AN OUTSIDE DA BOX PRODUCTION



SEX & MARRIAGE: UNDERSTANDING GOD'S BEAUTIFUL GIFT

USER'S MANUAL

Building the Kingdom of God by ministering to the young church through media and technology.

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FOR THE CATEQUİZ'isT!

There is nothing more personal than our sexuality. As Catholics, we see our bodies as the Temple of the Holy Spirit and our sexual actions as a blessing from God. There is a sacred intimacy about our sexuality that makes us reticent to speak about it in public. We would rather imply things than more fully explain.

Unfortunately, the culture today does not approach the subject with such sensitivity. Media is saturated with sexuality. Remember that for a young person, entertainment is really education. This is where they learn how men and women behave toward one another. And it is not a Christian model. Our silence on the subject only verifies a teen's assumption that what they see on TV and hear in their music is the way it really is.

Media speaks to teens all the time about their sexual identity, every day. So we also need to talk about sex. A lot. One chastity talk per year won't cut it. The beautiful gift of our sexuality needs to be a common theme in how we minister to young people today, because this is where the battle line is drawn and the fighting is the most difficult.

Thankfully, there are more resources available today to help young people in this area than ever before. John Paul II gave a masterful teaching on what he called The Theology of the Body which has given the Church a wealth of theological reflection on our sexuality and allows us to go deeper than a "don't have sex until you are married" message. Because if the only thing a teenager takes away from a Catholic talk on sexuality is "I'm not supposed to do it," then we have really missed the boat.

We created this CateQUIZem! volume as a tool for you to use in your on-going discussion with teenagers about what it means to be a man and woman made in God's image and the beauty of sex in the context of marriage. It's divided into four parts:

LEARN IT! Through a series of humorous sketches, we break open the topic of sex and marriage. Almost everything they will be quizzed on in the next section is covered here.

PLAY IT! This is the heart of CateQUIZem! Participants are challenged with questions from the Catechism and answers are explained.

LIVE IT! A series of quick videos that give some practical advice on how to live a pure life.

PRAY IT! Scriptural reflections on purity and some great examples from the Saints.

There are lots of different ways to use the material on this DVD. Here are some ideas to make your CateQUIZem! experience the most effective.

OPTION #1: The Big Show

Use the CateQUIZem! DVD as the major part of a youth group gathering. Set up your youth room like a wedding chapel. Have your core members dress up. Have ushers ask "friend of the bride?" or "friend of the groom?" and escort them to their seats.

At the start of the meeting, have a recording of Pachabel's Canon (or some other wedding music) as the bridesmaids come in. Then play a recording of "Here Comes the Bride." Have everyone stand as the bride comes in and meets the groom on the altar. Then everyone sits.

PRIEST: Dearly beloved, we have gathered here today to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

GROOM: Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

PRIEST: What? That's the Sacrament of Reconciliation, not marriage.

BRIDE: (Sticks her tongue out and keeps it there.)

PRIEST: What are you doing?

BRIDE: Body of Christ?

PRIEST: No, that's Eucharist! That happens later.

GROOM: Well, let's just skip to the part where you put that oil on our heads.

PRIEST: That's Confirmation! Don't you two know anything about the Sacrament of Marriage? (They look

confused.) Here, watch this video. (Play "Learn It!" from the CateQUIZem! DVD.)

6:00 - 6:10 PM Gather Together

Perform the skit shown above.

6:10 - 6:40 PM Show "Learn It!"

6:40 - 7:00 PM **Testimony**

A talk from a Catechist on the beauty of marriage. Maybe have this talk given by a married couple.

7:00 - 7:30 PM Show "Play It!"

The length of game show depends on how much time you give them to come up with answers.

7:30 - 7:45 PM **Close in Prayer**

Ask God for the gift of purity, and stress the mercy of God because some teens may be strongly convicted of past activity. If you have time, pray "A Rosary for Purity" in the "Pray it!" section of the DVD.

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Show the "St. Joseph/St. Maria Goretti" video and encourage a devotion to those saints. Hand out their medals or

holy cards at the end of the evening.

7:45 - 8:00 PM Fun, snacks, and mingling!

You can even do stupid wedding things like "The Chicken Dance".

OPTION #2: The Day Retreat

Perhaps you'd like to spend a spiritual day with teens reflecting on the beauty of sex and marriage. This is great because it gives young people more time to process the message and make a commitment to purity. Start off with the same script and environment as Option 1.

| 10:00 - 10:15 AM | Gather Together Donuts, Bagles, Etc. Do marriage skit (see option 1). | | |
|------------------|---|--|--|
| 10:15 - 10:45 AM | Show "Live It!" | | |
| 10:45 - 11:15 AM | 1 Testimony A talk from a Catechist on the beauty of marriage. Maybe have this talk given by a married couple. | | |
| 11:15 - 11:45 AM | Group Discussion | | |
| 11:45 - 1:00 PM | Lunch/Break | | |
| 1:00 - 2:00 PM | • | | |
| | Do something fun where they run around and try not to break things. | | |
| 2:00 - 2:45 PM | Group Discussion: "What does it mean to be a Man/Woman of God?" Break into men's and women's groups. The focus should be on how God created men and women different but equal. It's also a time to focus on the blessings/struggles regarding each gender. (Tip: It shouldn't all be about sex.) | | |
| 2:45 - 3:15 PM | Show "Play It!" Gather them into four groups and play CateQUIZ'em! The length of game show depends on how much time you give them to come up with answers. | | |
| 3:15 - 3:30 PM | Snack/Break Celebrate victory with mid-afternoon snack. | | |
| 3:30 - 4:00 PM | Testimony A talk from a Catechist on the beauty of chastity. Start with "St. Joseph/St. Maria Goretti" video in the "Pray it!" section of the DVD. Main point: Chastity is not simply saying "no" to sex, but "yes" to all that God wants to bless us with. | | |
| 4:00 - 4:15 PM | Prayer/Reflection Invite them to a time of quiet prayer that could include: journaling, writing a letter to God, writing a letter to a future spouse, Eucharistic Adoration, signing a chastity pledge card, etc. | | |
| 4:15 - 4:30 PM | Close in Prayer Use the "Rosary for Purity" found in the "Pray it!" section. | | |

OPTION #3: The Follow-Up

Whether you use CateQUIZem! for a youth night or a day retreat, it's important to help them live out their call for purity. The "Ben and Barbara's Six Tips for Sexual Purity" videos on the "Live it!" section of the DVD were created for teens who made a decision to live a chaste life and need God's help to do it. The six themes are:

Video One: "Whatever."

Video Two: Running Away

Video Three: Stop Before it Starts

Video Four: Trusting in God

Video Five: Receiving Mercy

Video Six: The Fast(ing) Way to Get Results

You could use all of them in one night, or spread them for different nights. Maybe use them like a commercial break in your youth group meetings, or use the main Scripture verses in a Bible study. The LIVE IT! section of this user's manual has reflections on each of the videos.

OPTION #4: Mix and Match

Just because we put the videos in a certain order doesn't mean you have to show them that way! Use the "TV Show Pitch" video from "Live It!" as a part of a talk on the importance of family. Use the "Sport Talker" video from "Live it!" at the beginning of a talk on the differences between men and women. You can divide up the "Live it!" videos over a couple of different nights, then do the "Play It!" section as a social activity later on. There's lots of ways to do it right.

No matter how you use CateQUIZem!, the most important element in all of this is you. We can't discourage teenagers away from sexual sin—the culture makes it too attractive. But we can encourage them into the virtue of chastity. And the best way to do that is by example.

Teens need to see adults joyfully living out their vocation. They need to hear from both married and celibate people, "Trust in God's awesome plan for you. It really is the best!" They need to know they are not alone in their struggle for purity and that God is bigger than any sin they can commit.

Their culture does not keep silent about their sexuality. Nor should we. We pray this resource gives you some creative ways to help teens discover God's beautiful gift in sex and marriage.



LEARM it!

Scene 1—At a Wedding

Goal: To contradict negative cultural stereotypes of marriage and family.

Catechism: "Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes." *CCC 1604*

"A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfillment." *CCC 2366*

"Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves." CCC 1652

Through the sacrament of Marriage, "Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,' and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love." *CCC 1642*

Scene 2—TV Show Pitch

Goal: To contradict negative cultural stereotypes of marriage and family.

Catechism: "Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator's eyes." *CCC 1604*

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Scene 3—Faith Show

Goal:

In the "Faith Show" scenes, we try to show the extreme views on sex. Don Stephen Tinkaboutit says we should never do it; Cupid says we should do it all the time. When Jesus appears, he gives us the right answer: sex is a beautiful gift from God to be celebrated in the sacrament of Marriage.

Catechism:

"Chastity is a moral virtue. It is also a gift from God, a grace, a fruit of spiritual effort. The Holy Spirit enables one whom the water of Baptism has regenerated to imitate the purity of Christ." CCC 2345

"All the baptized are called to chastity... in the way that is suited to their state of life. Some profess virginity or consecrated celibacy... others live in the way prescribed for all by the moral law, whether they are married or single." *CCC 2348-2349*

"The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude." CCC 2362

"The spouses union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family." *CCC* 2363

Scene 4—Sports Talker

Goal: To show how men and women are equal, but not the same.

Catechism:

"Man and woman have been created, which is to say, willed by God: on one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman... Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity 'in the image of God." CCC 369

"Man and woman were made 'for each other'—not that God left them half-made and incomplete; he created them to be a community of persons, in which each can be 'helpmate' to the other, for they are equal as persons and complementary as masculine and feminine." CCC 372

Scene 5—Spiritual Passions

Goal: To explain the virtue of chastity.

Scripture: "God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created them. Male and female

he created them." Genesis 1:27

"Keep away from sexual immorality. All other sins that people may commit are done outside the body; but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you have whom you received from God?... So use your body for the glory of God." *1 Corinthians* 6:18-20

Catechism: "Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated

by them and becomes unhappy." CCC 2339

Scene 6—The Faith Show

Goal: In the "Faith Show" scenes, we try to show the extreme views on sex. Don Stephen Tinkaboutit says

we should never do it; Cupid says we should do it all the time. When Jesus appears, he gives us the

right answer: sex is a beautiful gift from God to be celebrated in the sacrament of Marriage.

Scripture: "Surely God's mercy is not over, his deeds of faithful love not exhausted; every morning they are

renewed; great is his faithfulness!" Lamentations 3:22-23

Catechism: "Chastity is a moral virtue. It is also a gift from God, a grace, a fruit of spiritual effort. The Holy Spirit

enables one whom the water of Baptism has regenerated to imitate the purity of Christ." CCC 2345

"All the baptized are called to chastity... in the way that is suited to their state of life. Some profess virginity or consecrated celibacy... others live in the way prescribed for all by the moral law, whether

they are married or single." CCC 2348-2349

"The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude." *CCC 2362*

"The spouses union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family." *CCC* 2363



PLAY iT!

ROUND 1—Creed

- 1) Scripture tells us that when God created the world, He said, "it is good". But when God created humanity, He said, "It is very good." Humanity has a unique place in God's visible creation because we are made in his image and likeness. For 50 points, what else makes us unique?
 - A. We are intelligent
 - B. We are made male and female
 - C. We were made in God's friendship
 - D. We share in God's creative power

ANSWER: C

"The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and the creation around him, in a state that would surpassed only by the glory of the new creation in Christ." — CCC 374

- 2) For 50 points, the soul comes from
 - A. God
 - B. Man and woman
 - C. A cooperation between a male and female couple and God

ANSWER: A

"The Church teaches that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God—it is not 'produced' by the parents." — CCC 366

3) True or False: Men and women were created for each other, and only when they are together can a man or woman become whole. Apart from each other, he or she is incomplete.

ANSWER: False

"Man and woman were made 'for each other'—not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communication of persons, in which each can be 'helpmate' to the other, for they are equal as persons ('bone of my bones...') and complementary as masculine and feminine." — CCC 372

- 4) We know that man and woman are both made in the image and likeness of God. So what does that make God? Is God:
 - A. Male
 - B. Female
 - C. Both
 - D. Neither

ANSWER: D

"In no way is God in man's image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes." — CCC 369

ROUND 2—Sacraments

- 1) For 50 points, which of the following needs to be present for the sacrament of marriage to be valid?
 - A. The consent of the bride and groom
 - B. The presence of a priest
 - C. A unity candle
 - D. Lots of flowers

ANSWER: A

"The consent must be an act of the will of each of the contracting parties, free of coercion or grave external fear. No human power can substitute for this consent. If this freedom is lacking, the marriage is invalid." — CCC 1628

2) True or False: In marriage, it is the spouses that confer the sacrament upon each other, and the priest, deacon, or bishop acts only as a witness.

ANSWER: True

"According to the Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ's grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church." — CCC 1623

NOTE: This is not the case in the Eastern Rite, where the blessing of the bishop of presbyter is necessary for the validity of the sacrament (CCC 1623).

3) For 50 points, True or False: The marriage bond is established by God himself in such away that marriage between baptized persons can never be dissolved. The Church has no authority to do so.

ANSWER: True

"What God has united, human beings must not divide." — Matthew 19:6

"Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom." — CCC 1640

- 4) With all the amazing gifts that come from the sacrament of marriage, which does the Catechism say is the greatest one?
 - A. The love experienced between the man and the woman, which is an image of Christ and His bride, the Church
 - B. The procreation and education of their offspring
 - C. The sacramental bond which rends their unity to Christ more perfect
 - D. The unity expressed by the indissoluble vows and their witness to the world

ANSWER: B

"By it's very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of their offspring, and it is in them that it finds it's crowning glory. Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute to the good of the parents themselves." — CCC 1652

ROUND 3—Morality

- 1) For 50 points, "Chastity" is synonymous with:
 - A. Self-control
 - B. Virginity
 - C. Abstinence
 - D. Consecrated life

ANSWER: A

"Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy." — CCC 2339

2) For 50 points, True or False: Sex was created by God to do two things. 1) Unite a man and woman more deeply together, and 2) create life. Sexual acts that are not open to both of those things are not in God's plan.

ANSWER: True.

"Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure." — CCC 2362

"The spouse's union achieves the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses themselves and the transmission of life. These two meanings or values of marriage cannot be separated without altering the couple's spiritual life and compromising the goods of marriage and the future of the family. The conjugal love of man and woman thus stands under the twofold obligation of fidelity and fecundity." — CCC 2363

- 3) Our next question, for 50 points. If you are called to the vocation of marriage, you should not have sex:
 - A. Ever
 - B. Until you find someone you love
 - C. Until you are engaged
 - D. Until you are married

ANSWER: D

"Fornication is carnal union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman, It is gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality which is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children." — CCC 2353

- 4) Our last question, for 50 points, what do you think was St. Paul's biggest reason for us to avoid sexual immorality?
 - A. Our bodies are God's temple
 - B. Sexually Transmitted Diseases
 - C. It incurs God's wrath
 - D. Unwanted pregnancy

ANSWER: A

"Keep away from sexual immorality. All other sins that people may commit are done outside the body; the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you and whom you received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:18-19)

Round 4—Prayer

1) The book of Genesis tells us that God created man and woman in his own likeness. He also created the sun and moon, sea and land, birds and animals. For 100 points, what was the last thing that God created?

ANSWER: God created light from the darkness. He created the earth and sea, the sun and moon, fish, birds, and animals that crawl upon the land. But he saved the best for last. The last thing he created was man and woman, in His image and likeness.

Now if you only said "woman", you're still right. Genesis chapter 2 tells us about the creation of man and woman in a bit more detail, and in that story man was first and woman was the perfect finish. You could also say "man" because in the Catechism, "man" refers to both genders. So man, woman, or man and woman are correct. Okay, we'll take humanity, too.

| 2) | God created man and woman for each other, and the Bible says | s, "this is why a man leaves his father and |
|----|--|---|
| | mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become | ." Fill in the blanks. |

ANSWER: God created man and woman for each other. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become <u>one flesh</u>. (Genesis 2:24)

3) In the Catholic Church, marriage is not just a legal contract. It's a sacrament. So what does the sacrament of marriage provide that a legal marriage does not?

ANSWER: Grace.

4) Of the ten commandments, three of them are given to protect the dignity of the family. What are they? There's no partial credit here. But I'll give you a chance for extra credit: which numbers are they? I'll be generous and give you... 30 seconds.

ANSWER:

- The fourth commandment: Honor your mother and father
- The sixth commandment: You shall not commit adultery
- The ninth commandment: You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

If they got the numbers right, give them an extra another 50 points.



Live it!

Six Tips for Sexual Purity

So you want to be pure... but you don't know how. Trust me, you're not alone. Many times we echo the words of St. Paul:

I don't understand my own behavior; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things that I hate... for though the will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not. (Romans 6:15,18)

This battle for sexual purity is not one that we can win on our own. We have to rely on the power of God. For as St. Paul later says,

I can do all things through Him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13)

And we are filled with this power of God through prayer. Prayer=Purity. There's no other way. Because it is only by encountering the incredible and intimate love of Jesus Christ that we can turn away from the fake and shallow love the world is offering us.

Here are some tips to help you when you face sexual temptations.

1) Whatever.

St. Paul wrote,

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is upright and pure, whatever we love and admire, whatever is good and praiseworthy—think about those things. (Philippians 4:8)

We need to fill our minds with things that are good, true, and praiseworthy. In nutrition we often hear the phrase, "you are what you eat." Well, the same is true with our souls, except it's not about what we eat but what we see and hear. If we watch a lot of sexually themed shows or listen to a lot of sexually explicit music, it effects the way our imagination works.

So when our imagination starts taking us to a place where we shouldn't be going, the best way to stop that is to feed it with something good. Actually, it's the only way. Because we can't try to not think about something. It would be

like me telling you, "Don't think about pink elephants!" See? You just thought about them. So to tell ourselves, "I will not think about sex!" just makes us think about sex even more.

So when you start thinking thoughts that will lead you to sexual impurity, think... whatever. Think about Jesus Christ. Think about a friend. Think about something good or noble in your life. Don't focus on eliminating the bad, but replace the bad with the good.

But that assumes there is some good in your head. If you are living a life that is saturated with sexual images and messages, then this won't work too well.

The best way to fill ourselves with "whatever is good" is to spend time in prayer each day. To read and meditate on the Gospels. To experience the sacraments. To spend time in fellowship with other Catholics. And to cut off things in our life that lead us in the opposite direction. Maybe there's a TV show you need to stop watching, or a musician you need to stop listening to. Or... a relationship you need to get out of.

The battle for purity isn't easy. But through the grace of God it is one of the most beautiful victories we can experience. And trust me—the sacrifices we make are small compared to the glory of His gift.

2) Running Away

When St. Paul talked about sexual immorality, he gave one simple piece of advice:

Run away.

Check this out:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (1 Corinthians 6:18)

Running away might sound cowardly to some, but it's pretty stupid to fight if you know you can't win.

The sexual act is something that is both natural and supernatural. It involves our bodies and our souls. Sexual temptation is also both natural and supernatural. So it makes sense that we will need to face this temptation using natural and supernatural means.

The supernatural means is through prayer, being open to the grace God is pouring out upon us to free us from sin and keep us from impurity. But that supernatural grace compels us to natural actions. What's a natural action? Literally, it means I get up and walk away.

If you're in a situation with your boyfriend or girlfriend and things are starting to get out of control, get up and walk away. I'm not kidding. The only other option is sin. Don't just lie on the couch together. Get up and go for a walk around the block. If you're sitting at your computer and are tempted to look at pornography, turn off the computer, get up and walk away. I mean, it's really difficult to look at pornography on your computer when your computer is turned off and you are in another room.

You have to ask God for the strength to do this. In those moments, it can feel like everything in you will fight against such a simple action as standing up and walking away. But don't forget that God is in you, too. And like St. Paul said, we can do all things through Christ who gives us strength.

3) Stop Before It Starts

A common phrase the saints have told us is that if we want to avoid sin, we must avoid the beginnings of sin.

The best place to stop a ball from rolling down a hill is at the top of the hill. So the most effective way to fight sexual temptation is to stop it before it starts, and avoid situations that would encourage it.

The virtue that helps us in this is called prudence. Yes, that's where you get the phrase, "don't be a prude" from. What people are telling you when they use that phrase is that you should be more open to sin in your life. Nice, isn't it?

Though our culture mocks those who are prudent, Scripture has a very different attitude toward them:

"The fool believes any message, but the prudent man looks where he is going." (Proverbs 14:15)

The world would like to blindfold you, spin you around three times, then push you off a cliff. To be prudent is to be wise. It is to be virtuous. A prudent person wouldn't end up alone in a bedroom with someone of the opposite sex, even if it was just "to talk". A prudent person wouldn't become drunk and by doing so lose control of their ability to say no, or their ability to fight off someone who won't listen to that no. A prudent person avoids the beginnings of sin.

Here's an example, at least for guys: The Sports Illustrated Swimsuit edition. It's not Playboy. It's not even Maxim. It's Sports Illustrated! But once a year it is filled with beautiful women who are almost naked. The imprudent person (i.e. fool) would say to himself, "Well, it's not like they are naked, so it's okay." He might even be foolish to justify it by saying something like, "Well, God created the body beautiful so it's okay if I look at it." Yeah, right. There's a huge difference between noticing that a person is beautiful and staring at a sexually provocative model.

Here's something we all need to understand: sin is never satisfied. It always wants more. Looking at the image of a virtually naked woman leads a man to look a picture of a completely naked woman, and then a video of a naked woman with a... you get the idea. It's the same when we date someone. It starts small: some strong sexual innuendo in a text message or conversations on a phone, an embrace where the hands move a little too freely. Like rolling a ball down a hill, our sins gain momentum until it's too late to stop and the next thing we know we crash against the ground.

How can we stop such rapid descent? At the beginning.

Be smart. Be prudent. Don't play with this, it's not worth it. The stakes are too high. And the gift that God is offering is too great not to take it seriously.

4) Trusting God

Here's my favorite verse when it comes to dealing with temptation, sexual or otherwise. It's worth memorizing:

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. But God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. And when you are tempted, he will give you a way to stand up under it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Let me break that verse down into three parts:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. The battle you are fighting is not so unique that you can claim you are alone in your struggles. Dealing with sexual sin is one of the most common experiences of the human condition. All the saints have faced it. Even before the Internet was created, people were dealing with sexual sin. So be comforted that you're not alone in your struggle, and that many have overcome this trial by the grace of God. You can, too.

God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. Listen again to those words of Sacred Scripture: God will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. He allows us to be tempted because he respects our free will, and if we are honest with ourselves we realize that we sin because we want to. Or at least a part of us does. But God will not allow temptation to overwhelm us. We always have a choice. Just as He respects our free will, He makes the devil respect it as well.

This promise assumes a few things. First that we've been prudent, and haven't thrown ourselves into a sinful situation. Second, that we're not dealing with an addiction, which by its very definition means we can't control our actions. But even in those dire situations, God is mighty to save. He can shine a light in the darkest places. And He can help us overcome our addictions, though the path to do so might be long and difficult.

And when you are tempted, He will give you a way to stand up under it. When we cry out, "God, help me!" He always throws us a lifeline. I can't tell you the amount of times I've struggled with sexual sin and my phone would ring, or someone would be at my door, or my computer would crash. If we find ourselves falling into sin, look for a way out. God will provide one. You can trust in that promise. You can trust in Him to save you.

5) Receiving Mercy

For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish, but have eternal life.

If those words sound familiar it's because it's John 3:16, the most popular verse in the Bible. Why is it so popular? Because it captures the Good News, the message of salvation.

For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

Over and over, Scripture tells us of the mercy of God. The letter to Hebrews tells us:

Let us have no fear in approaching the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace when we are in need of help. (Hebrews 4:16)

Because as St. John wrote:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

He not only forgives, but He purifies us. As it says in Psalm 103:

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our faults from us.

And speaking through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord tells us:

Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow. (Isaiah 1:18)

The Saints of the Church have long reflected on the incredible mercy of God. St. John Vianney said that, "Our sins are nothing but a grain of sand alongside the great mountain of the mercy of God." And St. Francis de Sales said that anyone who thinks that God can't forgive all and every sin is guilty of arrogance: "Where is the foolish person who would think it in his power to commit a sin more than God could forgive?"

The catechism tells us that:

There is no one, however wicked and guilty, who may not confidently hope for forgiveness, provided his repentance is honest. Christ who died for all men desires that in his Church the gates of forgiveness would always be open to anyone who turns away from sin. (CCC 982)

Are you getting the point?

Christ himself died once and for all for sins, the upright for the sake of the guilty, to lead us to God. (1 Peter 3:18)

There is no sin you can commit that God can't forgive.

There is no sin you can commit that God doesn't want to forgive. Because, as St. Augustine said, "God loves each one of us as though there were only one of us to be loved." He didn't die on the cross for us because He had to. It was because He wanted us; Because He loves us; And because he wants to show us His mercy.

The very name of Jesus in Hebrew, Yeshua, is literally translated as "I Save". It's what He does. It's what He wants to do. It's what we need to let Him do in our lives when we fall into sin.

For all the tips and tricks you might hear about how to avoid sin, sexual or otherwise, at times you are still going to sin. Because you're a sinner. And I'm a sinner. And God knows this... and He still loves us.

When we confess our sins and accept His grace, it purifies us and makes us stronger for the next battle. The devil would like to hit us with a one-two punch. The first is to lead us into sin, and the second (and more deadly) is to despair of His mercy.

For God so loved the world... For God so loves you, that He sent His only Son, so that through Him you won't perish, but have eternal life. That's a promise. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just. And we shall be white as snow.

6) The Fast(ing) Way to Get Results

This final tip is the most challenging, but the one of most effective ways to stay sexually pure:

Fast.

Yes, I'm talking about giving something up. Fasting isn't just for Lent. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "When you fast," not "if you fast." (Matthew 6:16) Jesus spent lots of time fasting. Don't we want to be like Him? Fasting should be a regular part of our spiritual lives.

The Church encourages her faithful to fast every Friday. What she requires in Lent she requests the rest of the year, namely to abstain from eating meat. But there are a lot of other ways to fast. Don't listen to the radio for a day. Take a day off of drinking soda.

You might be wondering at this point, how will giving up soda for a day help me with sexual temptation? Here are three reasons why you should fast:

A) The power of no. Jesus told us, "Anyone who is faithful in little things will be faithful in great." (Luke 16:10)

We live in a culture of instant gratification. We expect to be satisfied at all times by everything we see. Web pages must appear instantly. Clerks at stores must serve us completely. What we want, we want to get right now.

It is very rare that we ever say "no" to ourselves. But that's what fasting does. It's a bunch of little "no's that help us with the big "no's.

Think of your desires like a little child. If a child cries for candy, what should you do? Sure, you could give him candy. But then he will cry again and you'll be left with the same dilemma. Eventually, you've got to teach the child what "no" means or you'll be left at the whims of the child's temper.

I think that many of our bodies act like spoiled children. They cry out and we seek to instantly satisfy them. So when we have a lustful desire, we're more prone to act on it than deny it.

That's why fasting is so important. It gives us discipline. It puts into practice the ability to say "no" to ourselves on a regular basis. The fast doesn't have to be a big or dramatic one, just little things we can do to offer up our desires to God. When we get used to saying no in the small things, we find strength to say no in the big things.

B) The power of God. Jesus also tells us that fasting is a powerful prayer. When the apostles were unable to cast out a demon, Jesus told them, "That kind of demon can only be driven out by prayer and fasting." (Matthew 17:21)

Do you think there aren't demons abounding in our world today? Though none of us can blame our sexual sin on Satan, claiming "the devil made me do it," we must "stay sober and alert, because your enemy the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 4:8) A lion goes after the slow, fat beasts that fall behind from the pack. So don't be that way!

The Scriptures are full of holy men and women who added fasting to their prayers and accomplished powerful results. Armies were defeated, the dead were raised, and nature itself bent to the will of God in response to those prayers. Can adding fasting to your prayers of purity make such a difference? You bet.

C) The power of repentance. The last reason for fasting is that it is a powerful way of repenting for our sins. It is a small act of penance that doesn't make up for what we did, but it shows that our heart desires to turn away from sin and come completely back to God.

It is a common theme in Scripture that when the people fell away from God, they fasted; And God heard their prayer. He always brought them back.

But it's important to keep our focus on the mercy of God. At times, God chastised His people because they fasted but didn't change their lives. At one point Jesus blasts the Pharisees by telling them, "If you had understood the meaning of the words: Mercy is what pleases me, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the blameless." (Matthew 12:7) If we think our fasting is somehow earning our way back into God's love, we are really mistaken!

Think of it like this: There was one time I got in a fight with my wife. I don't want to go into the details, but the bottom line is: I was an idiot. Later that night, I apologized. She accepted my apology and we were cool. But I decided to do a small act of love to show her (and myself) that I would change. Without saying anything, I started cleaning the kitchen each night. It wasn't a big deal, and it certainly didn't "make up" for what I had said, but it meant a lot to her. And it really brought a deeper sense of reconciliation between us.

Through the grace of God, fasting is a prayer that teaches us discipline, adds power to our prayer, and allows us to more fully repent. What a gift!

So... what are you going to fast from this Friday?



PRAY IT!

A Rosary for Purity

Intro:

The Rosary is a beautiful prayer where we get to reflect on the mysteries of Christ's life through the intercession of someone who knew Him the best: his mother. Normally, a rosary would be focused on the joyful mysteries, the luminous mysteries, the sorrowful mysteries, or the glorious mysteries. But right now we are going to borrow moments from each of those mysteries so that we can pray and meditate upon a specific intention: purity.

Our Blessed Mother is also known as Our Lady of Purity. So let us now ask for her intercession that we may have the strength to live a life of purity, and for God's mercy for the times we have failed.

First:

Our first mystery is from the Joyful Mysteries, and it is the mystery of the Incarnation.

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a virgin named Mary and said to her, "Hail Mary! Full of grace! The Lord is with you!... You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you must name Him Jesus." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be since I have no knowledge of man?" The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be called the Son of God." Mary said, "Let it be done to me according to your will." (Luke 1:26-28,30,34-35,38)

In the garden of Eden, Eve said no to God, and by doing so brought sin into the world. Our Mother Mary said yes, and through her yes salvation came for us all in Jesus Christ. She completely trusted that God's will was the best, even if at the time it was a pretty overwhelming thing. So may we too trust in God's plan for our lives, and be able to say Yes to all He wants for us.

Second:

Our second mystery is from the Luminous Mysteries, and it is the mystery of the wedding feast at Cana.

There was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. They ran out of wine... and the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Draw some out now and take it to the president of the feast." They did this; the president tasted the water and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from, he called the bridegroom and said, "Everyone serves good wine first and worse wine when the guests have drunk, but you have saved the best wine till now." (John 2:1-3,5,7-10)

Marriage was a gift of God at creation. But just as Jesus takes water and turns it into wine, he takes the natural gift of marriage and transforms it into a supernatural gift, a sacrament. He does the same with our sexuality. Sure, animals give into their desires whenever they want to, but we were created for something more. Something better. The president of the feast was amazed at how good the wine tasted. What God offers us is so much better than anything the world can give. Let us offer God our water, let Him transform it into wine, and may we celebrate the gift of our sexuality in the beautiful and sacred way that He intended.

Third:

Our third mystery is from the Sorrowful Mysteries, the mystery of the Crucifixion.

When they reached the place called the skull, there they crucified him and the two criminals, one on his right, and the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing. One of the criminals hanging there abused him: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us as well!" But the other spoke up and rebuked him. "Have you no fear of God at all?" he said. "You got the same sentence as he did, and in our case we deserved it... but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "In truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:33-34,39-43)

Jesus Christ died for our sins. Even on the cross, He spoke of mercy. There is no sin we can commit that God can't forgive. St. Paul reminds us: "You are not your own property, then; you have been bought at a price. So use your body to glorify God." When we look upon the cross, we realize the price God paid for us. Our response should not be one of guilt, but thanksgiving. He died to set us free. He sacrificed his body to purify our own. Let us find our hope and strength in Jesus Christ's amazing love for us, and be washed clean by the blood he shed on cross.

Fourth:

Our fourth mystery is from the Glorious Mysteries, the mystery of the descent of the Holy Spirit.

Christ had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, telling them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them. And then, as they were praying in the upper room nine days later:

Suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a violent wind which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and there appeared to them tongues as of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:2-40)

Imagine sitting in a room with your friends. Suddenly you hear a roar like a violent wind, and then flames appear on everyone's head! The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Apostles and the early believers, and they ran into the streets to tell everyone about it. By the end of that day, they went from seventy-two believers to three thousand.

The Holy Spirit came upon all of us in an intimate way in Baptism. St. Paul tells us: "Do you not realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you and whom you received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19) Do you know what that means? It means that we are more than just flesh and bone. We are sacred. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, tabernacles of God's amazing grace.

Let us pray that we may always be filled with the Holy Spirit who purifies us and strengthens us in our fight against sin. May we always remember our Baptism and realize that we are not of this world; that we were made for something more. Come, Holy Spirit.

Fifth:

Our last mystery is the final Glorious Mystery, the crowning of Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth.

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman, robed with the sun, standing on the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (Revelation 12:1)

It was common in human history that when a King married a Queen from a different people, those people became part of the King's family. And so, Mary, a member of our human race, who said "yes" to God and was the vessel God used to bring Christ into the world, now brings all of humanity to His throne. This mystery is a celebration not only of Christ's love for His mother, but God's love for us as well.

Mary is our Queen and our mother. We can run into her arms and ask for her intercession to help us to be pure like she was. And our mother is a good mother, who loves us and always responds our needs. As it says in the famous memorare prayer:

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to your protection, implored your help, or sought your intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto you, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to you do I come, before you I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in your mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.

St. Joseph

When I think of sexual purity...I think of St. Joseph.

I know that might sound weird. I mean, how could I relate to a guy that lived in Israel two thousand years ago?

No one knows how old Joseph was when he was engaged to Mary, but in that time it was common for a guy to get married at sixteen or seventeen. So he was probably my age when he got some really bad news.

Joseph was told that his fiancée, Mary, was pregnant. He could have had her publically scandalized for that, but because Joseph was a good man he decided to break up the engagement quietly. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and said, (Show image?) "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the power of the Holy Spirit."

So Joseph took Mary into his house. And Mary gave birth to Jesus. It's probably not what he planned, but he accepted God's will.

You often see images of St. Joseph holding a lily. A lily is a symbol of purity, virtue, and innocence. The Church has always held that Mary was a virgin all her life. That means that Joseph accepted her call to virginity and didn't have sex with her, even though it was within his rights as a husband to do so. He was more concerned with what was right for her than satisfying his own desires.

And now St. Joseph is the patron saint of the Universal Church.

So when I think of purity, and need help to be pure, I think of St. Joseph. And I ask for his help by saying, St Joseph...

Pray for us.

More on St. Joseph

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the holy Spirit. Joseph her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us."

When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus. — Matthew 1:18-25

19. "Joseph did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife" into his home (Mt 1:24); what was conceived in Mary was "of the Holy Spirit." From expressions such as these are we not to suppose that his love as a man was also given new birth by the Holy Spirit? Are we not to think that the love of God which has been poured forth into the human heart through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rm 5:5) molds every human love to perfection? This love of God also molds-in a completely unique way-the love of husband and wife, deepening within it everything of human worth and beauty, everything that bespeaks an exclusive gift of self, a covenant between persons, and an authentic communion according to the model of the Blessed Trinity.

"Joseph...took his wife; but he knew her not, until she had borne a son" (Mt 1:24-25). These words indicate another kind of closeness in marriage. The deep spiritual closeness arising from marital union and the interpersonal contact between man and woman have their definitive origin in the Spirit, the Giver of Life (cf. Jn 6:63). Joseph, in obedience to the Spirit, found in the Spirit the source of love, the conjugal love which he experienced as a man. And this love proved to be greater than this "just man" could ever have expected within the limits of his human heart.

20. In the Liturgy, Mary is celebrated as "united to Joseph, the just man, by a bond of marital and virginal love." There are really two kinds of love here, both of which together represent the mystery of the Church - virgin and spouse - as symbolized in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. "Virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but presupposes and confirms it. Marriage and virginity are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the Covenant of God with his people." the Covenant which is a communion of love between God and human beings.

Through his complete self-sacrifice, Joseph expressed his generous love for the Mother of God, and gave her a husband's "gift of self." Even though he decided to draw back so as not to interfere in the plan of God which was coming to pass in Mary, Joseph obeyed the explicit command of the angel and look Mary into his home, while respecting the fact that she belonged exclusively to God.

-John Paul II, Redemptoris Custos, 19-20

Q. Was Joseph a "perpetual virgin" like Mary was?

A. The Church doesn't have an official teaching on the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph as it does on Mary.

The Church has always taught that Joseph respected God's unique call for Mary and that he lived a celibate relationship with her. The Bible describes him as a "just man" (Matthew 1:19) so he wouldn't have had sex outside of the marriage covenant.

The only valid argument to suggest he wouldn't be was if he was previously married. Some have proposed that Joseph could have been an older man, possibly a widower, when he married Mary. This might also explain the reference to the "brothers and sisters" of Jesus as mentioned in Mark 3:32—he might have had children through a previous marriage. However, since the Hebrew language had no words for "cousins" that verse could just as easily refer to Jesus' extended family.

The perpetual virginity of Mary is a dogma of the Church. The perpetual virginity of St. Joseph? We don't have enough information to say. So since both Scripture and Tradition are silent on the matter, so also is the Church.

St. Maria Goretti

When I think of sexual purity... I think of St. Maria Goretti.

She lived in Italy about a hundred years ago. She was born in 1890, but her defining moment came when she was just twelve years old.

While working in her house, Maria was attacked by a young man named Alessandro, a twenty-year old who worked on the same farm as her family. He wanted to sleep with her, but she protested, "No! It is a sin! God does not want it!" Enraged, Alessandro stabbed her fourteen times with a knife and left her for dead.

It took Maria twenty hours to die. But on her deathbed, she had one concern: forgiving Alessandro. On her deathbed, this twelve-year-old girl was worried about the salvation of her murderer.

Alessandro went to jail, and for 30 years was a hardened, unrepentant prisoner. But then he had a dream of Maria Goretti where she handed him a lily. It changed his life forever.

Maria was more concerned with being pure and praying for her attacker than she was for her own life. And now St. Maria Goretti is the youngest beatified saint in the Catholic Church.

So when I think of purity, and need help to be pure, I think of St. Maria Goretti. And I ask for her help by saying, St. Maria Goretti...

Pray for us.

More on Maria Goretti

"St. Maria Goretti is an example for the younger generations, threatened by a mentality of lack of commitment, which finds it hard to understand the importance of values on which it is never licit to descend to compromises.

Although she was poor and lacking in school education, Maria, who was not yet twelve years old, had a strong and mature personality, formed by the religious education she received in the family. This enabled her not only to defend her own person with heroic chastity, but even to forgive her murderer.

Her martyrdom reminds us that the human being is not fulfilled by following pleasurable impulses, but by living his life in love and responsibility.

I know well how much you, dear young people, are sensitive to these ideals.

In the hope of meeting you in two weeks in Toronto, today I wish to repeat to you: Do not let the culture of possessions and pleasure lull your consciences! Be vigilant and alert sentinels, in order to be genuine protagonists of a new humanity."

—Pope John Paul II on the 100th anniversary of St. Maria Goretti's death

"...It is well known how this young girl had to face a bitter struggle with no way to defend herself. Without warning a vicious stranger burst upon her, bent on raping her and destroying her childlike purity. In that moment of crisis she could have spoken to her Redeemer in the words of that classic, The Imitation of Christ: "Though tested and plagued by a host of misfortunes, I have no fear so long as your grace is with me. It is my strength, stronger than any adversary; it helps me and gives me guidance." With splendid courage she surrendered herself to God and his grace and so gave her life to protect her virginity.

The life of this simple girl—I shall concern myself only with highlights—we can see as worthy of heaven. Even today people can look upon it with admiration and respect. Parents can learn from her story how to raise their God-given children in virtue, courage and holiness; they can learn to train them in the Catholic faith so that, when put to the test, God's grace will support them and they will come through undefeated, unscathed and untarnished.

From Maria's story carefree children and young people with their zest for life can learn not to be led astray by attractive pleasures, which are not only ephemeral and empty but also sinful. Instead they can fix their sights on achieving Christian moral perfection, however difficult and hazardous that course may prove. With determination and God's help all of us can attain that goal by persistent effort and prayer.

Not all of us are expected to die a martyr's death, but we are all called to the pursuit of Christian virtue. This demands strength of character though it may not match that of this innocent girl. Still, a constant, persistent and relentless effort is asked of us right up to the moment of our death. This may be conceived as a slow steady martyrdom, which Christ urged upon us when he said: The kingdom of heaven is set upon and laid waste by violent forces.

So let us all, with God's grace, strive to reach the goal that the example of the virgin martyr, Saint Maria Goretti, sets before us. Through her prayers to the Redeemer may all of us, each in his own way, joyfully try to follow the inspiring example of Maria Goretti who now enjoys eternal happiness in heaven."

—Homily of Pope Pius XII, June 24, 1950

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