

### ***The Seven Deadly Sins: Lust***

In the name of him in whom we were washed, sanctified, and justified, dear friends in Christ: In this series of meditations on the Seven Deadly Sins, we have thus far discussed Gluttony and Wrath. And part of what we discovered is that both of these sins have a certain legitimate aspect to them. I mean, gluttony involves a *lifestyle* of overconsumption. So, just because you occasionally enjoy a festive meal as part of a special celebration and over eat in the process, it doesn't make you guilty of it. Likewise, though wrath can be a deadly sin, there are appropriate times for expressing it. When you hear, for instance, of some inhuman monster abducting a child, doing unspeakable things, and then brutally killing the victim, you are supposed to be filled with righteous indignation. It would be a sin if you *weren't* angry. So with both gluttony and wrath, what causes them to be deadly sins is an excessive or distorted display of the behavior or the way of thinking in question. They become deadly sins when they are allowed to go outside their proper parameters.

And so it is also with lust, the deadly sin under consideration for this evening. What I mean is this: sexual desire is a good thing. It's part of God's original creation. He made our first parents male and female and he brought them together with the intent that they would become one – one in mind, spirit, *and body*. He meant for them to be companions, mutual helpers, soul mates, and *lovers* in a physical sense. And so he gave them an attraction for each other, an attraction that included among its many facets the desire to share sexual intimacy. Adam was keenly aware that Eve was a woman, and he delighted in her; just as Eve delighted in the fact that Adam was a man. They liked what they saw and I'm sure they made the most of it. And there was no sin or shame involved. So simply to be aware of another person's sexuality and to be favorably influenced by it is not itself a sin.

Granted, in this fallen world of ours, every good and godly desire of mankind has become corrupt; but at their heart sexual desire and sexual attraction are very good things. Too many Christians I encounter are under the mistaken impression that simply to notice and appraise another person's relative sexual desirability – or *sex appeal*, as it's called – is itself sinful. That's just silly. You can't help it. It's part of your built in, God-given ability to identify a potential partner. If we didn't have this ability to notice and a natural interest in the opposite sex, the human race would be ... well, there wouldn't be a human race.

So sometimes I think we beat ourselves up for the wrong reasons. Just because a pretty girl makes a guy take a second look and think, "Wow" – that's not the sin of lust. And it isn't what Jesus is talking about in the reading we heard earlier when he speaks having committed adultery in the heart. Unfortunately, many people think it is, and that leads to all kinds of overreactions in the other direction. For example, I know of a very sanctimonious woman who won't let her husband engage in his favorite pastime of watching football on TV because she's convinced that seeing the shapely cheerleaders on the sidelines or, worse by far, a bikini clad model hawking beer in a commercial, will lead him into a dark fantasy world of lecherous thoughts and so doom him to an eternity in hell. Please. We live in the world and human sexuality is part of it. And while it's true that marketers take unfair advantage of people's natural interest in sex to cause them to notice their products thereby hoping to increase their sales, just seeing a beautiful woman – yes, even one clad in a bikini – and appreciating what he sees, does not make a man guilty of the sin of lust. The sort of wrong-headed thinking that imagines that it does is what led millions during the middle ages to enter convents and

monasteries hoping to keep themselves from interacting the members of the opposite sex. They imagined that if they couldn't see what in God's good design was supposed to interest them, they couldn't be tempted by it into the sin of lust. It didn't work, of course, because lust is more a sin of the heart and imagination. Yes, it can be stirred up by what we see; but in the absence of anything to see the sinful imagination is that much freer to roam – and it does—often into places that are worse. By artificially attempting to suppress natural sexual desires, many are led to unnatural desires. I'm convinced that this is why among priests in the Roman Catholic Church, who are required by canon law to be celibate, there is such a high incidence of homosexuality and pedophilia.

So let me make this as clear as I can: we're supposed to notice the opposite sex. We're supposed to be attracted. And we are supposed to desire sexual intimacy. And there's no problem with any of that. We run into trouble – and into the sin of lust – when we take the noticing, the attraction *and* the attracting, and the desire for sexual intimacy outside of the boundaries that the Lord has ordained for our good.

What are these boundaries? They're pretty simple, really. In the Lord's great design, the only proper venue for sexual intimacy is in the context of a lifelong, committed marriage between one man and one woman. Furthermore, the physical union itself is supposed to be the final step, as it were. It's only after they've connected in mind, and after they've joined each other spiritually by sharing the same faith, and after they've made a lifelong commitment to love, honor, and cherish—and proclaimed it publically in an official way, as in a wedding ceremony, that the physical union is to take place. And in this context, the sexual union is for a couple a way to give themselves completely to one another – to serve one another by giving their very bodies for the fulfillment and joy of their spouse. It's never to be a selfish sort of thing; but rather a way to meet the needs of the other and so to express self-giving love. And when it's this way, the sexual union is holy and undefiled. Then it is properly called “making love”.

Lust, by contrast, is driven by the desire for self gratification. It sees other people as a means to satisfy itself. It's not interested in making commitments, and avoids them if at all possible. If it must make a commitment in order to get what it wants, the more temporary and less costly the better. Even then, it doesn't take commitments seriously. It doesn't care about the honor of those it desires to use in the pursuit of self gratification. It's not willing to wait and go through proper channels. It's about getting what I want and getting it as quick as I can. Sexually related thoughts, words, and actions with such motivations are not about making love; they're about indulging lust.

And they are what lead to all the sexually related sins that plague our society such as pornography, prostitution, so-called casual sex between consenting adults, couples living together without being married, “swinging” aka “wife swapping”, adulterous affairs, and free and easy divorces sought by those who think that they've finally found the right one, to name but a few. In their wake they cause crushed hearts, shattered relationships, broken homes, diseased bodies, and even death when the betrayed and desperate commit suicide, when jealous spouses commit murder, and when countless yet to be born children are sacrificed on the altar of personal choice and convenience. And the funny thing is that despite all this lust fueled devastation, people involved in these sins continue to chant the mantras, “But I'm not hurting anyone” and “This is a victimless crime”.

That isn't even close to being true, as can plainly be seen; and in this evening's Epistle reading, St. Paul reminds us that even if no other victim is readily apparent, the one person who always suffers in every sexual sin is the perpetrator himself. Paul writes, “Every other sin a

person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body". How is this true? In several ways. First, because the person who commits a sexual sin is distorting God's perfect plan for what a proper sexual relationship should be and deliberately aiming for something less. He is therefore robbing himself of the full joy and fulfillment that the Lord intends to give that person through a proper relationship.

Second, because sexual sins aim at something less than God intends, they deliver less – and they are therefore inherently unsatisfying. Sure, there may be short term pleasures – lots of sins provide that; but sexual sins eventually leave the people who commit them with a sense of emptiness. They feel they've been shortchanged; and indeed they have been. This often leads the perpetrators deeper into sexual sins with increasing levels of perversion as they attempt to find the fulfillment they're after – the fulfillment they will never find through sinning. But that's the deception, isn't it? "Maybe if I try this or that, I'll get what I'm after." It's like an alcoholic thinking the next drink is all he needs. Instead, it just takes more alcohol to get the same buzz. So it is with sexual sin.

But the way the Christian who sins sexually suffers most is by defiling his or her own body, which is the temple of God's Holy Spirit. And here Paul is as emphatic as he can be. You were washed, you were set aside, you were declared righteous by the Lord Jesus, to whom your body now belongs. You are one with him. How can you now defile that sacred relationship by entering into another illicit relationship? Do you imagine for a moment that Christ, whose Spirit lives within you, is going to join you in that? No. Of course not. Your body belongs either to Christ or to your sexual sin; but never to both. So when you choose to sin sexually, you drive Christ and his Spirit out of your life. Is that really what you want? Small wonder, then, that lust is included on the list of deadly sins: it separates us from the Lord of Life.

With that in mind, let's examine our hearts, our minds, and our present and past behavior with the purpose of locating and repenting of the sin of lust and the sexual sins to which it leads. And remembering him who honored us with his body, surrendering it as the sacrifice for our sins on the cross in order to, with his own precious blood, cleanse us and make us his holy bride, let's resolve to glorify him with our bodies, now and forever. In Jesus' name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***