

► Sunday, January 4, 2009, Second Sunday after Christmas

Sir 24:1-4, 8-12; Ps 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20; Eph 1:3-6, 15-18; Jn 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

Week #20: Main Theme: The goodness of our bodies and the need for chastity.

“The Word became flesh,” John the Evangelist tells us today. This great mystery is the central fact of our Christian faith. The Word became flesh! What we celebrate in the Christmas season is God’s great love for humanity. That love extends all the way to our bodies, our “flesh.” The Son took on a human body—and He still has it, and will for all eternity! Why does God the Son assume a human nature and become enfleshed? So that He could surrender His life on the Cross for our sakes, so that He could embody self-sacrificial love and open up the way for humans into a happiness beyond death. By becoming flesh, the Word of God shows us the truth of human existence in the body: to live out true love to the end. As Vatican II and Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body remind us, “Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.” Not being angels, we humans make a sincere gift of ourselves through our bodies. That is, God has beautifully designed human nature as a synthesis of the material and the spiritual: we know and love **through** our bodies. This was God the Father’s wise design of human nature from the beginning, and the Word through whom He created all things, including human nature, becomes flesh to make it possible for us to love according to the fullness of the truth. Jesus is God’s Wisdom in the flesh, and He gives His Body to us in the Eucharist so that we may love as He loves.

Our bodies are truly good and are designed to participate in holiness. Because of our bodies, we are able to give ourselves generously to other people. For most of us, that self-gift will have its focus in marriage, in which a husband and a wife are able to give of themselves so intimately that new life is formed. God’s designs are always for our happiness; to live according to God’s design for human nature is to live in a way that leads to happiness. But to act in a way that violates God’s design will lead to unhappiness. For example, if we pursue sexual pleasure outside the face-to-face conjugal embrace that is open to new life, then we go against God’s wise design and cause damage to ourselves and those around us. It is the virtue of chastity that safeguards God’s wise design for the dignity of sex as serving the lifelong and life-giving love of marriage. When the Word became flesh, God reaffirmed the dignity of our bodies. May we show the same respect to our bodies and the bodies of every other person.

Bulletin quote: “Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: “It is not good that the man should be alone.” The woman, “flesh of his flesh,” i.e., his counterpart, his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a “helpmate”; she thus represents God from whom comes our help.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1605