

SESSION 1.5 – The Sexual Self

Objectives:

- To make the participants appreciate the meaning of their sexuality
- To help the participants affirm their own sexuality and not deny it
- To make them aware of the need to respect boundaries in intimate relationships with each other

Introduction:

“Human sexuality” is far more than “sex” (popularly used to refer to sexual intercourse), although it includes that. Sexuality cannot be reduced to certain acts, urges, or drives. It is an aspect of who we are as human beings, whether or not we engage in activity that is considered “sexual.” Our sexuality is our way of living in the world as male and female persons. We are bodies created by God, sensual human beings who yearn for relationships with others. Physiological, genetic, spiritual, emotional, social, economic, political, and cultural factors are interwoven in our sexuality and what it means to us. Sexuality can involve intimacy and warmth, erotic energy and creativity, sensuality and pleasure, as well as procreation. Our sexuality plays an important role in our life-long experience as human beings in relationship with one another. This session deals with the sexual aspect of our being.

Scripture Passage: Mark 10:2-16

²Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” ⁵But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

¹³People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Discussion Questions:

1. While acknowledging that divorce does take place, Jesus affirms marriage. What aspects of sexuality can you draw out from this?
2. Why do you think the passage of the blessing of the children is part of this passage from Mark's gospel?
3. As a result of our unique sexuality, relationships take on a different meaning. How can we affirm our sexuality without adversely affecting our relationship with one another? (How can a married woman get into an intimate relationship with a man without it being construed otherwise?)
4. Why do you think we need boundaries in our sexuality? What criteria can we use to set the limits of our boundaries in intimate relationships without denying our sexuality? (When you feel close with someone, and urges arise, how should you handle it?)
5. How can we help those who 'abuse' their sexuality? (How can we help someone who flaunt his/her sexuality and flout boundaries when it comes to intimacy? i.e. a woman flirting with a married man, a man preying on young girls)

Reflection: Love and Sexuality

Some people describe sexuality as a language of love, a force that draws people out of themselves toward others. It is also a fundamental aspect of an individual's personality or identity. Sexuality - maleness and femaleness - is not something that we have, but something that we are. It is one of God's gifts of creation and involves the whole person: body and spirit.

At birth, one of the first questions people ask is: "Is it a girl or boy?" As children grow up they begin to learn about their sexuality. There is biological information: the differences between the sexes, the conception and development of new human life, and sexual maturation during puberty. Knowing these facts, however, is only a small part of understanding sexuality. What does it mean to be female, and behave as a female? To be male, and behave as a male? How are males and females supposed to relate to each other? How are sexual feelings to be handled? What is the difference between love and sex? Between intimacy and sex?

At the very beginning of the Old Testament we are told that males and females are made for each other. In the plan of God, their relationship is to be a deeply intimate partnership. Their love for each other is to be so strong and generous that it will literally overflow into new life. Within marriage, sexual intercourse is a unique sign of that love - a symbol of the unity, faithfulness, openness, trust, and mutual acceptance of husband and wife. Their children will be born into a family that is prepared to love generously and unconditionally and to create a home that is secure and nurturing.

Many of you will find this description of married love idealistic and out of touch with the world today. Some of you, from what you see around you, may believe that it is impossible to live out this Christian vision of sexuality and marriage. It is certainly easy to find people who have tried and failed, or who have rejected the vision altogether. Because our society offers confusing

messages about sexuality and marriage, it is easy to become indifferent to, or even scornful of, Christian values. To many, they seem old-fashioned and unrealistic. Some suggest that God's plan for sexuality should be changed since so many people don't seem to be living up to it.

But none of us is free to rewrite this plan. We cannot make ourselves into a new kind of creation, fashioned according to whatever seems to be easiest or suits the largest number of people. We are God's creatures, and our happiness can be found only by following God's plan for us.

Human sexuality is a wonderful gift, to be treasured, respected and nurtured. Acknowledging the potential for abuse or misuse of our sexuality—sometimes intentional (i.e., sin), often not—we must not fail to highlight the challenge, the "awesome responsibility" that befalls the steward entrusted with any precious gift. Whether one is married, single or a vowed celibate, whether one is heterosexual or homosexual, and regardless of one's age or maturity, dealing creatively with sexuality remains a fundamental and lifelong task. The art of loving wisely and well is multifaceted. In First Corinthians, Paul reminds us that true love is "patient and kind, not self-seeking." Laying down one's life for the beloved is Jesus' benchmark for love at its fullest.

Chastity is a positive force for good and *the essential virtue needed to live one's sexuality responsibly and appropriately*, given each person's unique state in life. Often misunderstood as a synonym for the suppression or repression of sexual feelings, chastity "truly consists in the long-term integration of one's thoughts, feelings and actions in a way that values, esteems and respects the dignity of oneself and others" (*Human Sexuality*, 19).