

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Well, it's time to get back to the commandments. This week, we'll look at the sixth commandment:

### **6. You shall not commit adultery.**

I want to challenge you today to be open to the Church's (and God's) teaching on sexuality. If we believe that God is really Lord of all, and that He truly loves us, than His "requirements" on sexuality *must* be good and *life giving*, not oppressive, authoritarian rules. While following the Church's teaching on sexual morality may be difficult and certainly requires courage (even heroic courage), the Church continues to hold fast to her teaching *because she loves people!* We believe that this teaching is what will *really* fulfill us, really give us life!

So let's get into it. At the heart of the Church's teaching on sexuality is that God made sex *good!* Any teaching that denigrates sex or makes it dirty goes against all that we believe as Catholics. In fact, God's first commandment humanity is to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). However, sex is *so* good, that it needs to be respected. Our culture has been very good at making sex recreation. Sex is NOT *recreational* (though it may be procreational)! Sexual intercourse has a meaning; in it our bodies speak to each other (hence, "intercourse").

So what is the meaning of sexual intercourse? The short answer is love. But what is love, and how is sex a loving act? I think we can all agree that there are times when sex is not a loving act – for instance, in rape. This would fall under the sins against the sixth commandment. But what is love? Love is not an amorphous feeling toward another; love is a choice – a choice to *will* the good of the other as other. This means, I want (and actively work for) *your* good, even if it does nothing for me, even if I get nothing out of it, ever. In this context, the opposite of love is not hate, but *using*. We use cars. We use our phones. People, however, by their sacred dignity as made in the image and likeness of God, are NOT TO BE USED, but to be LOVED.

What does love look like? Look at the Cross – this is real love; this is Divine Love. On the Cross, Jesus gives the gift of Himself to us. This love is a total gift of self, freely given, faithful to the ones He loves, and is fruitful and gives life. Love speaks the language of gift and reception – I give myself to you, I receive you to me. This is what love is. Love is not about taking. Love is not about how you make me feel. Since the sexual act speaks this language of love with our bodies, it is a loving gift of self to another. We must look at each sexual act and see if falls into this category. Instead of looking at Catholic sexual morality as a bunch of "don'ts," we should see it as it really is, a litmus test for whether it fulfills the meaning of our bodies and souls in *love*.

The first thing to note is that since sex speaks of a total and faithful gift of self to another, given freely, this requires a commitment – a lifetime commitment. Sex speaks the language of permanence and total gift of self (which can be seen in the biology of sex – listen to "Green Sex" by Jason Evert, or "Sexual Revolution" by Chris Stephanick on [FORMED.org](http://FORMED.org) for more on the biology of sex), so anything less than a lifetime commitment goes against what the body communicates in sex. This total and permanent commitment we call *marriage*. In this context, then, any intentional genital stimulation that is not a gift of self to another in this permanent relationship of marriage goes against what sex is and what it is meant to be. So instead of saying "masturbation is a sin" (which it is), we can see that masturbation does not fulfill the purpose of the sexual act, since it turn the person in on him or herself, instead of outward as gift to the other. We don't have to say that fornication (any sex outside of the marriage commitment) is a sin (which it is), because we see that fornication goes against what sex is supposed to be, the total and faithful gift of self to another in the security of a loving permanent commitment.

How about within marriage? Is every sexual act okay? No. Again, I think you would all agree with me that marital rape is a sin. Why? Because love is a free gift of self, and rape, even in marriage, is *taking by force*, not receiving a gift freely given. So let's look again at what sexual love is – it is a total, free, faithful, and fruitful/life-giving gift of self to the other. The fruitful part means that each and every experience of the marital act is to be *open* to life. (Again, when we look at the biology of sex, not only does it speak of permanence, but it speaks of procreation.) Purposely to withhold your fertility within the marriage act is to say with your bodies, "I give my whole self to you... except my fertility," or "I want all of you... except your fertility." This is, then, *not*, a total gift of self.

Amazingly, the Church is not prudish or puritanical in her view of sex. Here I will get a bit graphic, but it is the truth about what we teach. Pope Saint John Paul II said in reference to our bodies – *every* part of our body is *good*, so good it is kissable. But, stimulation must not be for the sake of stimulation or pleasure, but for love – drawing the married couple closer together in union and with an openness to life. Anything that purposely hinders either of these two purposes of the sexual act, is speaking a lie with the body.

So, instead of creating a "don't" list of what is a sin against the sixth commandment, I hope this helps you to see the incredible "do" list of the incredible goodness of our sexuality, and God's plan for sex. I encourage you to continue learning about the true meaning of sex. Some good resources are John Paul II *Theology of the Body*, Christopher West's *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, and [corproject.com](http://corproject.com).