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Truth, Goodness and Beauty: Loving Ourselves as God Made Us in our sexual identity

My dearly beloved brothers and sisters,

As I continue my teachings regarding the importance of loving God, others and ourselves through truth, goodness and beauty, I hope to draw our attention to loving ourselves as God made us. This journey of experiencing God's love can be filled with hope and joy. Unfortunately, there is sometimes also a depravity of a true understanding of who we are as male and female. But we can take heart even in these confusing times we live in because we know we are not alone. God is ever-present with us, encouraging and loving us as the beautiful persons He has created us to be in His image. When we discover and love who we are as male and female, recognize our human weaknesses, and not give in to our disordered desires, we are able to delight in our inherent dignity, body and soul, destined to be in loving friendship with God, others and ourselves. Yes, even being able to love ourselves as God does! Let's delve into this a bit more by focusing on five points.

1. We are called to love ourselves as God made and loves us.

It is sometimes difficult to know our inherent dignity, receive God's love and live out of the truth of who we are. It has taken me many years to be able to receive God's love and to try to love myself because I often looked at the weaknesses of my body or mind. As a kid I was tempted many times to desire to be someone other than who God made me to be. I wanted to be stronger, bigger, faster in playing football with my brothers and cousins. Oh how common it is that we as humans want or try to be something other than what and who we really are in our humanity. As baptized, we are God's beloved adopted sons and daughters who are loved unconditionally. This is true regardless of how we love ourselves—or struggle to do so—the way we were created.

And just as God loves us and indeed *rejoices and delights* in us, so too are *we* called to rejoice and delight in who we are and who others are. We are created in His image. We are called to share eternal life with Him. What glorious gifts! What a weighty calling, perhaps even an overwhelming one at times, unless we love ourselves as God loves us in our unique identity. Although God has created us with “an inner power that draws [us] toward all that is true, good, and beautiful” (St. John Paul II, “Man and Woman He Created Them,” n. 47.2), we can go astray and fail to fully understand ourselves and the great gift of our sexual identity that we have been given. We know from Scripture: **“God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”** (Gen 1:27). How can we fully rejoice in being created in the image of God? By knowing and loving ourselves as God made us.

2. The truth of our identity can be known through human reason.

It's so important for us to recognize that we can come to know our true identity not only by way of the truths which our loving God has taught us in Scripture and Church teaching, but also by means of our own human reason capacities. Through the use of our intellect, senses and human reasoning faculties for example, we can know objective truths by nature which science helps us discover and explain. Through the history of humanity, Christians and non-Christian philosophers, scientists and others have discovered inherent truths by observing the very nature (design, functions) of things. When human reason is used rightly and well we live in objective reality. If we apply natural reasoning to understand the nature of our sexual identity at birth, we can determine even by observation of the body of a baby if a person is male or female. Even as a young kid on the farm it was easy to figure out if a newborn calf or piglet was male or female by observation. We discovered how they acted and that there were unique features, characteristics and purposes for the way each male or female was created for an intended purpose. When we learn and honor from nature how nature is designed and intended to function by the very nature of the thing, we discover the authentic truth of the inherent nature of that particular creation.

3. God has created us in our bodies and our souls together, as male and female.

"Body and soul are inseparable...they stand or fall together" John Paul II, "Veritatis Splendor," 49

As Catholics we know from Scripture and Tradition what God has revealed about who we are as beloved daughters or sons of his, uniquely as a male or female. Part of discovering the truth of who we are as God knows and loves us is recognizing that our identity as human beings is found in the unity of our own body and our soul. Someone may say, "I have a body," but the greater truth is "I *am* a unique person with a body and a soul." My body and soul *together* make up the essence, i.e. who I inherently am, as God created me to be, as He loves me and as He desires I love myself.

It is in our body that we see the truth that God created us as male and female. Part of the calling to rejoice and delight in who we are includes a calling to seek "with perseverance and consistency, the meaning of [our] body" in the full truth of our masculinity and femininity (Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia," 151). It means "learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning" and it means that "valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself" (Pope Francis, "Laudato Si'," 155).

Although we have an inner power that draws us toward the true, good and beautiful, we also have human weakness and frailty which can diminish or mask that interior force. We may have or develop certain impulses which lead us away from the truth, goodness and the beauty of who we are in God's love, including impulses which lead us away from a true appreciation of our sexual identity and its intended purpose by birth. The truth of the human body is not that the body is merely an organism which "I" inhabit, but rather that it is "*man* [i.e. the human person] *who expresses himself by means of that body*, and in this sense... 'is' that body" (St. John Paul II, "Man and Woman He Created Them," n 55.1). The human body in all its truth is "the body permeated above all...by the whole reality of the person and its dignity...male and female" (ibid., n. 55.4). God invites us to love our human body in all its truth, to love ourselves and others the way He chose to make us as beloved adopted sons and daughters destined for eternal joy and delight with Him.

4. True happiness is only found in respecting and embracing our created identity.

We all seek happiness, and happiness is found when we unite ourselves to a good. Perfect happiness will only come, however, when we are united to the universal source of all good, God Himself, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches (see his “Summa Theologiae” I-II, Q3, a3). To unite ourselves to God, we must recognize and embrace the dignity bestowed on us as creatures created in His image. Since we do not create ourselves, our inherent dignity, nor our identity, the truth, goodness and beauty of who we are and how we are intended to function by nature and as revealed by God are given as priceless gifts by our loving God. When we respect and rejoice in the gift of our body and soul in its unique identity as male and female, we find authentic and abiding happiness, flourishing and fulfillment.

Unfortunately, it is such a tragedy to see some people in our culture embrace ways of thinking and medical practices that disrespect the true nature of how we were created, claiming we are free to redefine the reality of ourselves as we see fit. This path only leads to greater sadness, confusion and self-reliance rather than to loving ourselves as God made us. Whenever we try to make ourselves happy by trying to be someone we weren’t created to be, we deny the truth, goodness and beauty of who we really are. Such self-seeking choices to violate God’s created beauty in ourselves or others is a violation and sin against God and brings harm to ourselves and others. Self-love is empty and unfulfilled because we are made in God’s image and likeness, destined for being in divine love with Him, with others and with ourselves.

Another destructive aspect of self-seeking sexual identity, opposite sex dressing, acting, claiming of rights to go in opposite sex bathrooms, be on opposite sex athletic teams, is that it brings confusion to others and imposes one’s own preferences and desires over the common good of society. True common good is promoted by sound reasoning, not by seeking rights which cause unjust hardship toward others. For example, is it really just to females if a male chooses to self-identify as a female and change in a female locker room, play on a female sports team or bunk with a female roommate in college dorms when we know by nature their physical bodies and capacities are different?

I learned the important lesson that happiness is not found in changes to one’s body but in the right relationships with God, others and self through my uncle Donnie who was severely disabled all his life. Although he desired to walk, run, get out of bed and feed himself, he accepted his limitations and focused on loving relationships with God and others. Consequently, he was one of the happiest people I knew growing up because He knew and loved God, others and himself as he was and not how he physically wished he could be. Happiness is found in loving relationships, not in external things like possessions, accomplishments, or thinking that changing our sexual identity will bring us true happiness. It won’t.

5. We all struggle to understand our created identity in some way, yet God loves us even in our struggle. He asks us to do the same.

One of the things I love about our Catholic faith is its solid teachings are based on what God has revealed in the Bible. Listen to the clear teaching of Jesus regarding the greatest of the commandments: **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength.”** The second is this: **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”** (Mark 12:30-31). These words, with their clear teaching of love of God and others, impel us, ask us, to love everyone!

It is because we love others and desire their happiness that it is so important that our culture, including our laws, embraces our authentic, God-given identity as human beings, as body and soul, as male and

female. The common good of our society demands nothing less, and this is what our God calls us to safeguard. Any promotion of or attempts at self-created sexual identity will cause great harm to innocent children, youth and adults because happiness is not found in creating or redesigning ourselves—including our bodies—but in respecting and loving them as they are by birth as male or female. We must protect the innocence and objective truth, goodness and beauty of our bodies as designed by God so as not to be deceived into thinking that attempting to change their sexual identity will bring Godly happiness. For the sake of children and the common good of society, and out of respect for our bodies and God who designed us as he did for our ultimate good, I ask all Catholics and people of good will to protect and promote what is objectively good, true and beautiful in our male and female bodies as they were given to us, which we can know by human reason and as revealed by God.

Protecting, promoting and preserving our God-given sexual identity is so important because it affects all aspects of who we are as a person. It affects who we are individually in the unity of our body and our souls. It affects how we form bonds of communion with others (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), n. 2332). It affects marriage and family life, and it affects the harmony between couples and society (see CCC, n. 2333). From the fall of Adam and Eve, through the “sexual revolution” of the 60s to our present day, we do not need to look very far to see the effects of failures to protect, promote and preserve our God-given sexual identity. (There are many sociological studies that have been done on these topics. Although it’s beyond the scope of Church teaching to address the accuracy of such studies, you can find some of them referenced in the Additional Resources at the end of this document.)

Jesus’ words also impel us as Catholics to compassionately love any who may desire, attempt or go through medical practices to try to change their sexual identity. The best thing we can do is pray for them, love them, and speak the truth, goodness and beauty of who they are as a person, inviting them to prayerfully ponder God’s amazing creation in the way their body was created and intended to be. Sharing the truth in love is our duty as we strive to help each other love God, others and ourselves. We must also advocate that individual or special interest groups not be granted legal rights which harm the authentic common good of society.

As we approach the great feast of Pentecost, join me in praying that each and all of us as baptized sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father may be filled—in our bodies and in our souls—with the Holy Spirit, and may grow in knowledge, understanding and, above all, *love* of who He has created us to be.

Additional Resources

Church Teaching

CCC 355-359

St. John Paul II, “Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body”

Congregation for Catholic Education “Male And Female He Created Them: Towards A Path Of Dialogue On The Question Of Gender Theory In Education”

Theological Studies

National Catholic Bioethics Center FAQ: [On Gender Identity Disorder and “Sex-Change” Operations The Person & Identity Project](#)

Diocese of Lansing, [The Human Person and Gender Dysphoria](#)

Sociological Studies

Mary Eberstadt, “Adam and Eve after the Pill”

[Institute for Family Studies](#)