally about them during the homily. I don't want the funeral sermon to sound superficial, like Charlie Brown's teacher, who said, "Wah, wah, wah, wah." I love that the family is never shy about sharing stories of their loved one! But I invite the family to proceed somewhat systematically, that is, first I ask them to share something about the deceased person's "beginnings," his or her parents, siblings, schooling, and childhood activities. Then, I ask them about the "middle years" of their life: their employment, marriage, children, vacations and hobbies. Finally, if the person was lucky to live a long life, I like to learn something about their retirement, grandchildren, and even their final illness and death. It's only after I have glimpsed this panoramic view of the person's whole life – beginning, middle and end – that I feel I "know" who this person was. I truly believe that it's only at the end of our lives, looking back, that we will be able to see the reasons WHY everything happened and HOW everything fits together. The old maxim teaches: "hindsight is twenty-twenty."

Pope Saint John Paul II taught that in order to understand all humanity – to have "twenty-twenty vision" of the whole of mankind – all mankind, too, must be seen in a similar panoramic view, which also includes its beginnings, its middle and its end. That is, all of humanity – all people taken as a whole – has a recognizable "life-span," just like individual people do. Seeing this long life-span of humanity is what John Paul calls "the integral vision of man" (*Man and Woman*, 23). The pope says that we can also identify three rather distinct stages or epochs of humanity's life-span. The first epoch is found in the Garden of Eden, when God first created man and woman. As we've begun to see, the pope will zero in on the bodies of Adam and Eve which teach us not only about their life in Eden, but also about all humanity's roots in Eden. In other words, their "story" is our

“pre-history” – what the pope calls our “theological prehistory” (*Man and Woman*, 11:1). The pope claims: “Precisely this integral vision of man must be built from the ‘beginning’” (*Man and Woman*, 23:3). But we cannot linger long in Eden; we must turn to the second epoch, how man and woman “fall” through original sin and begin the “middle years,” the stuff of history books. But even that does not paint the full picture of the human person, we must also carefully consider man’s destiny after death. This third chapter is that “undiscovered country” that Hamlet heralded, that part of the tale that lies beyond the grave.

Pope John Paul II will explore each of these three epochs of humanity’s life-span inspired by a Scripture verse, which he will unpack and analyze with the help of the human body and its experiences. The body becomes our Scripture professor! Our pre-history – humanity’s childhood – will be seen in light of Gen. 2:25, which reads, “Both were naked, the man and his wife, but they did not feel shame.” Secondly, our history laden with sin – our middle years – will be seen from the perspective of Mt. 5:28, “Everyone who looks lustfully has already committed adultery.” And thirdly, our destiny – our eternal retirement – will be explored through the lens of Mt. 22:30, “In the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage.” In each case, the pope turns to the body as our teacher, who helps us penetrate profoundly into these passages, and teaches us things we’ll find hard to believe.

### Pre-history

Just like childhood is a magical time of innocence and joy for many people, so our “theological prehistory” in Eden is blessed with bliss and beatitude. The Holy Father exactly explores both the first and second chapters of Genesis, but he devotes special attention to Gen. 2:25, “Now both were naked, the man and his wife, but they did not feel shame.” As we’ve seen, of paramount importance to the pope are the bodies of Adam and Eve, which, even though they were naked, did not experience or feel shame. This

remarkable experience of the body (nakedness without shame) teaches us something unique about life in the Garden of Eden.

That lack of shame is extraordinary because it's the exact opposite of how we would feel if we were naked in front of someone else, especially a stranger – or at least that's how we should feel, unless you enjoy streaking across football fields in only a trench coat! Starting from our experience of feeling shame for our nakedness, the pope attempts to “reconstruct” – to go back in time and try to imagine – how Adam and Eve must have felt NOT experiencing shame, and he does this by contrasting their experience with ours. In other words, our experience would be like a “photo negative” of their experience: their life was the “high definition color version” while our life is like a “black and white version.” The pope describes Adam and Eve's lack of shame as “spiritualization.” He writes: “It is a different measure of ‘spiritualization’ that implies another composition of inner forces in man himself, another body-soul relation, as it were, other inner proportions between sensitivity, spirituality, and affectivity, that is, another degree of inner sensibility for the gifts of the Holy Spirit” (*Man and Woman*, 18:2).

Ponder this question for a moment: what would it feel like to be immune from temptations? Every person has a certain sin which he always crumble in front of. Catholic moral theology calls this a person's “predominant fault.” Perhaps you struggle with gluttony – eating or drinking to excess. Maybe your critical failure is vanity – obsessing about your appearance. It could be sexual sins – pornography, masturbation or promiscuity. Perhaps your downfall is pride – you have an over-inflated ego and hate to be corrected, and choke on the words, “I'm sorry.” It could be cowardice – you run away from conflict and danger. Or perhaps it's greed, or laziness, or envy and jealousy. Take your pick! Well, try to imagine for a moment being “immune” from all these temptations, and then you'll be able to imagine “spiritualization.” In other words, spiritualization is perfect harmony in the body-soul relationship, what the pope calls



“another composition of inner forces in man.” Adam and Eve could gaze upon each other’s naked bodies and feel no temptation, and therefore they felt no shame, no need to hide the body from the other’s lustful look. That’s where humanity began, where you and I have our roots, and there’s still an echo of that blessed beginning in every human heart. That’s what the pope wants us to “remember” and return to.

## History

We turn now to the “middle years” of humanity’s life-span, where the body-soul partnership is fractured, and these two “friends” now turn into “foes.” It’s almost as if we were two different people – a Jekyll and Hyde! – before and after original sin. The pope puts it precisely: “With original sin – the ‘man of concupiscence’ took the place of the ‘man of original innocence’” (*Man and Woman*, 28:1). The pope is careful not to blame the body as the cause of sin; rather, this disorder is rooted in our hearts, in our disordered desires. Sin happens in the heart before it’s enacted by the body.

John Paul II closely analyzes Mt. 5:28, “But I say to you, whoever looks at a woman to desire her has already committed adultery with her in his heart,” and arrives at an astounding conclusion. First, he argues that Jesus has “shifted the center of gravity of sin” (*Man and Woman*, 38:1) from the body to the heart, from an external act to an internal one (although external acts are obviously still important!). Then, the Holy Father notices that in the quotation from Matthew, Jesus does not specify WHICH woman the man should “not desire lustfully,” the implication being that all women – including one’s wife – are “off limits” from a man’s lustful gaze. And then pope-saint draws this staggering conclusion, he says: “Adultery ‘in the heart’ is not committed only because the man ‘looks’ in this way at a woman who is not his wife, but precisely because he looks in this way at a woman.” He continues, “Even if he were to look in this way at the woman who is his wife, he would commit the same adultery ‘in the heart’” (*Man and Woman*, 43:2). Because sin is in the heart before it’s in the body, the pope contends that it’s possible to commit “adultery” (understood as a lustful desire) with your own wife! That

is, you treat her as an object of lust. I dare any man now to say that he still cannot think of anything he needs to confess!

The pope also argues that our inner brokenness really leads to a lack of “spiritual power.” Remember how Adam and Eve’s inner wholeness gave them spiritual power? The pope writes: “[There is] a certain constitutive fracture in the human person’s interior, a break up, as it were, of man’s original and somatic unity. [Man] realizes for the first time that his body has ceased drawing on the power of the spirit, which raised him to the level of the image of God” (*Man and Woman*, 28:2). You see, sin fractures the harmony between the body and soul, and thereby also shatters the image of God in each person. Because we lack God’s image, we lack his power. Our hearts are like Humpty Dumpty, and we need a King to put us together again.

### Post-history

We turn now to the last chapter in the book of humanity’s life-span, beyond the confines of creation, our heavenly retirement. As usual, the pope proceeds with both the Bible and the body in hand, and our Scripture professor will reveal the hidden meanings of the Bible. The Holy Father contemplates Mt. 22:30, where Jesus says, “In the resurrection they take neither wife nor husband, but are like angels in heaven.” The pope describes heavenly bodies saying: “In the resurrection the body will return to perfect unity and harmony with the spirit: man will no longer experience the opposition between what is spiritual and what is bodily in him” (*Man and Woman*, 67:1). We’ll experience anew what Adam and Eve felt – the harmony and holiness of the body-soul relationship – in the Garden of Eden.

Heaven, however, will not simply be a re-run of the Garden of Eden, but something incomparably more. We will also experience not only “spiritualization” but also “divinization” – being filled with God’s own goodness and grace, God’s own life and love. The pope explains: “Participation in the divine nature, participation in the inner

life of God himself, penetration and permeation of what is essentially human by what is essentially divine, will then reach its peak, so that the life of the human spirit will reach a fullness that was absolutely inaccessible to it before” (*Man and Woman*, 67:3). And where does the Holy Father find a clue in creation for our heavenly bodies? He points to the celibate bodies of priests and nuns. The pope states: “One can say the choice of continence for the kingdom of heaven is a charismatic orientation (a grace-filled sign) toward that eschatological state in which human beings ‘take neither wife nor husband’” (*Man and Woman*, 73:4). Just as the pope considered the historical body’s experience of “shame” and “worked backward” to re-create Adam and Eve’s experience of “lack of shame,” so now the pope takes the experience of historical celibate men and women to “work forward” to guess what the experience of a heavenly body will be like.

Let me share my personal experience of celibacy. For me celibacy means being “spiritually married” to Jesus. This is something not only spiritual but also very serious. Many years ago, when people married they said that they “exchanged the rights of marriage.” Have you heard of that? The “right of marriage” is the “right” to the other person’s body. When you marry someone, you have the “right” to the other person’s body so that your spouse’s body “belongs” more to you than to your spouse. If you ask for her body – a euphemistic way to talk about asking for sex – she must give you her body. And vice versa, gentlemen!

Something similar happens for celibates, especially for us priests, because we “spiritually marry” Jesus, and we exchange the right to the body with him. For instance, if I were to wake up at 3 a.m. and go to the chapel and say Mass, that bread and wine on the altar would HAVE to become the Body and Blood of Jesus. You see, Jesus will not deny me his Body because he has given me “rights” over his Body. In a sense, the Lord’s Body “belongs” to me even more than it belongs to him! Think about that for a moment. But Jesus also has “rights” over MY body. So, if the hospital calls me at 3 a.m. to give the Anointing of the Sick to a dying patient, I cannot say “No, I’m too tired. Call

the assistant priest!” I have given Jesus “rights” over my body so that it is available 24/7 to care for the Church. My body belongs more to him than it does to me.

That sense of celibacy can give us a clue as to what we will experience in heaven in our bodies. Everyone will “exchange rights over their body” with Jesus. He will not deny you his Body, and you will not deny him your body. Jesus will belong to you, and you will belong to Jesus. In some mysterious, mystical way, Jesus will be the heavenly Bridegroom, and the whole Church will become the corporate Bride of Christ, and the two shall become one flesh. This is divinization. This is heaven. And earthly sex is a euphemistic way to talk about that!

Now you know what it feels like to attend one of my funeral Masses! But maybe I just sounded like Charlie Brown’s teacher! Like at a funeral, so today, I’ve tried to provide a panoramic glance of someone’s life, in this case, it was the life of all humanity. We must do this exercise if we want to know who man and woman are, not in partial measures, but in the full score of the human symphony, and to grasp “the integral vision of man.” Only then can we answer the most important questions: Who is man and woman? Who am I? What am I doing here on earth? Where did I come from? What is my destiny? Where will I find love, joy, and peace? Why are there suffering, pain and death? What is life all about? Only when you see all three epochs of humanity’s life-span, can you truly know who you are, and be able to answer these perplexing and perennial questions. Otherwise, you remain a mystery to yourself. Here’s your deepest identity: you were created in the image of God (especially in your body), you now carry a shattered image of God (which God’s grace is slowly restoring), and one day you will enjoy a glorified image of God. And all this we learn from the body in the Bible, because our body is the best Scripture professor!

## **Body by Erikson**

### **The body as a psychology professor**

Arguably the most precious but painful moment in life occurs when we take our first breath, namely, on the day we're born. Anyone who has witnessed the birth of a child is awe-struck seeing the miracle of life. New dads stumble and stagger out of the delivery room babbling incoherently, saying things like, "I can't believe it!" "That's the most amazing, miraculous thing I've ever seen!" Human words are woefully weak for the wonder of it all. But birth also comes at a painful price for both mother and baby. Both cry considerably throughout the process. A mother once told me that shortly after child-birth, a woman's body releases hormones that actually cause her to forget the pains of child-birth. I only believe that because it was NOT said by a man.

In this process of pregnancy and birth, the human body teaches us many things. We want to sort of "sit" at the feet of the tiny baby's feet in the womb, and listen attentively to our diminutive professor, and learn his lessons about life. The renowned psychologist, Erik Erikson, also learned remarkable lessons by paying close attention to the developing human body. He constructed the "nine stages of the life cycle" by following the body's psychosocial evolution throughout life. Erikson insisted that the body's own evolution was a key in overall human development: "The stages of life remain throughout 'linked' to somatic [bodily, physical] processes" (*The Life Cycle Completed*, 59). The body – from the womb all the way to the tomb – will be our "psychology professor" and Erikson will help us as his "teacher-aide."

#### The Bouncing Baby

We all know, of course, that human life begins at conception. All the basic genetic information necessary to make each unique and unrepeatable person is present in that fertilized egg, or the "zygote." The zygote evolves into the "embryo," and the embryo into the fetus. For a moment, consider these miraculous milestones along the

way in the womb: at just 6 weeks the heart and major blood vessels develop, at only 7 weeks the legs and arms appear, by 9 weeks bones and muscles form, the brain waves can be detected, and fingers and toes are defined. That means that by 9 weeks we can actually find the feet of our tiny professor and take our seat! At 10 weeks nearly all organs are formed, at 14 weeks the sex of the baby can be identified – even though the doctor is often wrong! – and the baby can also hear, at 16 weeks hair and eyelashes and eyebrows appear, at 24 weeks lungs are formed enough so that the baby can survive outside the womb. At 25 weeks the baby’s head turns downward toward the birth canal and gets ready for his or her debut.

But this tiny professor teaches us about more than the body’s evolution; it also has insights about how we relate to each other. During pregnancy mother and baby usually reach a kind of “cruising altitude” during the second trimester. By three months, both bodies have grown accustomed to and comfortable with each other. Not only are the two bodies “enmeshed” with each other, but so also are the two identities. The baby doesn’t even have a name yet, so how could it have its own identity? But because of the baby’s body’s explosive growth, that “status quo” is short-lived. For the well-being of both the mother and the baby, they must separate (birth) which causes great pain, anguish and tears. Notice that it is the body – the growing baby’s body – that demands this change, which eventually becomes a blessing for both on the day of the delivery. At birth, therefore, a particular stage of life ends, while a new one begins; an old “identity” is relinquished, while a new one waits to be discovered. I call this first stage of growth and development in the womb “The Bouncing Baby.”

The body in the womb teaches us that pregnancy and birth really establish a kind of “paradigm,” or “pattern” of growth, a paradigm that will “shift” but one that we will see repeated again and again throughout life. Erikson identified nine distinct stages of growth or “paradigm shifts.” William Shakespeare said there were seven, the so-called, “Seven Ages of Man” (*As You Like It*, II, 7). Don’t worry, I’ve boiled it down to just six,

namely, (1) the Bouncing Baby, (2) the School Boy/Girl, (3) the Swinging Single, (4) Married with Children, (5) the Elder Statesman, and (6) the Golden Oldies. The body actually “causes” the leap, or “paradigm shift,” from one stage to the next, and precisely through that leap the body “teaches” us. What does it teach us? It will show us that every “paradigm shift” brings with it the discovery of a new identity, but that always comes at a cost. For example, the body of the Bouncing Baby says in effect: “You cannot stay in the womb any longer; it’s time to leave. It will be painful for everyone. But in the process, you will gain a new identity, a beautiful new you, and everyone will be blessed. Just trust me.” One of the hardest things to do, as we’ll see, is to trust and believe what our bodies try to teach us.

### The School Boy/the School Girl

I call the second stage of development “the School Boy” or “the School Girl,” which lasts from birth to about the age of 18. As the baby develops after birth, the small child is profoundly aware – through his body – about his own smallness, his lack of knowledge, or ignorance, and his physical weakness and limitations. By contrast, when he beholds his parents – especially when he beholds their bodies – they appear to be “god-like”: they are strong, beautiful and all-knowing. Our parents look like Zeus and Athena. I recently returned to my elementary school in Little Rock, St. Theresa’s. I was shocked by the buildings and the classrooms, and especially the students’ seats. Do you know what surprised me? How small everything was! I felt like Gulliver who had traveled to the land of the Lilliputians! Of course that littleness was an illusion: the school had not shrunk, rather, I had grown. But when we’re small, we think “children’s sizes” are normal while adult sizes appear “god-like” and superhuman; this is part of the paradigm of the School Boy.

Because children see their parents as smart, beautiful and strong, they allow their parents to become “the architects” of their initial identities. Parents give their children their names (a profound gesture), they select what television programs are suitable, where

the family will live and where they will vacation, what school their children will attend, what friends they will have, what church they will attend, what they will wear every day, and what will be for dessert each night! By the way, if you are a child growing up in India, your parents even tell you who you are going to marry! That is, unless you're smart enough to become a priest! You see, to a child, all this seems quite natural and necessary because a child's body is helpless and completely dependent on his parents. Around the age of 10, the stage of the School Boy or School Girl reaches its "cruising altitude," you're comfortable with your parents' complete control over your life, and your body tells you that this is good, healthy and necessary. And it is.

But just like in the womb, the body taught us that this "status quo" had to change, so the body now teaches the School Boy and School Girl they cannot remain where they are. Welcome to puberty! The School Boy's body becomes physically stronger in adolescence, and sometimes even stronger than mom and dad! The teenager's mind learns quickly and deftly gathers information and experiences often baffling to his parents. At the same time, the youngster perceives that his parents are not quite god-like or as perfect as he once thought; they evince physical limitations, they aren't as attractive as before, and they grow forgetful and unable to advise him on modern dilemmas. Mark Twain quipped: "When I was 17, I thought my father was so ignorant that I could hardly stand to be around him. When I turned 21, I was amazed at how much he had learned in just 4 years!" Again, it was Mark Twain, the School Boy, who was changing dramatically, not his father. Seeing his body's abilities growing exponentially, the School Boy faces an identity crisis, and enters the paradigm shift. He must leave behind the old identity, and go in search of a new one.

As he's putting together the pieces of his new identity, who are the only two people the School Boy will never turn to for help? His own parents! Why? Since they were the "architects" of the old self, so naturally, any advice they might offer will seem suspect to him. He'll wonder, "Won't they simply suggest that I return to being the



School Boy again?” Here lies the culprit of so much of the turmoil and tribulation between parents and teenagers, the so-called “teenage angst.” Parents must accept that teenagers will not turn to them for advice and counsel – as they did previously – because to a teenager, that would be the same as telling a newborn baby to return to his mother’s womb! Parents will find this a very painful lesson because they have fallen from the heavens where they were perceived (maybe worshipped!) by their children as gods. But notice that it’s the teenager’s body that demands that he begin to relate to his parents through a new identity, not as the old School Boy.

### The Swinging Single

The first step of the Swinging Single is to question – and apparently to reject – every aspect of his current identity; he must kill the School Boy. He questions his parents, he argues with his siblings, he explores different religions or the possibility of no religion at all, he experiments with everything. His body, meanwhile, teaches him he is “bullet-proof,” his mind is virtually all-knowing, and his actions do not seem to have consequences. I distinctly remember thinking as an 18 year old, graduating from Catholic High School in Little Rock, “What could they possibly teach us in college? Surely it will just be re-hashing what we’ve already learned, because we’ve learned everything there is to know!” I didn’t think that in arrogance, but that was simply how I felt; and what my body was teaching me. Doesn’t every 18 year old feel the same?

No one symbolizes the Swing Single better than the conflicted character, Raskolnikov, in Dostoyevsky’s classic novel, *Crime and Punishment*. Raskolnikov is a college student who believes that he’s above all laws, social mores, and moral limits. Raskolnikov was convinced that all such boundaries were superficially imposed, and if you only had enough self-confidence, you would be able to discard these like yesterday’s newspaper. One day Raskolnikov puts his theory to the test by killing an elderly pawn-broker, named Alyona Ivanovna, with an axe, as well as a young girl who inadvertently walked in during the murder. (I’ve always believed that killing was

symbolic for Raskolnikov killing his old identity.) For good measure, Raskolnikov also steals some of the lady's jewelry. Raskolnikov perpetrated the crime not out of necessity, but merely to prove that society's standards don't apply to him. Eventually, however, Raskolnikov's conscience cries out louder and louder about his crime, and his guilt becomes intolerable, and he falls physically ill. In a dramatic scene, he kneels down in the middle of a busy intersection and confesses his crime aloud for everyone to hear. Raskolnikov receives a sentence of 8 years of hard labor in Siberia. That wasn't his ultimate fate. Through the love of a devout Christian woman, named Sonya, who faithfully visits him in Siberia, he begins his regeneration and redemption, and the paradigm shift into a new identity.

This is why we experience "falling in love" as an overwhelming euphoria; almost an irresistible force. The love we feel in our bodies needs to be that intense in order to inspire us to make the leap from the Swinging Single to being "Married with Children."

### Married with Children

The stage of Married with Children, which typically extends from ages 30-45, also requires adapting to a new identity. As a symbol of this new identity, in many countries like India, men grow facial hair – a beard or mustache – to signify that they have entered a new phase of life. This holds true also for clergy after they are ordained. I remember when I grew a beard while I was in Washington D.C. studying canon law. It was so thick and covered most of my face that my friends started calling me, "Hezbollah." That's not what you want people calling you in the capital of the United States. I quickly learned that a Roman collar works just fine as a symbol for my priestly identity. Marriage also brings a new identity. The woman takes on the name of her husband, and loses her "maiden name." But the man also adapts to a new identity because he gets a new boss! But how does the body of the spouse also teach them about their new identity?

We all know that marriage is consummated by sexual intercourse, where two bodies literally become one. That “oneness” of your body with your spouse’s body indicates a deeper oneness of your spirits and identities. Jesus points to this new identity and oneness of persons in marriage when he says, “So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together no human being should separate” (Mt. 19:6). Scott Hahn half-jokingly said: “The love between a husband and wife is so real that nine months later you have to give it a name; they have a baby!” Nowhere do spouses become more “one” than in the bodies of their children: each child is 50% mom and 50% dad (23 chromosomes from each parent). The two have indeed “become one flesh,” in the flesh of each child!

Married with Children also comes at a cost, with tears, anguish and even pain. What father who walks down the aisle of a church to “give away” his daughter in marriage has not shed a few tears and felt anguish and uncertainty for her future? What mother-in-law has not wondered if her son’s new wife would be able to care for him as well as she does? But spouses, too, make sacrifices to obtain this new identity: they relinquish their freedom and independence; they concede power to another person over their future. All this is necessary to kill the “Swinging Single.” Again, it is the body of the spouses that makes this truth visible. But this stage, too, will pass.

### The Elder Statesman

I call the fifth stage “the Elder Statesman,” which extends from age 45 to 65. By the early forties, the body has reached the peak of its growth and begins to decline. People, especially men, experience the so-called “mid-life crisis.” I believe this is a very real and profound crisis that men face, and it shakes them to their core. Deep within him, each man feels the body whispering to him, “You will die.” Erik and Joan Erikson described how the possibility of death surprised them. Joan wrote: “It had never

felt as though the end of the road were here and now. We had still taken [the] years ahead for granted...[but] the vistas changed; the view ahead became limited and unclear. Death's door, which we always knew was expectable but had taken in stride, now seemed just down the block" (*The Life Cycle Completed*, 4). Deep in their bones, men feel that they will eventually die, they are no longer "bullet-proof." They face one of two options.

Some men simply deny that the body is slowing down, and they "pretend" to be as virile and robust as they were in their twenties and thirties. In order to prove this to the world (and to themselves) they make poor choices: some men divorce their wives and marry younger women (the so-called "trophy wife"), others buy a sports car, yet others obsess over their appearance and sexual stamina. They reject what the body is teaching them, and essentially accuse our professor of being a "liar." But just like the Bouncing Baby cannot remain in the womb, and the School Boy cannot stay naïve, and the Swinging Single must enter marriage, so, too, those who are "Married with Children," must come to terms with the possibility of death and leap forward into a new identity.

When we humbly listen and learn from our bodies and embrace the inevitability of death, we shift to the new paradigm of "the Elder Statesman." The Elder Statesman uses the wisdom he or she has gathered along the way of life and shares it with others. They do this in a variety of ways and in countless settings. Elder Statesmen find themselves in charge of organizations, companies, churches and families (as grandparents!), and they try to lead these groups into the future. They see that that the former Elder Statesmen who held these honorable roles have died. I'll never forget when this dawned on Archbishop Peter Sartain. Archbishop Sartain, while he was still bishop of Little Rock, mentioned this brief episode in a daily Mass homily. Shortly after Bishop Sartain became the Bishop of Little Rock, Arkansas, he was talking with another priest-friend of his. They were discussing how their lives had changed and how God had led them to this point. Bishop Sartain commented to his friend, "You know, if you look around, we're

the ones in charge of things now!” The Elder Statesman feels a responsibility not only for himself, and not only for others, but in a unique sense, also for the future of the world. The Elder Statesmen ask questions about his legacy: what will be written on my tombstone? What have I done for others? What will people remember about me after I die? The body teaches us that our time on earth is limited, and forces us to ask, “What is the best use I can make of the time that remains?”

### The Golden Oldies

The last stage I call the “Golden Oldies,” from about age 65 until we pass away. The body’s limitations become acutely pronounced: lack of memory, reduced mobility, impaired vision and hearing, retirement from a job, relinquishing a driver’s license. All these bodily signs remind us we’re not long for this world, death is not only real but imminent. Once again, we must learn to let go of the previous identity and shift to a new paradigm, a new identity. This isn’t without pain and anguish, however. How many elderly are left in nursing homes or assisted care facilities without visitors? How many grandparents wait for their children and grandchildren to visit to no avail? And all weep at the final farewell of the funeral, even when the person has lived a “full and fruitful life.” The leap from one stage to the next is never painless.

How do we learn what our professor has to teach us at this final step of life, how can you make your “oldies” truly “golden”? Listen and learn what your body has been teaching you throughout life, namely, “transcendence.” Transcendence is an experience of moving “above and beyond,” which is what happens at every paradigm shift: we move beyond our former identity. The “gold” of our older years is to grasp the basic message our bodies have always taught us. In the final paradigm shift, we must move beyond this life, beyond time and space, into eternity. The body always helps us make the leap from one stage to the next, and in this final stage the body’s own deterioration prepares us for the leap to “transcendence.” Joan Erikson argues that the golden oldies do not need to be a morbid and depressing experience. She slightly modifies the word “transcendence,”

into “transcend-dance” and injects it with new meaning. She writes: “With great satisfaction I have found that ‘transcendence’ becomes very much alive if it is activated into ‘*transcen-dance*,’ which speaks to soul and body and challenges us to rise above the dystonic, clinging aspects of our worldly existence that burden and distract us from true growth and aspiration” (*The Life Cycle Completed*, 127).

How do we leap to transcend-dance? As Catholics, many elderly begin to attend daily Mass, some people go on pilgrimages to Rome and the Holy Land, others attend retreats and missions (like this one!), we cherish family and friends like never before. Joan Erikson again: “[In old age] love, devotion and friendships bloom; sadness is tender and enriching; the beauty of relationships is deeply heart-warming. Looking back is engagingly memorable; the present is natural and full of little pleasures, immense joys and much laughter” (*The Life Cycle Completed*, 9). I can hardly wait!

Jesus explained to Nicodemus, that curious Pharisee, we must be “born from above” (Jn. 3: 3) in order to enter the Kingdom of God. Isn’t this the same lesson that our psychology professor, the body, has been teaching us throughout life, in each paradigm shift, that we must be born again and again until we are born from above? At each step of the life cycle we experience a new birth, a new identity. Our body has been teaching us, subtly but insistently, that we were not meant to be here on earth forever, but to transcend this world and leap into eternity. God made our bodies to teach us to long for our homeland of heaven. Our body’s main message: “Just trust me.”

# **Body by Sacraments**

## **The body as a spiritual director**

I have a habit of wearing my priestly collar almost all the time. When I was ordained my mother gave me a little advice, she said, “Son, always wear your collar. It will keep you out of trouble.” Mothers know their sons better than they know themselves. Here’s an example of the “trouble,” I suppose, my mother hoped I would avoid. A priest-friend of mine was on vacation with a married couple. My friend does NOT wear his collar on vacation. They went to dinner early and the three of them were seated at the bar, virtually the only people in the restaurant. A lady nearby was playing the piano, while my priest-friend was staring absent-mindedly at her. Annoyed by his vacant stare, the lady suddenly said, “Hey, look. Too bad if you don’t like the music. This is like sex: you only get out of it what you put into it!” Unperturbed, my priest-friend leaned over to his hosts and whispered, “Do you think I should tell her I’m the only virgin in this room?” People don’t say that to you when you wear your collar.

I would like to suggest that this “truism” also applies to the sacraments, that is, we will only get out of the sacraments what we put into the sacraments. Just like much about sex depends on our bodies, so too, much of the sacraments depends on our bodies. You could say that the sacraments were made for the human body and the human body was made for the sacraments. They were made for each other. Just think of the critical role the body plays in each sacrament. The body is bathed with baptismal water; the body is anointed with chrism in Confirmation, the body consumes Christ in Holy Communion, the body confesses sins with its lips, two bodies become one in marriage, the male body is ordained as a priest, and the body is blessed with holy oil in the sacrament of the sick. If you didn’t have a body, you could not receive the sacraments! Think about this. Angels cannot be ordained as priests and we don’t baptize your dog or your cat. The human body is a critical component to receive the sacraments. This is why the more of our bodies we put into the sacraments, the more we’ll get out of the

sacraments. Let us once again take our seat at the “feet of our feet,” and listen to what the body teaches us about the sacraments, this time as our “spiritual director.” Spiritual directors help people expand their capacity for Christ, and the body does that admirably.

Just so you don’t think comparing sacraments to sex is wild speculation on my part, Pope John Paul II invites us to see a similar parallel, between marriage and the other sacraments. He explains that marriage contains the “basic pattern” or “blue print” of every other sacrament. The pope writes, “The visible sign of marriage [that is, the love between husband and wife]...transposes the eternal plan of love into the ‘historical dimension’ and makes it the foundation of the whole sacramental order” (*Man and Woman*, 95:7). In other words, the best way to see and sense God’s eternal, heavenly love in the earthly here-and-now is through the sacraments understood as the love of spouses. Jesus loves us first and foremost in the seven sacraments, and the best way to understand his sacramental love is as the love of a husband. The pope says Jesus loves us in “the spousal way” (*Man and Woman*, 90:6). But we can only understand that “spousal love” (and have a capacity to receive that love) because we have a body. The body was made for the sacraments and the sacraments were made for the body. The more of the body we put into the sacraments, the more of God’s grace we’ll get out of the sacraments.

Let’s consider just three of the sacraments, and learn how our spiritual director increases our capacity for Christ. We’ll look at baptism, Eucharist and Holy Orders. If we learn what the body has to teach us, we will not only appreciate the sacraments as the spousal love of Christ, but we’ll be able to put more of ourselves into the sacraments and thereby get more grace out of each of the sacraments.

### Baptism

Catholics have the curious custom of baptizing their babies, a custom not shared by most Protestants. Why? A lot of things happen at baptism, but one essential “effect” (or sacramental grace) of baptism is to incorporate the baby into the Church, the Spouse



of Christ. The baby becomes part of the Bride (Christ's Spouse) so that Jesus can start loving that child in "the spousal way." I don't want this to sound offensive or disparaging, but Jesus does *not* love those who are *not* baptized in the same spousal way, although he does love them. You love your neighbor's wife as a friend and as a neighbor. But you do not love her in the "spousal way" that you love your own wife! That's the profound difference that baptism makes: we become part of the Church, Jesus' Spouse. The sooner we baptize our babies, the sooner we start to feel Christ's spousal love for us. But notice it's the baby's *body* bathed in baptismal waters that's the critical component to increase its capacity for Christ's love.

When I perform a baptism, I've noticed that some parents dress their babies in baptismal gowns that are several sizes too big for them! Have you noticed that? The baby is swimming in the gown! A mother explained why, saying, "The baptismal gown is supposed to be like a wedding dress, which traditionally has a long train, and that's why the baptismal gown is so big." Every baptized baby dressed in that long gown is really a mini-bride; he or she is becoming part of the Bride of Christ, the Spouse of Jesus. Another mother shared with me that the material used to make the baptismal gown should be taken from the bride's (the baby's mother's) wedding dress. After the wedding, the long train is cut and sewn into the baptismal gowns for the babies. These customs and practices remind us that Jesus loves us in a "spousal way," even when we're tiny babies. Catholic baptize babies because we don't want them to wait to feel that spousal love of Christ. The more of their bodies they put into the sacraments, the more grace they are able to get out of the sacraments.

### Eucharist

The Eucharist, or Holy Communion, most explicitly evokes "the spousal way" that Jesus loves the Church. Pope John Paul II wrote, "The Eucharist...is the Sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride." And later said the Eucharist is where "Christ is united with his Body [the Church] as the bridegroom with the bride" (*Mulieres*

*Dignitatem*, 26). Catholics insist that the Eucharist is not symbolic, merely bread and wine signifying Jesus, but the Real Presence of Jesus. Only if we really and truly believe that can Jesus' Body and Blood are present at Mass can we become "one body" with him. As Catholics mature in their faith, their desire for communion with Christ grows and deepens, and people begin to attend Mass not only on Sundays but during the week. One man who attends daily Mass said to me with tears in his eyes, "Father, I would die if I didn't receive Holy Communion." He was exaggerating, but rather expressing the depth of his faith and love for Jesus. His capacity for Christ's love was enormous! The more of our bodies we put into the sacraments, the more grace we'll get out of the sacraments.

I have a pet peeve at first Holy Communion Mass. I forbid families to take pictures at the very moment that their children receive their first Holy Communion. Parents hate me. I explain that what's really happening at that moment is that their son or daughter is becoming "one body" with Jesus for the first time, and they shouldn't worry about smiling for the camera. The only earthly parallel to the moment of first Holy Communion is the moment you consummated your marriage on your wedding night: when newlyweds become one flesh. I hope you didn't take pictures! Some moments in life are too sacred to capture on film, and if you tried, you'd miss the moment, or worse, you'd cheapen the moment. In fact, you'll be able to see better what's going on at first Holy Communion Mass with your eyes *closed* than with your eyes open; that is, using your eyes of faith. Isn't this why people close their eyes when they kiss? They experience more love with their eyes closed. The Eucharist is the preeminent way that Jesus demonstrates his love in "the spousal way," because he becomes one flesh with us. Each time we receive Holy Communion our bodies increase our capacity for Christ's love.

Holy Orders

Probably the most controversial of the seven sacraments these days is Holy Orders, especially since only men are allowed to be ordained as priests. Gallons of ink have been spilt on this subject. Let me point out two such writings. In 1948 C. S. Lewis wrote an essay called “Priestesses in the Church?” He was an Anglican and this possibility was being raised at the highest levels of the Church of England. At that time, Lewis wrote, “I am, indeed, informed that such a proposal is very unlikely to be seriously considered by the authorities.” Little did Lewis know that by the next century, the Anglican Church would ordain women bishops. In 1994, John Paul II declared that the Catholic Church, “has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women, and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful” (*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, 4). While these writing persuade me, I doubt such writings will curb the conversation or the controversy.

Both Lewis and John Paul argue that what’s at the heart of Holy Orders is the same thing that’s at the heart of the whole sacramental system, namely, the spousal love of Christ. Both men maintain emphatically that Jesus is the Bridegroom and the Church is the Bride, and that maleness and femaleness are not merely a matter of metaphor or imagery, but rooted in the reality of creation. To inter-change maleness and femaleness would be to change everything. In literature we can mix metaphors and we can employ a wide range of imagery to drive home our point, but we don’t have that luxury when it comes to matters of faith. Lewis explains, “One of the ends for which sex was created was to symbolize to us the hidden things of God. One of the functions of human marriage is to express the nature of the union between Christ and the Church.” In other words, only a man can truly represent Christ as Bridegroom and symbolize “the spousal way” that Jesus loves his Bride, the Church, because Jesus’ maleness is not accidental but essential to his spousal identity.

This requires taking the human body seriously, and accepting that it’s created by God as male and female for a specific purpose, namely, a sacramental purpose. We do

not have the liberty to modify that divine design. The pope asserted, “The fact that theology also includes the body should not astonish or surprise anyone who is conscious of the mystery and reality of the Incarnation. Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology...I would say, through the main door” (*Man and Woman*, 23:4). Only by taking on a human body – specifically a male body – could Jesus love us in “the spousal way.” If we reject this fundamental teaching of the Incarnation, rooted in the reality of the human body, we constrict and curtail our capacity for Christ’s love. We don’t put much of our bodies into the sacraments and so we do not get much grace out of the sacraments.

It becomes rather easy to see how to apply Jesus’ spousal love to the other sacraments as well. *Confession* requires the use of our lips and voices as we vocally declare our sins to Christ’s representative, the priest. Christ loves us with his merciful love. *Confirmation* involves being anointed with the oil of sacred Chrism on the forehead as the gifts of the Holy Spirit are imparted. More than any other sacrament, *marriage* symbolizes the spousal love between Jesus and his Spouse, the Church; hence marriage can only be between one man and one woman for life because Christ’s love for us is unconditional and unending. And the *anointing of the sick* imparts Christ’s tender love during serious illness as the body is anointed on the forehead and palms of the hands imparting Christ’s peace. In each and every case, the critical component is the body. The more of the body we put into the sacraments, the more of God’s grace we get out of the sacraments.

As any good spiritual director would do, the body not only teaches us how to open ourselves to goodness and grace but also how to fight against and flee from evil. Rejecting Christ’s spousal love does not leave us in a spiritually “neutral position.” Without Jesus, we open ourselves to the attacks of the Evil One. C. S. Lewis concluded his essay on the possibility of “priestesses” with a warning if we ignore what our bodies teach us. He wrote: “With the Church...we are dealing with male and female

not merely as facts of nature but as the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge. Or rather, we are not dealing with them but (as we shall soon learn if we meddle) they are dealing with us.”

# **Body not Birds and Bees**

## **The body as teacher for teens**

I have a brother with four children and a sister with five children. Whenever I visit them, I enjoy their company immensely, but I'm also very happy to leave. Sometimes, the small children yell and scream and throw fits, meanwhile, I just think to myself: "Man, I can't wait to get home, put up my feet, enjoy a cold beer and watch Sportscenter!" Visiting my siblings has been very reaffirming for my priestly vocation. Something else I thought I would not have to worry about as a priest was giving the talk euphemistically called "The birds and the bees" to my kids. I wasn't so lucky.

Several years ago my brother was in Germany for a business trip and he called wanting to talk to me urgently. He had heard that the next door neighbor had been arrested for soliciting a minor for sex and he wanted me to talk to his son, who was about thirteen years old, and explain what sex was all about. I replied, "Wait a minute! This is the whole reason I became a priest: so I wouldn't have to do this kind of thing!" I only signed up for the beer and Sportscenter! Fortunately, I'd given a few talks on the Theology of the Body and could use that for context. Here's what I told my nephew, and maybe it will serve as a blue-print if you find yourself in a similar bind.

Before diving right into the material of buzzing around with the birds and the bees, it's important to get in the right frame of mind. You should remember three key things as you talk to your kids. First, speak with calm and confidence, and use proper anatomical terms, not pet terms like our parents often did. You are sharing the good news about something holy, not bad news about something dirty. Hopefully, studying the theology of the body has helped you see how sacred sex is. Second, avoid using scare tactics to discuss human sexuality, such as the horror of sexually transmitted diseases, or running the risk of pregnancy, etc. Fear tactics are poor means of motivation. Third, do

not compare human sexuality with animal copulation; that is, begin with the Bible and not with biology. The love of a husband and wife in sexual intimacy is something God-like (therefore Biblical), not something animal-like (therefore biological), although it has some of those characteristics. Love is God-like, while lust is animal-like. Let's go back to our analogy with the movie The Matrix. If we choose to think our bodies are really like animal bodies then we've taken the "blue pill" and live in the world of illusion and falsehood; we fail to see things as they truly are. The theology of the body, on the other hand, is the "red pill" of reality because it allows us to see the truth about human sexuality.

**Genesis 2:18, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'."**

Who did God create to be Adam's partner and friend? It was a woman, "Eve." Notice that no animal was a suitable partner for him, even though Adam had "tested" to see if any animals could be his partner. We are NOT like the animals and they are not meant to "complete us." Up until now, you've looked at girls as "friends." But now you'll begin to feel in your body a special attraction to girls in a way like never before. This deeper attraction, this gravitational pull between a man and a woman, is the beginning of love; a part of God's plan for your happiness. That's what Genesis 2:18 means that man was not meant to be alone. This feeling to know girls more intimately brought your parents together (a long time ago!) and ultimately led to their marriage. So, the first thing to recognize about these feelings of mutual attraction is they are designed by God (not merely biological or instinctual), they are good and even godly. God planted these feelings in your heart so that you would be more like him.

**Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two shall become one flesh."**

Adam (and every man since him) felt a deep desire to be together with Eve, and this desire for a woman is the beginning of “love.” This desire is felt in many different ways: to want to hold hands, to want to kiss her, etc. BUT this love is at its best when it’s a desire to serve her, to make her happy, to protect and provide for her. Perhaps you’ve felt this desire; it will feel like a “push” inside of you to get closer to a girl, you will feel attracted to girls in a whole new way.

This love has highs and lows. It is at its highest when your desire for the other person makes you want to be a “gift” for the other person, that is, to serve them and make them happy. It is at its lowest when you “use” another person for your selfish gratification. That’s the difference between love and lust: love is so high it makes you like God, while lust is so low that it makes you lower than the animals.

One day you will love a girl so much that you will want to spend the rest of your life with her, and make her your wife. It is from this kind of love – a love which lasts your whole life – that children come. YOU came from this life-long love of your mom and dad. When two people marry, they become a mirror of God’s love, which is always life-long and fruitful. Your mom and dad’s love is sacred and holy because it reflects God’s love. That’s why the fourth commandment says, “Honor your mother and your father.” In honoring their love, you honor God’s love which is reflected in them.

**Exodus 34: 34-35, Whenever Moses entered the presence of the LORD to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out again. On coming out, he would tell the Israelites all that he had been commanded. Then the Israelites would see that the skin of Moses’ face was radiant; so he would again put the veil over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.**

As I said, a husband and wife show love in many ways, holding hands, a warm hug, giving kisses, words like “darling,” “honey pie,” “sweetie,” and even in how they argue! Only people who are honest with each other can love each other truly; that



honesty looks like arguing sometimes. But there is a very unique expression of love between married people called “sexual intercourse.” I will explain exactly what sexual intercourse is, but first you should remember it is something sacred and holy.

One way we show respect for holy things is by covering them. In some churches a veil covers the tabernacle because it is a sacred object where the Blessed Sacrament is placed. Nuns wear a veil as a sign of their consecration. Women used to cover their heads in church because they are holy; but men did not because we’re not as holy as women! In the Old Testament no one could see the face of God and live – his holiness was so brilliant and blinding it had to be covered up before human eyes. That’s why after talking with God, Moses face shown with the same divine holiness, and the people begged him to cover it up with a veil! We cover our sexual organs because they are sacred, not because they are dirty.

The bodies of boys are different than the bodies of girls. This difference was created by God so that a husband could show his love for his wife, and their love could be God-like. The man has a sexual organ called a “penis,” while the woman has a sexual organ called a “vagina.” These two organs were made for each other; they are “complimentary” because they complete each other. In other words, a husband shows his love for his wife by putting his penis inside his wife’s vagina. Through the union of their two bodies, the man produces a sticky liquid called “semen” which remains inside the woman’s body. Sometimes, this semen reaches something inside the woman called an “egg” – think of an Easter egg that brings new life! – and causes conception, the beginning of a new human being. This, my friend, is where you came from! YOU are the fruit of the God-like love of your mother and father. That is not only your “beginning” in time (on the day of your conception), but that moment is also the sacred ground in which are plunged the roots of your dignity as a human person: you are the fruit of God-like love. Each human person is conceived in the image and likeness of God.

**Exodus 3: 2, 5 “There an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in fire flaming out of the bush...God said, ‘Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground’.”**

Now, you should always remember three things about sexual intercourse. First, the husband and wife experience a sensation extremely intense, euphoric and pleasurable; it is far greater than anything you’ve ever felt before. It’s better than the taste of any hamburger or pizza, or the excitement of a rollercoaster ride, or the elation of winning the state basketball championship, or any other pleasure. It is such a powerful feeling, that you’ll find it hard to control at times. It may even feel like you are controlled by it. But to be a Christian and a man is to learn to harness that power. Fr. George Tribou, who was the principal of Catholic High School, taught us the best definition of a man. He said, “A man is he who controls the animal within which he lives.” Only if you learn to control this powerful pleasure will you be a man.

Second, because sex is sacred, it is only for husbands and wives, not for anyone else. So, when you see people engage in sexual intercourse on T.V. or in movies, realize that is very wrong. They are treating something holy as if it were something off the streets. They are approaching the burning bush that Moses saw, and instead of keeping their distance like he did, they run up and cook marshmallows and hotdogs on it! To use a sacred object for a profane purpose is called “desecration.” This is why sexual intercourse outside of marriage is a mortal sin; it is desecrating something holy.

And third, sexual intercourse should be one of the highest expressions of love between a husband and a wife. In other words, it should not something selfish (for my own pleasure) but something to make the other person happy. Love that becomes a gift to the other person is God-like; love that seeks selfish pleasure is animal-like, indeed it is below the dignity of the animals.

**Conclusion**

Son, as you grow through your adolescent years and become an adult, you'll have more and more curiosity and questions about sex. Look for answers in the right place; don't believe what everyone tells you. Your friends will talk about it, your teachers will say things about it in biology and anatomy class, you will hear things on the T.V. and the internet, and even from doctors. Sometimes they will be right, but sometimes they will be wrong. But the fact is that sexual intercourse is sacred, and so the only way to learn what it's really about is by reading the Bible and listening to the Church.

Parents rightfully enjoy lots of "firsts" with their children: taking them to their first baseball game, teaching them how to tie their shoes, explaining to them why the sky is blue and why some people's belly buttons are "innies" and others have "outies." These "firsts" are both a parent's right, but also their responsibility; they should not allow others to rob them of this privilege. Parents should also be the first to teach their children about sexual intercourse: it is a parent's right and their duty. Once you understand the theology of the body, the "Birds and the Bees" talk should not be something you fear to discuss, but something you look forward to sharing with your children. It is indeed the "good news."