

Adulterated Lives

In the name of him who created man and woman in his own image, dear friends in Christ: Our Lenten countdown through the Holy Law God handed down through Moses at Mount Sinai continues this evening with a review of the Sixth Commandment. As we heard earlier, by it the Lord prohibits the sin of adultery, which by itself has a fairly narrow definition. Strictly speaking, adultery is sexual intercourse between two people at least one of whom is married, but who are not married to each other. However, it's customary to treat all sins that are sexual in nature that are given elsewhere in the Law of Moses under the general heading of adultery. And that makes sense. To adulterate something is to contaminate it with a foreign substance that robs it of its purity. And really, that's what this Commandment is about: keeping the children of God sexually pure in every way.

The Command does this by upholding and protecting God's institution of holy marriage, which is the first and most foundational of all human relationships. God created our first parents male and female, two different but complimentary persons that he brought together to become united in one flesh as a reflection of his own plurality of person and unity of essence. Marriage is meant to show us a glimpse of God: how the Father and Son are two and yet one. It also prefigures for us how Christ and his Church are united in one body, he giving himself for her and she receiving his gifts and submitting to his will. Thus marriage is the human relationship God honors most. Marriage is also the closest and most enduring of all human relationships. And from this relationship all others are derived: parents, children, siblings, cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and so on. All these relationships are defined by who's married to whom. So the integrity and connectivity of the entire human family hangs on marriage.

And our Lord has made it abundantly clear: the sexual relationship between a man and a woman is exclusively for those who are married. They are to be joined together physically only after having been united by their mutual public vows of lifelong love and fidelity. Only then are the two to become one flesh in the physical act that, in God's good design, has the potential to let them participate with God in his work of creation: the making of new human life. Thus God intends the sexual relationship to be the culmination and ultimate expression of unity – the icing on the cake, so to speak. Unfortunately, throughout history – and perhaps especially in our day – people prove that they only want to lick the sugary frosting out of the bowl and leave the far more nutritious cake unfrosted, uneaten, despised, and thrown away.

The result has been disastrous for our families and our society. Many children grow up today with no notion of what an intact nuclear family actually is. Instead they're with a struggling single mother who bounces from one unstable relationship to the next, often producing half siblings for the child along the way; or they go through a series of family reshufflings in which the children are his, hers, and ours – except on weekends, when the kids are sent off to the other biological parent and a different arrangement of kids who are his, hers, and ours. They come to learn that instead of children dearly loved by the two people who made them, they are pawns in the ongoing battle between their parents to prove which is superior or had the better reason for the divorce. When they're older, since it's all they know, they repeat and even exacerbate in their lives the mistakes of their parents, making their kids even more messed up than they are: feeling unloved, fearful for the future, and far less willing to make any lasting commitments to anyone. And we wonder why our culture is in such decline. The answer is obvious: the strength of our nation, the strength of our communities, the strength of our families

– they all depend on the essential building block of marriage. When this institution is despised or neglected, when marriages are dysfunctional, in crisis, or broken, then everything else will be broken too.

This puts a lid on the coffin of that silly notion that what goes on between two consenting adults behind closed doors is nobody else's business. It's not true. The damage done there to God's gift of holy marriage hurts us all. It overthrows too that equally silly notion that there is such a thing as casual sex – just a form of recreation that has no other physical, emotional, or relational significance. No, Paul makes this clear: when you unite yourself with one who is not your spouse, you sin against that person and against your own body. Of course, if you're married and unite yourself to another, then you sin also against the one to whom you swore fidelity. No good ever comes of sexual intercourse outside the place God made for it.

And to the perpetual claim that, "I don't need a piece of paper to tell my spouse I love him or her", actually you do. Part of the point of marriage is that it's both a legal binding contract and a public proclamation. When you marry, you're entering into a legal commitment to your spouse and to any children that may come from your union. You're also announcing to the world that you and your spouse are now officially off limits to others who might have considered either of you as a romantic interest. This is where David went wrong. From his palace roof he spies the beautiful Bathsheba. His interest is piqued. Who's the pretty girl? I'd like to get to know her. So far, no problem; but the moment he hears that she is the wife of another, that should have ended it. It didn't. And as you know, this single sin brought shame to the kingdom, death to at least a half dozen people, and misery to David and his whole house for many years to come. If he had known the bitter consequences he would have to face, he would never have considered tasting that sweet frosting. Instead he thought he could get away with it and suffer no ill. It doesn't work that way. It never does. I'll say it again: no good ever comes of sexual intercourse outside the place God made for it.

Other perversions of God's gift of our sexuality abound. And we're seeing them more and more as those who practice and advocate such aberrations are forcing them upon our society, insisting that we not only accept but join them in celebrating their sins. So it is with the whole gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender thing on one side, and on the other with those who want to eliminate the categories of male and female altogether. Brace yourself. It's only going to get worse. It's a sad commentary on our society too that the biggest blockbuster of the year thus far is a film that promotes Sadism. *Fifty Shades of Grey* is about a man who entertains himself sexually by tying up and hurting women, and the girl who is so desperate to please him that she goes along with it. To be honest, I don't understand it; but audiences – especially women – are flocking to see it. I do understand that it's not a good thing to tell the young men of America that regardless of what they say, what women really want in a relationship is to be tortured. It's sick.

It's tempting for us, however, to focus on the sins of our society and those folks out there who do such things. That way we can frown on them while we pat ourselves on the back and revel in our own goodness. But that would be to miss the point. The truth is that we too live adulterated lives. We are constantly breaking the Sixth Commandment.

How? First up there's lust, of course. Jesus makes it clear that it's not just the act of adultery that makes one guilty; but it's merely the thought of it. And we are given plenty of opportunities to form lustful thoughts, surrounded as we are by people, images, books, television programs, and films that are sexually enticing. And that's only to speak of the stuff that's hard to avoid. For those who seek it out, there's the pornography industry – which used

to be harder to get to. One had to buy smutty magazines off the rack and risk being seen, or go to one of those windowless adult book stores off the freeway. Now with the internet, one can see all they want in the privacy of their own homes. If you've lingered while looking, if you've lusted after someone other than your spouse, you're guilty.

The flip side of this is not dressing modestly. Knowing that others are inclined to lust when they see things overexposed, we have an obligation to be discreet in what we wear. Bathsheba usually gets a pass in the story of David's adultery, but it takes two to tango. And I'm not sure she didn't actually plan to give David an eyeful. Lonely young woman, her soldier husband away at the war, knowing her courtyard was so easily visible from the palace roof where the king often takes his walks ... I rather suspect that she was hoping for some royal attention. And if you've ever dressed yourself with the same intent or encouraged others to do so, you're guilty of leading others to sin.

What else? There are the course jokes and stories we like to share. And if that's too over the top for your taste, you can resort to sexual puns and innuendo. There's the tentative flirting we engage in to assure ourselves that we're still in the game – that the other sex still finds us attractive. There are the things we do and say that denigrate God's gift of marriage, the bitter complaints we make to others about our spouses, and the counsel we give to others to seek divorce on the grounds that he or she is just not good enough for you.

It's important to remember also that we sin against the Six Commandment not only by what we do, but also by what we don't do. We sin when we fail to lend assistance to those couples we know to be struggling in their marriage. We sin when we don't speak the truth in love to those who are cohabiting outside of marriage, or to someone we know who is involved in an extramarital affair, or to someone we know who is pursuing a sexually perverted lifestyle. Most of all, we sin when we fail in any way to love, honor, and cherish the spouse we have. When we are unkind to our spouses, when we hold grudges against them and refuse to forgive, when we speak angry, hurtful words, we sin against the Six Commandment by not keeping our sacred vows to the one we promised to love faithfully until our last breath.

We are living adulterated lives. And this applies to all of us, not just those who are married or who hope to be one day; but also to those called to be single whether voluntarily or involuntarily through the death of a spouse or through abandonment or an unwanted divorce. It makes no difference: not one of us is pure as God commands us to be.

And that's why we must continue to examine ourselves each day in light of the Sixth Commandment to reveal where our own pollution and impurities lie. Then, seeing the filth of sin within, we turn with sorrow and naked shame to Him who alone is pure and yet who bore in naked shame our sins upon the cross. By his Word of pardon, we are cleansed. And we are empowered by his Spirit to live unadulterated lives as men and women recreated in God's own image. May God grant such purity to us for Jesus' sake. In his holy name. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!