

The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality

by Fr. Paul Quay, S.J.

Chapter 5

The Church: Bride of Christ and Mother of the Living

1. On the natural level, bodily union between husband and wife symbolize “an entire life together”. Yet God has made natural marriage to symbolize something that lies entirely beyond the sexual. Explain.

God has made the union between husband and wife to symbolize the relations between Christ and His Church, and the Father’s adopting us as His children through Christ’s gift of the Spirit to His Bride. God has made marriage to symbolize relationships more intimate than its own sexual relationship, stronger, more tender, more open, more demanding. This sacramental symbolism involves all that is present in the marital relationship but give it a further meaning at a level of communion where there is no possibility, even, of sexual activity.

Christ’s Unmerited Love for His Church

2. Complete the sentences:
Christ’s love was not given to the Church for any merit on her own part.
Christ loves her because she is the Father’s choice for Him.
He had to win her for Himself by His battle with Satan upon the cross.
He espoused her there when His side was pierced.
His heart was opened and water flowed forth, the sign of the bridal bath of Baptism.
Only His death made her to be a bride without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.
Her beauty was His gift alone.
3. What does the author mean when he writes of the Church, “Without His grace she can do nothing?”
As a husband with his wife, it is Christ who is the initiator of union with His Church. As God is masculine with respect to the whole of His creation and with respect to the whole of humanity, Christ is masculine with regards to His Church. The Church has no initiative in relation to Christ except that which Christ has already given to her. Without His grace, she can do nothing.
4. How is Christ’s pleasure in His Bride expressed?
Finding His delight in her, He seeks to share with her all His gifts. Since He experiences the Church’s happiness as His own, He gives to her everything that He has to offer to mankind.
5. What is Christ’s chief gift to His Church? What are the effects? How ought this gift to be received and manifested? How is this related to intimacy between husband and wife?
Chief of His gifts is the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, He guards the Church from harm and keeps her faithful to Himself. By the power of His Spirit, He maintains her in purity of doctrine and worship. By the Spirit’s action the Church conceives and bears children for the Father. Through the Spirit we live in Christ’s own life. We are nurtured and brought to spiritual maturity under her guidance and love. The Church must be receptive of this grace and has to respond to the love Christ has shown her. She may not simply be passive. Because a wife’s response to her

husband ought to symbolize the Church's joyful response to Christ, passivity on a wife's part would destroy that symbolism. The Church responds to Christ to give Him pleasure, having her sole pleasure in Him and in the fact that He takes pleasure in her response.

6. What did many in the Old Testament, and also the Church Father's know about how God revealed Himself beyond the limits of Israel? Give three examples.
May in the Old Testament and also the Early Fathers of the Church knew that God gives to every man the grace to be saved, even though he has not heard of Christ from other men.
The Pharaohs known by Abraham and Joseph, Balaam, and the Babylonian kings of *Daniel*.
7. Why is the Church so concerned to bring ever more people to the knowledge of Christ?
The Church is so concerned to bring ever more people to the knowledge of Christ so that she may bring forth for the Father through His Spirit all those whom Christ desires as His brothers. There is no race, there are no cultures, there are no tribes or languages which are naturally alien to her. All are meant to be within her, all are meant to be her children.
8. How was this idea expressed by the Fathers of the Church?
"He alone has God as Father who first has the Church as mother."

Christ's Fidelity to His Church

9. Explain how the Lord's "marriage" with Israel and His "marriage" with the Church are NOT an example of divorce-and-remarriage.
Christ has not divorced the people of Israel and taken a new bride. St. Paul tells us that Israel is an olive tree from which the branches have been broken off through their own fault. We, the branches of wild olives trees, were incapable of bearing any fruit except what is bitter and hard, of no use at all. But through our being made one with Christ, we have been grafted into the still-standing trunk of Israel, the trunk of the patriarchs, prophets, and kings. Thus we have been enabled to bear fruit that is sweet and good. We, by being incorporated into Christ, are the new Israel, but only in the sense that we are made one with the old, being new growth from the same roots and trunk. God, in His fidelity, wishes to bring the broken branches (Israel) back and graft them in again. St. Paul tells us that God will do this.
10. How are Israel and the Church related to one another?
There remains only one true People of God. The Church is not a new bride. The changes brought by Israel's growth are more surprising and disconcerting than those changes a girl undergoes at puberty. But they are the same sort of changes—those she has needed to become ready to bear children. So, the Church is Israel grown up, become mature, and bearing children for the Father from among the Gentiles.
11. What will come about when the Jews by carnal generation finally recognize their Lord and come to Him?
Then all the promises to Israel will be fulfilled. This will also be the fulfillment of all that He has given to the Gentiles. It will be, St. Paul says, life from the dead the consummation and perfection of the Church when His bride will be radiant in the beauty of all her children as well as in herself.

12. How can it be claimed that the Church is indefectible while still recognizing the sinfulness within the Church?

While the Universal Church, like Mary, is indefectible, the local churches God permits to go their own way. The local church will suffer for her sins. She will go into exile from those regions where she is unfaithful. Always, however, there is the promise that as with ancient Israel, if she returns, He will forgive.

Our Sexuality in the Light of Christ's Mysteries

13. Explain the "ultimate reason that husbands and wives are called to sacrifice themselves...for one another".

Christian marriage is the sacramental representation of the covenant of eternal love Christ has entered into with His Church. Christ's espousal of His bride upon the cross was the sealing of the New Covenant in His blood. The children of this covenant enter into it, then, and ratify it in their own persons by their marriage, as they image forth and symbolically represent Christ's marriage to His Church. This is the ultimate reason why husband and wife are called to sacrifice themselves, as far as death if need be, for the true good of one another.

14. How does a husband's initiative in lovemaking, and his wife's response, shed light on the Catholic doctrine of grace?

The Church teaches that we cannot desire any grace unless God has already given us his grace to desire it. He alone can take the initiative. He alone can convert us. At some point, it is our task to respond, but He is always the initiator. The relationship of husband and wife is symbolic of this same exchange. Corresponding to the giving of one person to the other through the gift of a man's substance to his wife, we have God's gift of Himself to us through His Holy Spirit, who pours out the love of the Father in our hearts and who makes us sharers in the life of Christ by grace. We give ourselves to the Father, in turn, through the same Spirit, by responding to His grace actively even as a woman opens herself to her husband in love.

15. What does it mean to say that the symbolism of marriage reaches even as far as the beatific vision? How does this bring us to an understanding of basic Christian sexual morality?

Scripture describes that absolute and perfect union of man with God that constitutes our utter happiness as the Wedding Feast of the Lamb and the final consummation of His marriage with His Church. The Church will then be united with her Spouse in a spiritual ecstasy far beyond all marital ecstasy as she enters the joy of her Lord.

We learn to be Christlike by living according to the pattern He has set. We ought so to engage in the natural sexual activity of body, mind, and heart that its basic symbolic structure is always preserved and honored, so that this structure may serve rightly to symbolize in turn the relations, in the Spirit of the Father, between Christ and His Church. If God has created marital union to signify these great mysteries of the faith, how great a responsibility, then, lies on married couples (and in their own say on all the unmarried) so to act that this meaning and significance is fully preserved in their action and it meant and intended by them.

Understood from this point of view, all the Church's teaching falls in place as simple and consistent. Christ is the norm. His relations to His Father and to His bride the Church form the norms for union among Christians in their marriages and families. Indeed, as possibly suggested already by the examples we have considered, those relations are norms for all sexual behavior whatever.