

The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B)

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| <i>First Reading</i> | 1 Samuel 3:3b-10, 19 |
| <i>Response</i> | Then I said, “Lo, I come; I delight to do thy will, O my God; |
| <i>Psalm</i> | Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10 |
| <i>Second Reading</i> | 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20 |
| <i>Gospel Acclamation</i> | We have found the Messiah: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. |
| <i>Gospel</i> | John 1:35-42 |

The second Sunday in Ordinary Time for year B resumes the Church’s reading of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. Elsewhere in our series when we were looking at year A, we saw that for the first six weeks or so of year A, the Church journeyed through the first several chapters of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. She starts the season of Ordinary Time with these readings from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. But unlike some of the other letters of Paul, which the Church treats in order from start to finish in any given year (A, B, or C), the Church has decided for 1 Corinthians that it gets pride of place every single year. So every single year, whether it’s A or B or C, the Church takes a portion of 1 Corinthians and gives it to us over the course of several weeks.

And I think that probably the reason for that is because 1 Corinthians is—at least in my estimation—the most accessible of Paul’s letters. It’s the most catechetical, and it deals with the most practical issues. There are lots of wide ranging issues of morality and ecclesiology and sacramental theology—all kinds of things in the life of the Church that Paul deals with in 1 Corinthians. So it’s a fitting way to start the year of Ordinary Time off as the Church moves through the letters of Paul in the second reading cycle for the Sundays of Ordinary Time. So that’s why we’re starting in the middle of 1 Corinthians 6 and not at the beginning. We’re not picking up where we left off in year A.

So the second Sunday of Ordinary Time for year B starts in 1 Corinthians 6, with Paul's famous discussion of immorality—and not just any kind of immorality but sexual immorality. In the Greek, *porneia*. So the Church here gives us a very short and edited version of Paul's statements. I'm going to fill this out by adding in the verses that are omitted from the lectionary, just so we can see the overarching context, and it'll help us understand a bit more clearly what Paul is talking about in his admonitions. So I'm going to start in chapter 6, verse 13, and I'm going to read all the way down through verse 20...although, for the lectionary, it's chapter 6, verse 13-15, and then it skips to 17-20. And you'll see why in just a second. And so chapter 6, verse 13 begins in this way:

“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

And here, the Church skips over these verses, but I'm going to include them. He says:

Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two shall become one flesh.”

And here the Church picks up again. So it skips those verses, but now it resumes:

But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You

are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.¹

I'll stop there. Whenever I teach this passage to my students in class, I always like to refer to it as Paul's theology of the body. Many of you are probably familiar with Pope John Paul II. In the early 1980s, his general audiences—he had 129 or so—general audiences where he addressed the creation of man and woman as male and female. And he referred to this as a theology or his theology of the body. It became a very popular, very influential series of papal teachings on the nature of masculinity, femininity, as well as sexuality, consecrated virginity, marriage...a whole host of teachings related to Pauline anthropology—not just Pauline anthropology, but Biblical anthropology, the theology of what it means to be a human being, and also to human sexuality and the theology of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman.

Anyway, I highly recommend reading Pope John Paul II's—St. Pope John Paul II's—*Theology of the Body*...although it's not easy going. It's not for the faint of heart. It's some of his most difficult and dense writing, which is saying a lot for St. John Paul II.

Anyway, but...John Paul. The idea of theologizing about the human body is not something John Paul II came up with. Paul's already doing this in 1 Corinthians. And the reason I read the full context there is because I want you to understand why he is pushed to address this topic. If you recall, he's writing to the Church at Corinth. And Corinth was a port city. It was known for being not only cosmopolitan in the various groups of people that lived there that came from all over, but it was also known for sexual immorality. And so one of the first points we want to highlight here in this text is that when the Revised Standard Version or when the New American Bible says immorality, the Greek word is actually more explicit than that. The Greek word is *porneia*...*porneia*, from which we get the word “pornography.”

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

So you don't have to know a lot of Greek to understand the sexual connotations of the Greek word *porneia*. So when Paul says that:

The body is not meant for immorality... (1 Corinthians 6:13c)

What he means is that the body is not for sexual immorality, in particular. The body is not made for *porneia*. I'll never forget...every time I see this verse, though, one time I had a student turn in an essay, and they quoted and they said, "The body is not made for immortality." And I was like, "Well, you might want to go check the Apostles Creed on that one again, because that's exactly what it's made for in terms of the resurrection of the body." It was just a typo, but every time I see it, it comes back to mind.

But a part of the problem there is that it's lacking an adjective to make it explicit, what kind of immorality is involved. Paul's not talking about fiscal immorality here or political corruption...or he's not talking about theft or false witness. He's talking about sexual immorality. That's the context. So what's interesting is he begins his discussion of *porneia* and the body with a statement that:

"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"...

So let's pause there. Why does he bring that up as an analogy? That verse isn't included in the lectionary, but I included it because I want you to see the context of his statements here that would otherwise be very puzzling. So what Paul's doing there is he's making an argument from what philosophers or theologians call teleology, from the Greek word *telos*. It means an "end" or "goal." So the teleology of the body is basically—it's just this fancy way of saying the purpose of the body.

So if you look at the human body, you look at its various parts, the parts are made for something. They have a purpose. They have a *telos*; they have an end. They have a goal for which they were created. And the stomach was created for food. If you put food into the stomach, it'll digest it. If you have one of those disorders where you eat things that you can't actually digest, like some...there are different disorders that sometimes children will eat dirt or they'll eat chalk. They have a mineral deficiency. Sometimes people will have the temptation to eat metal or

coins or things like that. None of those things are going to actually work, because your body—your stomach—is not made for dirt or chalk or coins or metal. It's made to digest food.

So Paul here...he's drawing an analogy from nature, from the nature of the created body. But what's fascinating about it is, if you were writing this letter and you said "food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food" ...and then your next step was "the body is not meant for sexual immorality," you would probably think that Paul is going to say, "The body is not meant for *porneia*, but it's meant for marriage" ...or it's meant for procreation, or it's meant for a union of a man and a woman, like Genesis 1 and 2.

But he doesn't do that. He zags when you might have zigged, or zigs where you might have zagged. Instead of saying the body isn't for sexual immorality but for marriage, he says:

The body is not meant for [*porneia*], but for the Lord...

...and this is staggering:

...and the Lord for the body. (1 Corinthians 6:13c)

Now what in the world does he mean to say that the human body is created for God, for the Lord—it says the Lord here—and that the Lord is for the body. There's a relationality. In other words, what he's saying is, the teleology...the ultimate teleology of the human body is actually the Lord Christ Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now why would Paul say that? Well, it's because Paul is thinking theologically. He's thinking christologically here. And in Paul's theology of who Jesus is, Jesus isn't just the Son of God. He isn't just the Lord. He's also the divine bridegroom. He's the bridegroom Messiah, and the Church is His Bride that's made for union with Him...and not just some kind of moral union, but there's a bodily union. It's not sexual, but it's bodily between Christ and the Church, because every single

person who's baptized becomes a member of His Body. It's Paul, more than any other author, who uses the image of the Body of Christ to describe the Church.

So let me give you an example of this. This is from 2 Corinthians 11:2. So Paul writes another letter to the same community, and this is what he says to them:

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband.

Fascinating. When did Paul betroth the Corinthians to Christ? Well, when he preached the Gospel to them and then as he says in 1 Corinthians 1, when he began to baptize them. He united them with Christ in Baptism in a virginal, nuptial union. They entered into the new covenant, which isn't just a special relationship with Christ. It's a marriage covenant. It's a nuptial covenant. It's a marital bond that unites Christ with the believers in the mystical Body of the Church.

So what Paul is doing here is he's laying the groundwork for showing just how serious sexual sin is by reminding the Corinthians that if you're baptized, you actually belong to Christ. You're a member of Christ's Body. You're a member of Christ's bride. And it's unfortunate—at least in my view, although I don't get to make these decisions—that the Church hops over the next couple of verses, because he drives home the reality of that point by saying:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!

The Greek word there, *mē genoito*, Paul means “by no means”—absolutely not.

Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two shall become one flesh.”

Alright, so I think the Church probably omits these pastorally because of the mention of prostitution and the explicit nature of the verses. Maybe they thought that in a pastoral context, that might be problematic or scandalous. There are kids that go to church and whatnot. I'm not sure. I don't know the exact reason, but

what I do know is that for Paul, he's definitely getting the Corinthians' attention here by helping them understand in a very real way for Paul that what Christians do with their bodies, Christ does through them, because they are really members of Christ...which is a wonderful thing when they're performing virtuous actions—acts of charity. It's Christ working in me, Paul says:

“...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me... (Galatians 2:20b)

But if a person is engaged in mortal sin and in sexual immorality, Paul is saying...don't you understand, that if you're a member of Christ and you make your body a member of a prostitute, that you are in a sense uniting Christ to a prostitute? And then he says, God forbid that someone do something like that.

Now why does he have to say this to the Corinthians? Well, as you read through the letter in Corinth, you're going to realize that these converts from paganism haven't quite gotten the theology of the body yet. They don't yet understand their bodies through the Jewish lens of creation and redemption. They're thinking of their bodies in the way the pagans did. The pagans, by and large, didn't have a problem with the kind of sexual immorality associated with, say for example, prostitution.

So what's likely going on here is that some members of the Church at Corinth are still visiting the brothels in Corinth, so Paul has to address the question of *porneia* (sexual sin) by explaining to them who they really are and what their bodies are in Christ. And that's where the Church picks up. The lectionary says:

But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

And then it says:

Shun immorality.

That's a weak translation as well. Literally, it's “flee from sexual immorality.” Run away from it. You see it? Go the other direction. He's not saying shun any kind of immorality. He's saying run away from sexual immorality. Well, why? Because

every other sin the man commits is outside the body, but in this one, he sins against his own body. And he says:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God?

Now that's a staggering claim on Paul's part, because it links the Christian not just with the second person of the Trinity, Christ, but also with the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Now that's not the language Paul uses, but Paul certainly has a triune God that he speaks about—God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So here he's describing the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in the believer, and thereby making the body into a temple. Now, that's a very Jewish concept. The Jews had the idea of the Jerusalem temple as essentially the dwelling place of God on Earth. You can see this—it goes all the way back to Exodus 40, when Moses builds the tabernacle. The tabernacle is just a portable tent, but when the glory cloud of the Lord descends upon the tabernacle in Exodus 40, it transforms it into a temple. It transforms it into a sanctuary. It transforms it into the dwelling place of God on Earth.

So for Paul, every single Christian's body is the equivalent of the tabernacle of Moses, except now the Spirit of the glory of God is dwelling within the body of the individual and not in a tent made by human hands. So what Paul is saying here is...he's not just trying to get the Corinthians to understand christology and ecclesiology—theology of Christ, theology of church—he's also trying to get them to understand pneumatology.

When he wants to deal with sexual sin, he doesn't focus on, well, you know...it's going to lead to trouble in your life. It's going to lead to problems, broken relationships, and pain. He focuses on the theological problems with it. It says by definition, if your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, then sexual sin in particular isn't just wrong, it's a sacrilegious desecration of something that's holy. It doesn't just harm you; it desecrates the holiness of the Christian body. Because a Christian's body has been set apart for Christ. A Christian is consecrated to Christ. A Christian belongs to the bride of Christ. And just like if a bride were to give her body to someone who was not her husband, it would be a desecration of her body

and a violation of the marriage covenant. So too, for a Christian to engage in *porneia* is a desecration of the Christian body and a violation of the Holy Spirit dwelling within—so a very serious thing. So Paul says, you have to understand:

You are not your own; you were bought with a price. (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20a)

What's he referring to there? He's referring to the Passion of Christ, which was given as a ransom for many. So Paul's point is exactly the opposite of the kind of modern day slogan, "It's my body, I can do what I want with it." Well, not if you were baptized, according to Paul. If you were baptized, if you have faith, then your body belongs to Christ, and He paid for it with the infinitely valuable price of His blood...which makes any desecration of the Christian body that much more serious, that much more grave. That's why Paul is saying here: Flee from *porneia*. Run from it. Don't play with it. Don't dabble in it. Don't put yourself in the near occasion of it. Get away from it. Run away from it, straight the other way, because it's particularly deadly.

So, alright, a lot there. A lot in Paul. Paul is so rich, so good. Such a great way to start off Ordinary Time here with this exhortation. This is very important for Christians to understand who they are in Christ, so that we can live in accordance with those demands.

So what might we say about this again? In closing, I want to take two quotes from the living tradition. The first one is from St. John Chrysostom, who I've mentioned and quoted before—fourth century Church Father. Ah, I don't want to say he's my favorite Church Father, but he's certainly one of the most enjoyable to read. I love John Chrysostom. And this is what he says in his *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*:

Reverence Him that dwells within. For the Paraclete is He. Thrill before Him that is enfolded and cleaves unto you; for Christ is He. Have you indeed made yourself members of Christ? Think thus, and continue chaste... Before they were members of a harlot, and Christ has made them members

of His own Body. You have therefore henceforth no authority over them. Serve Him that has set you free.²

So notice what John Chrysostom is highlighting there—the union of the Christian both with the paraclete that dwells within the Holy Spirit and with Christ the Bridegroom. And he’s calling them to reverence at the mystery of the indwelling of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the person...and the recognition that our bodies are not our own to do with as we please. We become—as Paul says in Romans—slaves of righteousness. Slaves don’t get to choose what they do. They obey the master, and in this case that’s a metaphor for the obedience that we owe to the Lord, who has set us free from the slavery of sin.

Now you might be thinking...well, what does that mean though, Dr. Pitre? “Think thus, and continue chaste...” I’m married...I have a husband...I have a wife... I live in the married state. Isn’t chastity just for people who are unmarried (whether they be celibate or consecrated virgins)? And that’s a widespread misunderstanding, but that’s not actually precisely correct.

So the *Catechism* makes a very important statement. I’ll end with this. In *Catechism* 2348, it talks about the virtue of chastity. And it says here:

*All the baptized are called to chastity. The Christian has “put on Christ,” the model for all chastity. All Christ’s faithful are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life. At the moment of his Baptism, the Christian is pledged to lead his affective life in chastity. “People should cultivate [chastity] in the way that is suited to their state of life. Some profess virginity or consecrated celibacy which enables them to give themselves to God alone with an undivided heart in a remarkable manner. Others live in the way prescribed for all by the moral law, whether they are married or single.” Married people are called to live conjugal chastity; others practice chastity in continence.*³

² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 18

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par 2348-49

That's CCC, 2348-49. So a lot of times think the virtue of chastity is simply a synonym for continence, for abstinence from all sexual relations...but it's not. All Christians are called to avoid sexual sin, to avoid *porneia*. But the right use for the body is different. For those who are in the married covenant, in the married state of life, which not only permits but encourages a union and procreation of spouses as one of the ends of marriage. But then for everyone else outside of the marital covenant, they're called to chastity in continence—in other words, chastity in abstinence from sexual relations and from sexual sin.

So just a little distinction there, but it's important to point out. I just think it's important to end with that point from the *Catechism* that all of the baptized are called to chastity. All are called to avoid *porneia*. And let's face it, we are living in a pornographic culture, and we need to renew that commitment and the call to Christians to recognize that when you were baptized, your parents didn't just sign you up for membership in the local parish. As the *Catechism* says:

At the moment of his Baptism, the Christian is pledged to lead his affective life in chastity.

Because at the moment of Baptism, our bodies become a temple of the Holy Spirit. And as Paul says to the Corinthians:

You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20)