

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time – B

During my 18 years as a faculty member at Loras College I taught a course entitled “Christian Sexual Morality.” It was a popular course that usually filled-up the first day of registration. A male student who had signed up for the course was once asked by a friend, “How come you are taking that course?” He replied, “I know all about sex but I don’t know anything about morality.” Is this true of you as well?

I discovered during my years of teaching this course that only about half of the parents of my students talked to their sons and daughters about sexuality. I also discovered that the course was popular with couples who were dating one another. The course apparently allowed them the opportunity to talk about their relationship from a faith perspective.

We live in a very sexually charged culture. We are surrounded by sexual images all day long. In this way we are like the Christians in Corinth during the time of St. Paul. As a port city on the Mediterranean Sea it was known for its sexual immorality. And so we hear Paul write in the second reading today “The body is not for immorality but for the Lord.” He goes on to say that our bodies are “members of Christ” and temples of the Holy Spirit.

Apparently in the Corinthian culture and all too often in our American culture today sexuality was understood as having no more eternal value than eating and drinking: we eat when we are hungry, we drink when we are thirsty and we have sex when we are sexually aroused. In these ways we are not much different than animal world around us. But aren’t we more than animals?

Take for example the bread and wine that will soon be placed on the altar. They are not meant to satisfy our physical hunger and thirst but rather our spiritual hunger and thirst when

through the power of the Holy Spirit they become for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ. In this form they are meant to be a foretaste for us of the eternal banquet of heaven. The same is true of our sexuality – it is more than just a means having of pleasure and babies. It is also a means to experience God. For example, I used to work with an older couple on retreats for engaged couples. In one of their talks they described their love making as a form of prayer. They said they tried to pray often together!

This older couple's comments on sexuality and prayer remind me of St. Teresa of Avila who was a virgin, a nun and a spiritual mystic in 16th century Spain. During her life she experienced periods of religious ecstasy in her prayer life that some religious writers compare to the ecstasy experienced by husbands and wives when they are intimate with one another. There is in fact a famous statue of her in Rome entitled St. Teresa in ecstasy. It is a marvelous piece of sculpture by the Italian artist known as Bernini. Look it up on the internet... you will be amazed.

In summary, St. Paul's letter that we heard today challenges us to ask ourselves what does it mean to be embodied persons united to Christ? Perhaps Paul is reminding us that our only way to God is through our bodies, through our five senses? There is an old saying that "faith builds on nature." It is a reminder that while God can work directly through miracles to touch our lives, more frequently he works his creation, through our human bodies to do so. Sexuality is one way that he does this. Do you believe this to be true?