

Today, Jesus speaks to us about anger and lust.

Even though these passions are among the *Seven Deadly Sins*, our contemporary society often portrays these vices as virtues. Anger has two things in common with lust:

- (1) both vices selfishly *manipulate* others; and
- (2) we can easily become *desensitised* to these passions.

Let me explain.

Because people are relating to one another in more and more dysfunctional ways today, many people see anger as a virtue. Being aggressive is mistakenly seen as being assertive. Indeed, being assertive is a virtue; whereas, being aggressive is not. When a person is assertive, he's using good communication; whereas, when someone uses aggression – whether it's physical, verbal or emotional – this is manipulation.

Lust is also often made out to be a virtue insofar as sex outside marriage is presented to be normal. Sins against chastity may be becoming *usual*,

but that does not make these sins normal.

For those who think being unchaste *is* normal on the grounds that so many others are doing it, the Book of Ecclesiasticus tells us otherwise.

Specifically, we read that God **"has given no one permission to sin."**

Lust is a disordered love of the pleasure of the flesh.

The important word here is *disordered*,

for it was Almighty God Himself who associated pleasure with the flesh. When such pleasure takes place *within* marriage, it's not *disordered*, but *ordered* because it fulfils what God designed it be.

When we know what is *ordered*, we can understand what is *disordered*.

For this reason, when teaching children about the virtue of chastity, explaining the rewards of this virtue is important.

If all you do is tell your children what to avoid, then this method of instruction will only ever serve to become a *negative reinforcement*.

Let me explain what I mean by a negative reinforcement.

If you gave some crayons to a child

for his Birthday, how would the child respond if you provided the following instruction?

"Here are some crayons.

Make sure you never use them to put scribble all over the walls of the house!"

You never actually told the child that he would do well to use the crayons to draw pictures on pieces of paper. To be fair, you really couldn't blame the child if he went off and did the only thing you put in his mind!

Likewise, how often is instruction provided on why God gives us the virtue of chastity?

Indeed, unity in the flesh within Marriage is a sacramental sign of the loving and committed bond between Christ and His Church. Accordingly, the heart-felt joy that accompanies the consummation of Marriage is a foretaste of the profound happiness that we will experience in our heart and soul when we possess God in Heaven. As you can see, the virtue of chastity brings so many valuable rewards.

Only when we are grateful for the virtue of chastity can become sufficiently aware of the pitfalls of lust.

Lust is not exclusive to sins of the flesh, for it also consists of sins of *thought* and *desire*.

For this reason, in addition to the Sixth Commandment, **"Thou shalt not commit adultery,"** God gave us the Ninth Commandment,

**"Thou shalt not covet** [that is, inordinately desire] **thy neighbour's wife."**

We would do well to make another important distinction; namely, that lust is not always the same in a woman as it is in a man.

Generally speaking, lust in a man consists of a desire for the pleasure that primarily comes from the senses that is disordered, or at least selfish; whereas, lust in a woman predominately consists of a desire for the pleasure that comes from experiencing emotional intimacy with someone to whom she is not married.

Put another way, in men, lust primarily takes place in their *flesh* and its *senses*; whereas, lust in women predominately takes place in their *heart* and its *emotions*.

In saying this, I do not mean that men are less capable of lusting in their emotions.

Nevertheless – at least in its

beginning stages – lust generally originates in men and women in different aspects of their makeup that is respectively unique to them. For example, viewing pornography is a mortal sin. While this is indeed a serious sin for which men have a greater tendency to commit than women,

how often do we hear anyone speak about how reading over-explicit romance novels, which women are more inclined to read, can also be a mortal sin?

Likewise, we all know that it's a mortal sin when a man **"looks at a woman lustfully,"** for in doing so, he has **"committed adultery with her in his heart"** (Mt 5:28); yet, some women may fail to recognise their own lust given that it operates in a deceptive manner.

A deceptive form of a woman's lust is her attempt to manipulate men with the intention of receiving inappropriate attention and affection from them outside of Marriage. That, too, is *objectification*.

Having said this, when men treat women as objects of their own sexual gratification, they're more responsible than women for their behaviour.

Why?

Because in a man, lust primarily takes place in the immediate perception of his senses. Consequently, a man has no excuse for not being aware of this passion. Men can easily manipulate women, too. Accordingly, men need to be sensitive to how vulnerable women can feel if a man puts her under pressure to be unchaste.

Since women tend to experience their emotions more deeply, a woman who hasn't grown in emotional maturity can readily become afraid of losing her boyfriend's affection if she were to say no to his inappropriate advances.

Since being afraid is a discomforting feeling, a woman can easily bury her fear such that she's not fully conscious of the need to set appropriate boundaries.

This understanding further demonstrates that men are more responsible for their lust because they're usually more consciously aware of it.

A man who deliberately does something that he knows will cause a woman to become aroused or a

woman who deliberately satisfies her needs for emotional intimacy are not sinful in and of themselves, for again, the important word here is *disordered*.

Such thoughts, desires or actions are only sinful if they're disordered; that is, if they are directly willed outside of marriage.

There's another consequence of lust which is seldom spoken about. The same consequence applies to the passion of anger.

When a person acts upon these passions, he has a decreased sense of sin.

The more he sins, the less he thinks about it. St Alphonsus Liguori taught that this dynamic is especially true if a person puts off going to Confession.

For this reason, many have become addicted to sins of fornication and anger without realising that these passions are serious sins when they are deliberately acted upon. Just as repetitive exposure to violence can desensitise a person to the evils of violence, repetitive sins of lust can desensitise a person's conscience to be aware of the sinfulness of lust.

Fulton Sheen has a good way of explaining this: **"It is a fact of human experience that the more experience we have of sin – our own sin – the less we are conscious of it. In all other things, we learn by experience; in sin, we unlearn by experience. Sin gets into the blood, the nerve cells, the brain, the habit, the mind; and the more it penetrates a person, the less he knows of its existence. The sinner becomes so accustomed to sin that he fails to recognise its gravity."**

If temptations can be so subtle, why is it that the Book of Ecclesiasticus tells us: **"If you wish, you can keep the Commandments, to behave faithfully is within your power"?**

This is true because we have received the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. The Holy Spirit also gives us the gift of *discernment*. As St Paul said: **"These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God."**