

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week, is the ninth commandment:

9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

This commandment is intimately related to the sixth commandment (you shall not commit adultery); whereas the sixth commandment is about actions, the ninth commandment is about *thoughts*.

Jesus tells us:

I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)

First, let's define *lust*. Lust is NOT sexual desire. Sexual desire and sexual pleasure is not bad or evil; it is a gift from God Himself. Lust is a sin because it *uses* another – or even ourselves – for our own selfish, sexual pleasure. In other words, to look at a person and say something along the lines of, “Wow! God does good work!” is not necessarily a sin. To appreciate the beauty of another is not sinful. It is sin when we look at a person and see, not a person, but an object – when we *objectify* someone. When we look at a person's parts because they give me pleasure, when we use people, even in our own minds, this is lust.

When dealing with lust, there are two ways to do it: 1) to look away from the person, and push away the thoughts that use the person; 2) to look *at* the person, really look at the person, and not see the person as an object for my own pleasure, but as the sacred, unique person that God created him or her to be. Ultimately, we should be moving to the second way, but many of us are not strong enough for that (especially in this pornographized culture which teaches us from a young age to look at people as objects), so we may have to focus on looking away until our resolve is strengthened.

That brings me to my next point: while there are so many ways that we can objectify people (ogling people, fantasizing about people, etc.), one of the most insidious ways – which has become almost omnipresent in the smartphone culture – is pornography. The problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the body, but that it shows too little of the person. One of my favorite quotes from St. John Paul II is:

The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it. (*Theology of the Body* 19:4)

The body is beautiful and can show us invisible realities – God, yes, and the *person* who is both physical and *spiritual*. Pornography doesn't point us to the person, it points us to an object to be used. Extended exposure to pornography reroutes pathways in the brain to train us to look at others as objects not people. This goes against the Heart of God who made *each person to be loved, not used!* This is why, even in marriage, pornography is not acceptable – it is a grave offense against the dignity of the person. Think about the person that is being exploited – this person is someone's daughter or son... and certainly God's daughter or son.

Because of the ever-present access to pornography, children are being exposed younger and younger to this evil. I have ordered a CD from Lighthouse media called “**Protecting Innocence**” which gives an overview of the problem of pornography in our society and families, as well as practical solutions on how to protect our children. Look for the CDs on the kiosks in the next few weeks. At the end of the CD, Matt Fradd exhorts people to use Covenant Eyes (www.covenanteyes.com) as both an internet filter and accountability software. I strongly encourage you to get it for the sake of your family!

Of course, with all sin, we remember the infinite mercy of God. If you have a sexual addiction, receive the grace of God's healing mercy in Confession, and then frequent the Eucharist in order to receive His Body as strength. Cry out to God for help when you feel weak. Get an accountability partner to help you in the struggle. If you struggle with the internet, get Covenant Eyes **today!** Beg Our Lady to untwist the twisted desires of our hearts which turn people into objects.

At the end of all of this, is the heart of the commandments – that we are to love one another. *Using* is not loving. Lust uses; love gives of oneself unselfishly for the other. May we not ever use another – in our minds, with our eyes, even pixels – or even use ourselves for selfish pleasure, but rather give ourselves away in authentic love.