



Dear Folks,

God, whose generosity has no limit, has made us for the fullness of life, the fullness of freedom, and the fullness of joy. The Enemy is always trying to persuade us to accept an inferior substitute, something that usually seems better at first but then betrays us. If we are going to show people that the Gospel is worth accepting, we have to show that what it offers is better than what the world offers. We read in the Scriptures:

*“See, I am teaching you the statutes and ordinance as the Lord, my God has commanded me, that you may observe them in the land you are entering to possess. Observe them carefully, for this is your wisdom and discernment in the sight of the peoples, who will hear all of these statutes and say, ‘This great nation is truly a wise and discerning people (Deuteronomy 4:5-6).”*

*“If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31b-32).” “A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10).”*

*“But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the word so that they may share my joy completely (John 17:13).”*

One of the great triumphs of the Enemy is convincing so many people that Christianity is a matter of accepting a diminished life in order to get a reward from a miserly God. It is for us to show that following Jesus and His teaching leads to a more abundant, more free, more joyful life.

What do people see when they look at us? Do they see people who disagree with each other and still show love and respect, people with a steady and persistent dedication to helping those in need when it is popular and when it is not, people who work harder at fixing themselves than correcting other people, people more interested in developing virtue than in virtue signaling? Do they see us as light to the world (Matthew 5:14)? Would many not be drawn to this? These things are, of course difficult, and so we need to take advantage of all the help God provides for us to grow in holiness.

Some people suggest that we need to downplay or even modify Catholic teaching on sexuality. I say that is a mistake. What if it is one of the most important gifts we have to offer the world now? Daniel Mattson gave a talk on Courage International to a diocesan gathering for priests (We see him in the documentary “Desire of the Everlasting Hills”, and he wrote a very interesting book “Why I Don’t Call Myself Gay”). He started with the provocative question, “Is chastity a part of the good news?” He talked about living a sinful lifestyle and said, “I was as happy as I knew how to be.” Then he gave up his old lifestyle to follow Jesus according to the Catholic faith and learned a new level of happiness. How many Catholics, even those who try to take the faith seriously, consider Catholic teaching on marriage, sexuality, and chastity to be a bitter pill to swallow, rather than a wonderful gift. I suggest that this is because we have not done enough to show the goodness, beauty, and truth

of that teaching. We have the better message; the Enemy has outdone us in marketing (Luke 16:8).

Ralph Martin makes the argument, “One of the main reasons for the growth of the early Church was its emphasis on sexual morality rooted in the believers becoming one body, one spirit with Christ Himself. Call it the theology of the body if you will. The difference between the Church and the world on these issues was a prime reason why those pagans of good will could recognize a ‘higher’ way of life that was being lived by Christians in their respect for sexuality, marriage, and family (Church in Crisis, p. 132).” He presents scholars’ statements (with footnotes) to back that up. People (especially women) who were disillusioned with the exploitative sexual practices of ancient Rome were drawn to a more noble vision of how people should conduct themselves. Now, with so many experiencing the destructive power of pornography addiction, hook-up culture, human objectification, degradation, exploitation (in so many ways) and many other evils, might a nobler vision be welcomed by many people. As Christopher West said, “if you don’t know about the banquet, you wind up eating from the dumpster.” Let us never be ashamed of any aspect of the Gospel (Romans 1:16). If we don’t see it as Good News, it is a shortcoming on our part. We shall never have an occasion to say that God should have done a better job designing it.

If we are about anything, we are about inviting people to the banquet. Every aspect of our faith is part of the banquet, and the better we know the menu, the better we can invite people.

Blessings,  
Fr. Jim