

Supplemental Information for  
*Why Catholic? Journey through the Catechism*  
*Life In Christ – Walking With God*  
To group leaders of  
Christ the King Parish, Springfield, Illinois

By Deacon Al Laabs  
March, 2011

Session 10: “Chastity and Love”

### **Suggested Environment**

By now you’ve gotten my pitch to encourage your group members to acquire a copy of the red covered book, *USCCA (United States Catholic Catechism for Adults)*, so I’m dropping my recommendation to make it a part of each table arrangement. I still will be recommending sections for some of the sessions in this second half of year three to share or to read before you lead the session. I’m going to repeat a suggestion Joanna and I used when we talked about the sacrament of marriage in one of the earlier years of *Why Catholic*. We put a copy of our wedding picture out [yes, it was humbling] and used a beautiful candle the Hospital Sisters had given us for our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on our table centerpiece. As usual, knowing your group, be sensitive to those who may be in a second marriage or a divorced single attending the session.

As a session leader I would recommend your reading and perhaps encouraging your members who have the red *USCCA* to read the section entitled “Recovering Modesty” (pages 442-443). I’ll have more to say about that section later. Key doctrinal statements on each of the commandments are also succinctly found on the following pages: Commandment Six (*USCCA* pp. 414-415) and Commandment Nine (*USCCA* pp. 444-445).

### **Lifting Our Hearts**

In the face of our culture that has such different values associated with our sexuality, the idea of chastity, and promotes self-centered love, I wouldn’t hesitate to point out in the prayer our humble admission of asking not only for grace and strength but even to have “instilled” in us the desire to respond to that grace. We have admitted in earlier sessions this year our real need for God’s grace and help to live as a disciple and in this session under discussion that need is quite clear.

### **Sharing Our Good News**

As usual an opportunity to see what group members did or thought about doing following last week’s session.

## Exploring the Catechism

We are focusing on commandments six and nine this session. Let me offer just a brief word on the first paragraph to broaden an understanding of love as the foundation of all commandments. We have to think back to the act of creation itself to arrive at the heart of love which is central to our understanding of God and Trinity. When we see the expression “exuberant love showered great dignity on the human person,” we have to remember our creation solely out of the freedom of love to create us and our world. While God is not male or female, we know that at the core of each human is the revelation that we share that loving freedom, a muted image of our loving creator, to be creators ourselves, to care for and build our human family. We are willed into existence and sustained in existence by love and through love we have revealed to us God’s plan for us to live as true human beings through the commandments but also through His Son who became one of us. Christ shows us that love is at the heart of all life as a disciple and follower. Christ’s great commandment of love is at the heart of the New Covenant, at the heart of the new Israel, the disciples and followers of Jesus. So all that we are is centered in love and, most importantly, all that we can become must be centered through our “whole persons” and our “sexuality” into that life of Christ into which we are born again through baptism.

I think the remaining paragraphs on pages 62 through 63 are well done and need little further development. I would however suggest reading sections CCC 2348-2349 together and discussing the call to chastity whatever our state of life may be. Notice also that the middle paragraphs on page 62 speak in terms of a much broader understanding of sexuality beyond the mere genital. In that context it does help to see ourselves as always acting towards others from the whole person that we are, our sexuality as a male or female. It helps to understand that the “affective side” of ourselves, in other words, our feelings, our energy dispositions, come from that whole sexual person that we are. I am going to leave aside the issue sometimes called the “transgender issue” [a male trapped within a female body, for example] since it is beyond the scope of this discussion. Note that wherever we as an individual may be in the spectrum of life, we are called to chastity commensurate with that state of life.

It is worthwhile pointing out that the USCCA has a wonderful two page summary, in effect, of what Pope John Paul called the Theology of the Body—his vision of our body, its sexuality, and the human person. This is not an easy topic to cover briefly but I would suggest mentioning that it can be found on pages 412-413 of the red book.

At our Sunday afternoon discussion for group leaders a question was raised about direct teachings of the Church in various areas. Should that question come up for discussion in your group, you will find that CCC 2351-2359 contains very succinct teachings on “Offenses against Chastity.”

That last paragraph in this first section before Pondering the Word makes a crucial statement that I hope you can bring out in discussion. When it says, “...church teachings...seem difficult if taken as sterile prescriptions of what is forbidden...,” that message has a familiar tone to it. I suspect that many of us have experienced that or even thought it ourselves. It is a challenging perspective to stand in the face of our culture and say, “No, there’s a better way for us to be truly human than giving into our self-centeredness whether it is sexually based or

purely materialistic.” Using others, using our bodies, using our sexuality in ways that betray what God has commanded or what His Church teaches is a betrayal of trust in God’s revelation to us of the meaning of being truly human. There is a sentence almost in the middle of that paragraph that has real power in it: “It is then we discover the reality of grace.” Perhaps we discover this grace through listening and bending our will to the Church’s teaching; perhaps we discover it through the grace of forgiveness through reconciliation when we have failed; or perhaps we discover it when we realize how helpless we can be without turning completely to the Lord’s grace to aide us in our fight. Whatever the source of this presence/grace that leads us to see the reasonableness and the truth of what God has revealed in these commandments, we need to be led to grateful hearts that stand in awe at the mystery of God’s love and our salvation through Christ our Lord. Remember, Christianity isn’t for wimps.....

### **Scripture: Pondering the Word**

#### **John 15: 9-17**

- 9 As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love.
- 10 If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love.
- 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.
- 12 This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.
  
- 13 <sup>5</sup> No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.
- 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.
- 15 I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, <sup>6</sup> because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.
- 16 It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.
- 17 This I command you: love one another.

Note that the small numbers in blue are links to footnotes that you will find on the web site of the United States Catholic Conference.

I can’t resist pointing out one of my favorite lines from John, “I have called you friends...” When you or I have suffered some great disappointment brought on my forces external to ourselves or even by a poor choice on our part, I can’t imagine a more comforting image than to see that I have this “friend” to turn to in my regret. I hope all of us have had a friend or perhaps a spouse that we have turned to in moments of great need. We always have that relationship that we can turn to in the person of Jesus when life takes one of those unexpected turns. And just as one of the most powerful things friends can do is just being with us so too our Lord can be there with us and for us when we are most in need.

## **Sharing Question**

The challenge of loving one another as God loves us can indeed be formidable since God so loved us he sent his Son who loved us so much he gave his life for us. You may want to challenge the group with the question, “Is this a reasonable expectation for us humans?” That question which asks for some things that help us to form healthy relationships with others is also an interesting one. Maybe someone will offer the observation that meeting as we [the group] have done for these past years at Why Catholic is a great thing to do to foster healthy relationships with others, maybe someone will think of singing in the choir together, attending a scripture class, working together on a volunteer project, having good clean fun watching the Green Bay Packers together, etc.

## **Exploring the *Catechism* (continued)**

I would encourage reading CCC 2364 that high lights the strong position the church takes on marriage. Do be sensitive since I know groups have divorced and separated individuals attending sessions. Nevertheless, it is still important to stress what God intends for us at the highest level of our lives as humans while always understanding the unique stories and real life situations that still faithful disciples have to address in their personal lives.

The remaining paragraphs are also well done and need very little additional commentary. There are several areas that do deserve to be highlighted. One is found in the third paragraph on page 64 [the one ending with (2365)]. The term “marriage covenant” contains an important and crucial idea. It is important to see a covenant relationship in the depths that are intended. We deacons were reminded in our training that our role at the sacrament of matrimony is merely to be a witness. The actual ministers of the sacrament are the husband and wife who through their acceptance of one another and their pledges before God effect this covenant relationship with God as a partner to it. A covenant relationship always involves God as a party to it.

The second comment also is prompted by that same paragraph and centers on the comparison of the marriage covenant as sign of the “...sacramental witness of Christ’s fidelity to his Church.” It can be such a powerful image to see the steadfast witness through lasting marriage in the face of cultural pressures that this is a sign of how faithful Christ is to his Church. As members of the body of Christ we witness Christ to others in our individual lives but we also do in lives joined together in covenant relationship.

Towards the end of this section the idea of premarital sex and even “trial marriage” [although no CCC citations are presented] might lead to sharing of stories of family experiences in this area. I remember hearing recently from our diocesan director of marriage and family life that nearly half of all couples who go through Pre-Cana are living together before marriage. If the conversation goes in that direction, I would be interested in hearing about where we have gone wrong with the generation of children many of us in these groups have raised. Is it just symptomatic of the culture and age we live in or are there deeper issues? I guess what I am suggesting here is some soul searching of where and how those of us in my generation may

have failed to "...convey a full appreciation of the positive and life-giving aspects of the Church's teachings (CCC 2366-2372)." So don't hesitate to share insights with me.

### **Sharing Our Faith**

Following up from where I ended the above paragraph, I would think the second bullet point would be worthwhile to discuss. With the recent scandal at City Water Light and Power regarding pornography available at work, I think perhaps a discussion of the challenges of access via internet at home and even work in this area may be beneficial. All of us who get emails may have "friends" from time to time who forward something that is inappropriate in regard to this topic. What actions have we taken; what message do we send to them by simply deleting and not being direct in our disapproval of that type of communication? I think you may find some very heartfelt and challenging issues up for discussion this session.

### **Living the Good News**

There are some good suggestions that of course have to fit in with where you are in your state of life. I wouldn't hesitate to point out bullet four, encouraging individuals to speak out or write to those who sponsor some of the "crude" on television that passes for "reality" TV these days. Maybe our generation was just too silent as we gradually let inappropriate cultural values invade our homes via airwaves and now cable/internet. If you do encourage members to write or protest, make sure you encourage them to let the group know of the type of responses that are received. I had suggested earlier reading the section "Recovering Modesty" from the *USCCA*. Here's a sentence from that section: "The Church calls us to be signs of contradiction in an overly eroticized society." Maybe a good question to prompt action is how we can be signs of contradiction, not just in our own lives but as more outspoken witnesses against the type of reality shows promoting voyeurism.

### **Lifting our Hearts**

I think this type of a session is an even greater opportunity than usual to go around the circle and offer prayers and intentions for what is in our hearts. I suspect at times we can feel overcome by the enormity of the challenges to living a faithful Christian life in the face of our culture. Let's not be discouraged and forget the power of prayer and our need to trust that God's graces will be there as we need them and as those we pray for will need them.

**Addendum Note: Any feedback you would like to give is most welcome. Please reply to**

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