

THE BODY IS NOT FOR IMMORALITY

On most Saturday mornings, Deacon Jones conducts a session with some fathers of families in our parish. Awhile back they were talking about the Internet and the problem of monitoring what their children are watching on the Internet or on cable networks not only at home but when they are in the homes of others. There is whole attitude of alertness necessary as well as having to be on constant guard about their own use of the Internet. I remember being online once and as I came to a particular web page there was an advertisement for a well known magazine, not in the pornography line, but with the picture of a well-known actress on the cover. She had no clothes on but her arms and legs were strategically placed to cover herself. The banner for the magazine read: “So and so reveals all!”

The come on, of course, was to buy the magazine and page through to see how much of the actress’ body had actually been revealed. Well, she may have revealed some parts of her body that are normally covered but even without any clothes I hardly think that she was revealing “all” of herself. But that is how our culture thinks all too often. If the body is completely exposed then I have revealed all. Our faith, though, tells us that there is so much more to us than our naked bodies. Not that our bodies are bad. They are not. They are good. They are given by God. We could do none of the good we do without them. And we will have a body forever—a glorified body in the kingdom of God for all eternity, but a body nonetheless.

But our bodies are to be respected. Taking off all your clothes and allowing others to photograph you and then allow these pictures to be widely distributed for all to gawk at is hardly a sign of how much this particular person respects who he or she is and the body they have been given. To notice the attractiveness of another person, or their physical beauty, is not a bad thing. It is a good thing, a godly thing, perhaps even a necessary thing. However, we sin when we mentally turn that person into an object, an object of my fantasy, an object of my desire so that I might enjoy sexual pleasure without a further thought that this is a PERSON, not some BEAUTIFUL THING to excite me. Thus, something which is good in and of itself becomes disrespected and abused by the wrong mindset and mental attitude. Not that we set out to see the other in this way but that is what can so easily happen if we do not guard how we view people.

We have to learn how to make some distinctions about what is good and at the same time maybe not good for me. I have to use that line in my own life every single day. I have to remind myself. “I am not going there. There is nothing beneficial for me there. There is nothing good for me down that path. Leering at the naked body of

another—even if they want to show their body—is not a respectful act, either to them or to myself.

We have to learn to recognize the “triggers” in our lives that mark the beginning of embarking on the wrong path, a path that is harmful to me or another, a path that leads to shame and disrespect to me and to my own body. This is especially so when the person or situation is particularly enticing or attractive. Sexuality is a good thing. It is a gift of God to each person. But it only unites and gives life when it is used in the way God intended and designed. It does neither of those things when it is used inappropriately. And the choice can come upon us at any time, no matter what we are doing. Being watchful and mindful means that sometimes we just have to turn the page, sometimes we have to put the magazine away, sometimes we have to go to another web page, sometimes we have to turn to another channel, sometimes we have to turn off the set, sometimes we just have to choose not to look.

And why do we do this? Because the values of Jesus Christ counsel us to do so. His way is all about respect and avoiding those things that disrespect another or myself. We must learn to recognize what is a gospel value and teach that to our children. When they ask why they can’t do something we have to reply that the thing they want to do is not a gospel value and we are trying to live the gospel values of Jesus Christ. This means that we are fine when our sexuality is expressed between husband and wife in an exclusive relationship of fidelity and openness to the possibility of life. We have to recognize these limitations precisely because our bodies are good and sex is good but both need some protections or they will be misused and sometimes even destroyed or do much harm.

In the gospel today Jesus asks a question of his apostles-to-be. “What are you looking for?” That question can be open ended or it can apply even to the area of our sexuality. “In the expression of your sexuality, what are you looking for?” This question is followed by another, in turn. In the area of your sexuality, have you mastered your sexual urges or have they mastered you? Addiction—or freedom? Christ is always and only about freedom. That does not mean freedom without restraint. It means true and genuine freedom.

Listen again to today’s second reading:
The body is not for immorality but for the Lord.
Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ (part of the Body of Christ)?
Every other sin a person commits is outside the body but the immoral person sins against his own body.
Glorify God—in your body.

Not so easy perhaps but really good counsel. Where else will you hear such a truth as this except here?