

Purity of the Eyes
(A Prerequisite for Love)

I. Introduction.

- a. Matthew 5:27-28: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you: whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”
 - i. John Paul II comments on this passage, and articulates what is meant by this lustful look: “What we have in mind is an *intentional “reduction,”* a restriction, as it were, or closure of the horizon of the mind and heart... to “reduce” the whole personal richness of femininity to this one value, that is, to sex as the fitting object of the satisfaction of one’s own sexuality.”¹

- b. In other words, the look of lust about which Christ speaks is to look at a person in such a way as a mere object for sexual satisfaction.
 - i. *Reduces* the person; treats the person as no more than a thing that gives pleasure to oneself.
 - ii. It ignores the fact that the person has infinite dignity in herself, that holy love would focus on her happiness, her spiritual value, the fact that she is our sister in Christ, meant for union with God as we are.
 1. The lustful look cares nothing for all that; it is simply interested in the other as a piece of eye-candy, something for your own fantasy-enjoyment.

- c. For that reason Christ tells us that to engage in this kind of look is a sin, a species of adultery.
 - i. (Note: to be sinful, this look must be willful; we’re not talking about an involuntary temptation that you try immediately to put out of your mind).²
 - ii. It is a decision to use another person for one’s own self satisfaction.
 1. As such it is opposed to love.

Now, in our present society, there are two especially powerful modes of attack on the purity of the eyes. Let’s take a look at both of them.

II. Pornography

- a. CCC # 2354 *Pornography* consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of

¹ General Audience of September 17, 1980.

² JPII: ‘It is only when the intentional reduction explained above drags the will into its narrow horizon, when it awakens in it a decision for a relation with another human being (in our case with the woman) according to the scale of values proper to “concupiscence,” it is only then that one can say that “desire” has gained mastery over the “heart.”’ September 24, 1980.

its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials.

- i. JP II states that *pornovision* or *pornography* happens “when in a work of art or by audiovisual media one violates the body’s *right to intimacy in its masculinity and femininity* and – in the final analysis – when one violates that deep *order of gift and of reciprocal self-giving*, which is inscribed in femininity and masculinity across the whole structure of being human.”³

b. What does all this mean?

- i. It means that pornography takes the body and sexuality out of the context of love, mutual self-giving, commitment, etc...
 1. It rips the goodness of sexuality out of its proper setting, and makes it a cheap source of pleasure to anyone who cares to take a look.
- ii. Note: there is a common misconception that sexual activity can only occur through the sense of touch. People think as long as you’re not using your hands, you’re not doing anything wrong.
 1. This is ridiculous; we’ve got five senses!
 - a. The sins of infidelity and promiscuity can also take place through:
 - i. The sense of hearing: 1-900 phone #'s
 - ii. The sense of sight: videos and pictures.
 2. ***Anytime you use sexuality in a selfish way, (i.e., outside of love, mutual self-giving, commitment, concern for the good of the other, etc...) it is lust, a mere use of the other, and it is sinful.***

c. Further, pornography is highly addictive

- i. Addiction *always* destroys love
 1. Love = a) self-gift and b) concern for another’s happiness and fulfillment.
 - a. But the addict can’t do either of these things
 - i. Can’t give of himself
 1. Can’t give what you don’t have; and the addict isn’t in possession of himself, his urges possess him.
 - ii. Can’t work for someone else’s happiness
 1. Too busy trying to satisfy his overwhelming addiction
 - ii. Pornography is an addiction from which we must escape.
 1. Just like any other serious addiction; we’ll hurt ourselves and those around us until we’re free from it.

³ April 22, 1981.

d. Stats and Studies

i. What are the effects of pornography viewing?

1. A study conducted by Dr. Reo Christensen of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, found that pornography leaves the impression with its viewers that sex has no relationship to privacy; that it is unrelated to love, commitment or marriage; and that irresponsible sex has no adverse consequences.
2. Professors Dolf Zillman of Indiana University and Jennings Bryant of the University of Huston found that repeated exposure to pornography results in a decreased satisfaction with one's sexual partner, with the partner's sexuality, a decrease in the valuation of faithfulness and a major increase in the importance of sex without attachment.
3. Tom and Judy Lickona, with William Boudreau report several cases of pornography habits leading to acts of pedophilia.
4. Other findings associated with pornography viewing:
 - a. Develop an increased callousness towards women
 - b. Trivialize rape, or increase the thought that women enjoy rape
 - c. View non-monogamous relationships as normal and natural
 - d. Develop an appetite for more deviant, bizarre, or violent types of pornography.

ii. Some stats:

1. 2.5 billion pornographic emails a day
2. 68 million pornographic search engine requests
3. Average age for first internet exposure to pornography: 8 years old
4. 90% of 8-16 year olds have viewed pornography online
5. US porn revenue exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS and NBC (6.2 Billion dollars)

e. So what do you do?

i. prevention: avoid temptation

1. regards especially private internet access
2. remember Joseph and Potipher's wife

ii. Get help

1. Attachments

iii. Prayer and Confession

iv. To those dealing with someone with a pornographic addiction

1. Firmness: never treat pornography as something "normal" or "acceptable"
2. Mercy: remember how many times Christ has forgiven you in love; you are called to do likewise

III. Immodesty in Dress

- a. CCC # 2521-22: “Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness... Modesty is decency. It inspires one’s sense of clothing.”
 - i. So, in order to safeguard the beauty of the body and sexuality, one must dress modestly.
 1. Note that God supplied Adam and Eve with animals skins; a little more substantial than fig leaves.
- b. Now, just as men are generally more susceptible of looking lustfully, so women have a greater tendency to encourage that lust by their behavior. Hence they have a greater obligation to make sure that their self-presentation, especially in what they wear, is not a near occasion of sin for men.
 - i. Fr. Regis Scanlon: While it is true that traditional Catholic teaching on modesty in the area of sexuality is more demanding of the woman, it is not unfair. Just as the woman is the weaker gender in the area of physical power, so the man is the weaker gender in the area of sexuality (in the sense that the male is more prone to immediate sexual arousal). And just as it is wrong for a man to use his physical strength to lord it over a woman, so it is wrong for a woman to use the feminine characteristics of her physical body to dominate a man.
- c. What does this mean practically?
 - i. Women shouldn’t wear (or not wear) clothes in such a way as to draw attention to areas of sexual excitement.
 1. That’s a deliberate encouragement of lust: you want men focusing on your sexual qualities before anything else.
 - a. Remember, sexually explicit attachment is supposed to come after the *personal* relationship has been established.
 - ii. Often times women can’t believe the way their objectified, when their clothes are designed precisely to encourage that response
 1. Wendy Shalit in *A Return to Modesty*, describes the author Jenny McCarthy who decides one day to dress up in a leather microskirt and an off-the-shoulder, skintight black T-shirt. Of course, she gets a lot of objectifying looks and rude comments. At first she blames the men, then she realizes, “But I practically have Sure Thing tattooed on my forehead. If I were just out to get laid, this is pretty much the getup I’d wear. How’s he supposed to know the difference?”
 2. Remember, the body expresses the person; there is often a subtle hypocrisy between the way women dress and the respect they think they deserve.

- d. OK, what about the kids?
 - i. Peer pressure is enormous: “My daughter says she doesn’t like wearing tight clothing all the time, but she says all the girls at school dress like that, so she’s always saying ‘Mom, I have too!’”
 - ii. Moms:
 - 1. Example is critical.
 - a. First examine your own wardrobe
 - 2. Explain the meaning, the depth and dignity, of female beauty, and how it’s to be cherished and protected
 - iii. Dads:
 - 1. Draw the line!
 - a. Shalit points out that girls in the past sometimes had to rely on their fathers to blame their modesty on.
 - i. “I can’t wear that; I can’t do that. Dad won’t let me, and I’m afraid what will happen if he finds out.”
 - ii. They need support, so it’s not just them taking a “weird” stand on their own.
 - 2. You know how hard it is for a man to be pure; don’t let your daughter make it harder for them, or jeopardize her own safety.

To sum up: Purity of the eyes is the prerequisite for learning how to love. And it’s really hard to accomplish. So it’s up to all of us to do all we can for this ideal in ourselves and in our families. Finger-pointing is not the answer.

Often times women “hope to change the behavior of men without the women having to change. That will never happen. They want the men to be gentlemen without having to be ladies.” Men, “for their part, want women to be ladies while still getting to do whatever they want, and clucking ‘boys will be boys.’ That will never happen, either. Everybody wants the other guy to change and to be nice to him, without having to change his own behavior. If women want the men to be good, they have to be good too. If men want women to be ladies, they have to start acting honorably.”

This is our task. We pray to Joseph Most Chaste, and to Mary Most Pure to give us the strength to grow in love and self-control.