FAITH & CULTURE SERIES

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS

The Church's Teaching on Sexual Morality and the Family Drs. David and Cathy Deavel

1. What is sex for?

- a. Integration of body and soul
 - The Church recognizes sex to be a mutual gift of self between spouses, a profound expression of love, and cooperation with God in bringing a new person into the world.
 - What is sex for? The goods of sex and the body are tied up with our full good as human beings – with our happiness physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
 - The Church teaches that every human being is loved by God and worthy of being loved fully and unconditionally.
 - Because human beings are physical, emotional, and spiritual, sexual love that is worthy of us and that will make us happy has to respect all of these aspects in order to be full and unconditional. These aspects are all part of who we are – because they are integrated – they are a "package deal."
- b. Biological objectivity
 - The objective biological purpose of our reproductive organs is to reproduce, to procreate to conceive a child.
 - Physical factors can affect whether the objective purpose of sex is achieved, but they do not change the objective purpose.
 - The objective purpose of sex is not affected by the subjective desires of the couple.
 - The reproductive system is our only biological system that requires another human being to fulfill its function, and our reproductive organs (and the body as a whole) only really make sense when we understand the reproductive organs of both males and females.
- c. Emotional intimacy
 - Physical union holds the promise of emotional union, or emotional intimacy – a flood of hormones on the physical level and intense affection on the emotional level.
 - The act of sex that unites the couple physically is accompanied by intense feelings and pleasure that helps to bond the couple emotionally. A lifetime bond of parents is good for the parents and the child.

2. Self-gift of spouses is the context for sexual activity

- a. Permanent, faithful, exclusive
 - Marriage is a partnership between one man and one woman that is characterized by a publicly made commitment in the form of a vow to exercise fidelity, permanence, and an openness to children.
 - The really safe sex is that which is done in the context of a vow of faithfulness. Human beings are capable of permanent, lifelong love.
 - Fidelity and permanence are geared at providing the context in which children thrive because they live with parents whose love thrives.
- b. Complete gift
 - Chastity, control over your sexual desires such that you act on them only in the context of lifelong, faithful, fruitful love, and with a full recognition of the dignity of your spouse, protects you and also produces great goods not only before marriage but in marriage.
 - Chastity while dating respects each person physically, emotionally, and spiritually. You should not promise with your body what you have not promised with your heart and will.
 - Chastity in marriage keeps you focused on the good of the other. Chastity means self-control such that you are always giving yourself freely sharing all those sides of yourself to that your spouse can give back freely. And that self-gift is really only fully given in sexual intercourse an act in which both of your sexual organs are engaged.
 - In the context of that faithful, permanent union that is open to children and governed by Jesus, sex can be a symbol of and an instrument by which you can discover not just pleasure but healing, affirmation, and even true love.

3. Common Objection: Contraception

- a. Particular objection: Contraception should be morally acceptable. It's irrational and hypocritical to say natural family planning (NFP) is moral and contraception is not.
 - Objection:
 - Actions that have the same goal and circumstances have the same moral status (as good or bad).
 - Certain cases of using NFP and using contraception have the same goal and circumstances. (For example, assume the goal is unity of the spouses without procreation, and circumstances give serious reasons to postpone a child.)

- Therefore, certain cases of using NFP and using contraception have the same moral status. (So, if the Church thinks these cases of using NFP are OK, it should think the same for using contraception.)
- Response:
 - Part of what makes an action morally good or bad is what you are actually doing (the nature or "object" of the act). This is why we have moral principles like "the ends don't justify the means."
 - Abstaining is different from using contraception on a physical level because "to abstain" is not to engage in sex/reproductive sorts of acts, and to do something else instead. In contrast, to use contraception is to engage in sex/reproductive sorts of acts while also acting to prevent their natural end, their objective biological purpose.
 - Having sex during infertile periods is different from using contraception on a physical level because choosing the former is just to engage in a reproductive kind of act while, again, to use contraception is to engage in this sort of act while also acting to prevent its natural end.
 - Contraception does not preserve unity of spouses while blocking procreation. It blocks both.
- Particular objection: Church teaching is unjust to women.
 Contraception empowers women to control their bodies, and it is just simply basic health care.
 - Response:
 - Not every way that women can control their bodies and are encouraged to control their bodies by our culture – is empowering. The Church is right. My body is a part of *me*, and respecting *me* includes respecting my body. That is empowering.
 - Contraception is not health care because it just modifies the body, without actually promoting health (like botox injections to counteract wrinkles, for example), it is not properly speaking health care. Health care aims at proper functioning of the body, not just modification of the body.

4. Common Objection: Same-sex attraction

- a. General objection: Church teaching is wrong and/or unjust; people should be free to marry whomever they love even if they are of the same sex.
- b. Particular objection: The Church teach is not biblical. The prohibitions against homosexuality in Leviticus are like the cleanliness and dietary restrictions. When Christ fulfills the old law, these rules no longer apply; they do not bind contemporary Christians (or anyone else beyond the ancient Israelites).

- o Response:
 - The objection fails to distinguish between moral teaching (which applies to all people from every era) and the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament (which set apart the Jewish people and helped them prepare for the coming of the Messiah).
 - The moral ban on homosexual acts, like the ban on incest, is a moral teaching and is repeated again by St. Paul in Romans 1:26-27.
- c. Particular objection: The Church teaching is not rational.
 - o Response:
 - Marriage is only possible for a couple that can be ordered toward both unity of the couple and procreation.
 - Opposite-sex couples can be ordered toward both unity of the couple and procreation.
 - Same-sex couples cannot be ordered toward both unity of the couple and procreation.
 - Therefore, marriage is possible for opposite-sex couples and not possible for same-sex couples.
 - Response to the objection that being ordered toward procreation is not necessary for marriage (e.g., older or infertile couples).
 - This claim mistakenly confuses potential that is unfulfilled and no potential at all.
 - Objectively, opposite-sex couples can engage in sexual intercourse, which is a reproductive kind of activity even when the potential for precreation is unfulfilled, and same-sex couples cannot.
 - Marriage requires a loving, lifelong relationship ordered toward union of the spouses and procreation.
 Precreation requires both male and female, one man and one woman. Therefore, marriage is possible for opposite-sex couples and not possible for same-sex couples.
- d. Particular objection: Sexual desire is part of someone's identity. Respecting someone's dignity requires us to respect this person's sexual desires.
 - o Response:
 - Moral reasoning distinguishes between the person and the action. To say that a person who plagiarizes has human dignity does not imply that plagiarism is morally acceptable.
 - Sometimes we think that desires that are very strong and persistent are part of our identity, that having them and acting on them make us who we are. But it is not true that our desires define us – we are not slaves to our

desires. We can evaluate them and choose whether to act on them. We are free. Moral evaluation of our sexual desires and self-discipline are necessary for everyone.

5. Summary Comments

- a. These objections have something in common. They try to have some goods of sex while rejecting others. For example, pleasure without children, or children without lifelong commitment. Put differently, they try to take some parts of the physical, emotional, and spiritual human "package" and leave out other parts.
- b. To love someone is to want and to act for what is good for this person for this person's own sake. When we love someone (ourselves included), we want what is good for the person we love, which may or may not match this person's desires. What we want and what God wants for us is what is great, and this is worth working hard and sacrificing for.
- c. Catholic sexual teaching and marriage offer the best possible context for pursuing the good of everyone involved single people, spouses, children and dealing with difficulties when they come. They offer the greatest opportunity for living as people of integrity and love. They offer lifelong self-gift and tremendous joy.
- d. The Church teaches that you are loved by God and made for great things. You are worthy of sexual love that respects you fully and unconditionally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and you are capable of loving another person in that way. Strive for love that is joyful, Christ-like, and worthy of you.