

Theology of the Body

What is sexuality?

We too often jump to the topic of sexuality without realizing and understanding the many elements that leads up to sexuality. By doing this, we end up assuming that sexuality is about sex and preferences instead of something rooted in our humanity. In order to understand the basics and beauty of sexuality we need to cover the following topics: love, community, intimacy, and then sexuality.

Love:

All humans were designed to love and be loved. God, the creator of the universe, is love itself. Since we made in the image and likeness of God, we too are created for and to love. Yet, although this phrase is commonly used in both a Christian and secular context, most people do not understand the basics of this statement.

Let's first start from God's perspective as the context for our creation from love. God created the universe. Why did God create the universe? The answer is simple: because he loves. Love is creative. A person who loves wants to make the person he/she loves better. A person who loves wants to make the world a better place. God is the same. God created the world so that the world can share in his love and experience his love. The entirety of creation was made from the love God has. The second part of love is love is self-giving. The person who loves gives of themselves for the good of the other. God gave his breath, his Spirit, to the world during the creation of the world. The very creation of the world demanded a gift from God. Thus, when God created us, he created us to share in his love and to experience as much of his love as we can as human beings.

From this short introduction to God's creation of humanity from his love, we already get a context for love. Love will always require two things from us: creativeness and gift. We cannot love another unless we allow part of ourselves to be given to the other person. This self-gift in love can be painful and lead to our vulnerability. In order to give ourselves we need to show ourselves to another in a way that's could lead to pain and suffering. Jesus' death on the Cross is the best example of the pain and suffering caused by love. The second side of love is creativeness. Our desire for the good for those whom we love means that we will lead them to a greater sense of life. Some of the examples of this creative love include encouraging the person, uplifting them, helping them through difficult times, sharing life with them, and making them a better person. These activities show our love for another person as an extension of God's love for us.

The other side of love for us as humans is the desire to be loved. Everyone desires to be loved. This desire can come in the form of being part of a group, feeling that someone else cares, or being loved singularly by another person in a dedicated relationship. The reason why humans desire to be loved is because we were created that way. God created us to desire to be loved by him and by others. We operate at our best when we know that we are loved by another person and can love in return. We create the best environment for everyone when everyone knows they

are loved and supported. The greatest challenge for people today is that we have ignored many of our natural desires to be loved and replaced them with fake forms of love that only mask our true desires. The simple easy friendships found through social media or casual acquaintances do not substitute for true authentic friendships.

Community

Following closely from the above discussion on love, we need to be in community. When God created Adam, he realized that the animals of the world would not be suitable partners for Adam but that only a human like him would be a partner. We are no different from Adam. The only true suitable partner to help us through life and be a faithful companion is another human being. Regardless of how many people have chosen animal companions, these animals cannot relate to us, they do not encourage us, they do not challenge us, they cannot show us the type of love we desperately need, and they cannot help us experience the love of God in the same way that other human beings can. Often we can ignore the true need for community but surrounding ourselves with only the people we like. When we surround ourselves with only the people we love, we do not allow the challenge of other not the ability for us to love them. True love and the growth in love requires a community not just an individual.

Community is vitally important for our good as human beings. Through community we learn about our identity, we come to understand our humanity, we are challenged by those who are different from us, and we find support in a stable group of people. The church used to be the standard form of community for almost 2 millennia. Then people moved away from churches into towns and cities leading to a loss of the sense of the stability of community. We need community to challenge us and help us grow. We need these other people who thinking differently from us and challenge our conceptions of the world to grow in love of God, our neighbor, and ourselves. Community is vital for being able to fully love.

Intimacy:

Intimacy has many forms and I want to describe each form in its basic sense. What is intimacy? Intimacy means being close to a person. Intimacy requires vulnerability, trust, and desire for love and to love.

Physical intimacy: most of the time we understand physical intimacy as sex. This is far from the truth. Physical intimacy is the quality of being close to someone in a physical sense. Two friends can have a physical intimacy in touching, hugging, and a physical closeness without any sexual component. For some people physical intimacy is a simple hug. Our relationship with a given person sets the boundaries and expectations for physical intimacy. Jesus is a great example of the simplicity and value of physical intimacy. In many of his healing miracles he touched the person as part of their healing. This touch brought them into community with him and gave them a physical expression of his love. Jesus is different that a simple touch is extremely intimate. Thus, even a simple touch, a hug, or a physical sign of affection can be a very intimate and close way of expressing love.

Mental Intimacy: mental intimacy can take the form of thoughts and/or feelings. Some people are very close to each other through the sharing of emotions. They can, through words and signs, express their love for each other and feel loved without any physical signs of affection. The power of words can transform a person's life. Some people are intellectually close to each other. They can share thoughts as though they were feelings. They have similar ideas or a freedom to challenge and debate each other as a sign of love and affection.

Spiritual intimacy: we often don't talk about this last form of intimacy. Many of the great saints who either had a companion saint or close spiritual friends experienced this form of intimacy. Spiritual intimacy means being free to share spiritual insights, feelings, or movements of God in their lives. Two people who are spiritually intimate can share their inner feelings related to their being, spiritual lives, or relationship with God to each other.

Sexuality:

Now we get to the core topic: sexuality. Often sexuality is related directly with sex and used almost exclusively to talk about sexual relationships or preferences. This greatly truncates the beauty and joy of sexuality. At its core, sexuality is the desire for intimacy with another person. We often think of sexuality in terms of who a person is attracted to. The reality is that we want a special and intimate relationship with both sexes but in different ways.

The first form of sexuality is the desire for intimate relationships. Everyone wants to be close and intimate with another person even without a sexual component. We often dismiss the importance of this part of our humanity when talking about sexuality. The highest form of this type of sexuality is union with God. To make my point clear: Jesus, through the Eucharist, enters our body and a physical and tangible way to express his intimate love with us. This type of intimacy is sexual at its core: a union of flesh and a desire for deep relationship. We can then share our deepest thoughts and desires with him in this intimate union.

The second, and most common, form of sexuality is sexual preferences. The natural form of preference is to desire the opposite sex. We desire the opposite sex because, as God showed in creation, the opposite sex completes us and brings us into deeper communion with each other. The highest form of intimacy can only be accomplished with the opposite sex who is the completion of our selves. Some, however, experience attraction to the same sex which is often called their "sexuality." Attraction doesn't mean the same thing as sexuality. They may want the other person to complete them but they were not designed that way. We were designed to complete one another through the opposite sex.

Summary:

As beings created in love, we were created to love and be loved. We need to experience, live, and grow this love in community and with individual people. The deep intimacy that all people want is rooted in our sexuality: our desire for intimacy and union with another. This sexuality can be expressed in many ways including physical, emotional, and spiritual. Either way, sexuality tends towards the completion of one's self and the desire for completing the other through sexuality complementarity.