

Notre Dame Senior Retreat

Talk 1 - The Journey Now, What is Love? (1:15-2:00)

Introduce myself:

- Parishioner at St. Mary in Athens. Among other things, my wife Christine and I teach Theology of the Body for Teens to our high school CCD class there. I also maintain our parish website.

- Almost 56 years old...yeah, I'm an old guy.

- Father of 4 and grandfather of 6, soon to be 8

- I'm a total geek. I'm a true technology freak who worked in the PC industry for 20 years in product marketing prior to buying our current business. I use technology for everything I can, including to compose and give this talk. This is my iPad with my notes. No, it's not an iPad2 although it might have been if my trip into Knoxville had been fruitful yesterday.

- I went to the Apple Store at 8:45 yesterday morning to purchase the iPad2 and found a line of close to 100 people waiting for theirs. Apple had said that they would be receiving a shipment and that they would open at 9:00. I couldn't believe so many people would show up for one.

They sold out before I got to the front of the line. Of course I then went to two Best Buy stores (one told me they sold out the night before, darn it!), the Verizon store and the AT&T store. I can't even get AT&T service at the house, but I really

wanted the new iPad so I thought I'd check. I even called two Walmarts and a Target. No luck.

- I also do some website development (I built the St. Mary website in Athens) and I'm an amateur photographer. I'll be taking photos today and I plan to post them on Facebook and on our St. Mary Flickr account. My Facebook account is scottmaentz and I'll make them viewable for Everyone so you can tag and share them.

- My wife and I own a business called Boogey Lights...we light up Harleys and other motorcycles using LEDs. Twice a year we travel to Daytona for Bike Week where we install our products for two weeks. In fact, we just returned earlier this week. Thousands of bikers make the trek south to Bike Week each year to escape from the cold and snow and celebrate the warm Florida weather. For many, this event is the first time they have had the opportunity to ride their motorcycle in several months and they savor the experience.

A motorcycle event like this is a great place to experience the false understanding of Love that is held by so many people today. Many of the women walk around these events wearing very revealing clothing designed to call attention to themselves. The guys eyes are all popping out of their sockets when a beautiful, half-naked woman walks by. Do you think these guys are looking at her in love? Do you think they want to understand more about the desires of her heart, her family, her faith in God? Do you think they are saying to themselves, "What a beautiful woman. I'd like to marry someone like her and meet her parents to learn more about what makes her happy." No, I don't believe that's what they are thinking at all. And what about her? Do you think that she dresses this way to let the guys

know that she's a very sensitive person who wants to marry the man of her dreams and have 3 children? Or, perhaps, do you think it might be because she has a false sense of what Love is and she's learned that this is the best way to get a man to "love" her?

At Bike Week you'll also see beautiful young girls on the arm of a men old enough to be their fathers. Do you think that the beautiful young woman on the arm of a man her father's age really loves him? How many of you think this is why she is with him? She is typically with him because he has money. It's amazing the number of ugly old guys that have beautiful women hanging on their arms. What about him? How many of you think he's with this half-naked young woman because he believes she's be the perfect mother of his children? How many think that he only wants her to be happy and do whatever he can to satisfy her inner-longing for peace and fulfillment? I don't think so either. I believe he's with her because she makes him feel good that he can still get such a beautiful woman, even if he knows it's just for his money. I believe he's also with her to satisfy his sexual desires...to fulfill his lust.

- In this talk I'm going to do my best to help you understand the true meaning of Love, versus the false definition of "love" that we encounter every day in our culture.

- We're all looking for "true love" but many of us don't understand what love is. We were all created by God (who is Love itself) for a life of love. We often look for love in all the wrong places because of our misunderstanding of what love is.

- In our state of original sin we are blind and walking in darkness. We must allow

the Lord to lead us by allowing Him to untwist the distortion of evil we are attracted to because of original sin.

- ALL that exists is GOOD (all was created by God), especially our desires and our bodies.

- Our modern culture has twisted these desires. When we buy in to these distortions we are separated from God.

- Our desires are good but we must learn to embrace them in the way they were intended for us. We must not succumb to the heresy of the "new Manichaeism" where we believe that our bodies and desires are evil and that our true selves are purely our souls. We must understand, as St. Thomas Aquinas taught, that OUR SELF is our incarnate self of body and soul together. Our bodies are not just biological organisms, they are also theological organisms. Only through intimacy with Jesus and Mary can we re-aim our desires that are the wonderful gifts of our humanity.

- The greatest proof that our bodies and our desires are good is that God came to us in human form. We call this the Incarnation. Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He was like us in all things but sin. His desires were not twisted in the way that ours are twisted.

- Heresy = A false teaching that is opposed to the dogma of the Church

- **We often confuse love with simple attraction.** This is what the bikers in Daytona were doing. This is what often happens in high school and college. In fact,

for many people this confusion lasts a lifetime. The problem is that this type of love usually fades when the initial attraction fades away. We all get old and less beautiful with time. If our love for another is based solely on that person's beauty, it will not last.

- Pope John Paul II explained this when he wrote (read slowly): **"For love is not merely a feeling; it is an ACT OF WILL that consists of preferring, in a constant manner, the good of others to the good of oneself."** (repeat).

- In other words, we can't judge the value of love by the intensity of an emotion. It's not enough to feel attractions or to simply want to love. To truly love another, we must strive to know and want what is best for him or her. Then we must make an actual commitment of our will to bring about this "good" for the other.

- Love always wants what is best for the other...it does not seek its own pleasure or fulfillment at the expense of another. Love is a decision to do what's best for another, not an emotion that seeks its own fulfillment.

- It may be helpful to understand the nature of true love if we compare it to what it IS NOT, especially in the context of romantic relationships.

- Love is very misunderstood today. We often think of love in terms of emotions or in sexual terms. Or we say that we love our football team, our iPads or our new car. We say we love pizza or our new shoes. We might say that we love Lady Gaga or Justin Beiber. We speak of love in many ways that give us a false idea of what true Love truly is.

- Love is not how we "feel" about something or someone. It's not about emotions or about sex, even though we do feel good when we experience Love and we do express true love in sexual terms in marriage. Sex as most people think of it does not equal Love. And Love does not equal sex.

- Sexual activity outside of marriage is definitely not Love. It is simply the fulfillment of **LUST**, not the expression of love. Lust is NOT from God, but arises out of our fallen nature.

- Many people have the idea that love is primarily related to sexual pleasure and they use others to fulfill their desires for love. This is not love. It is LUST.

- **Lust is the selfish, twisted and distorted ideas we have about our sexual desires.** Lust rears its ugly head most obviously in the form of pornography, but it is even present within valid marriages. It is there whenever we seek to fulfill our own desires by objectifying another person. Our **lust causes us to use others**, be they a girlfriend, boyfriend, prostitute or even our spouse, to fulfill our own desires. Love involves considering the good of the other, whereas lust causes us to think only of ourselves.

- For example, many people believe that their sexual urges and desires are meant to be satisfied whenever they arise. Many people think nothing of resorting to pornography and masturbation to fulfill their sexual desires. After all, it's my body isn't it? Who am I hurting by doing this? The problem is that we are acting in lust when we do this, not in love. We are hurting both ourselves by ignoring God's teachings and we are hurting others by viewing them as objects to fulfill our desires. By viewing porn we are supporting the porn industry, which ruins the lives of those

who engage in it.

- We are also going against God's will for us to live lives of love when we allow lust to rule our lives and lifestyles. Lustful attitudes can never bring about true happiness in our lives. We may feel momentary pleasure if we turn to porn for sexual satisfaction, but ultimately we are putting ourselves in a prison of sin and addiction.

- So many people are addicted to porn and, like any other addiction, they become a slave to it. The pornification of our society has ruined so many lives and has caused many to be blind to the nature of God's true love. We find "soft" porn everywhere - in commercials, mainstream magazines, computer games and you name it. We think nothing of using semi-naked men and women to peddle our products and sell our ideas. It just seems to be the thing to do. Sex sells. It's a huge problem and you have to see it for what it is if you want to find true love in your life.

- This is not to say that our desires are bad. In fact, quite the opposite. Our desires are very, very good. They were created by God for the purpose of entering into a loving relationship with your spouse where you give your whole self to that person. We call this loving relationship "marriage." God NEVER creates anything that is bad. It is our twisting of what God created that results in lust and the wrong ideas about love.

- **Lust is the twisting of the true meaning of love.** Lust distorts love into something that is purely selfish and pleasure seeking. It can never truly fulfill us and make us happy. It can only cause us to fall into the trap of sexual addiction and sin.

It makes us blind to the true beauty of sexual relations within marriage. In fact, many married people bring their lust into their marriages and never experience the love that God intended us to experience. They never learn how to give themselves fully to their spouse.

- Lust uses the other person. Love gives to the other.

- Lust treats the other person as an object to fulfill selfish desires. Love treats the other person as a person.

- Lust USES others, whereas Love GIVES to others...often at our own expense.

- Lust is sexual desire apart from the love of God, whereas Love cannot exist apart from God - its source.

- Lust is devious and ultimately destructive to all persons involved. Love is honest and life-giving to all persons involved.

- Lust seeks to please the self. Love seeks to do what is best for the other.

- Lust destroys lives and causes pain and hurt. Love gives us true happiness.

- In order to be truly happy in life, we must follow the way of Love, not the way of lust. This is what we were created to do...it is God's plan for us. Pope John Paul II defined love and linked it to happiness in a series of lectures back in the late 1950's called "*Love and Responsibility*." This was long before he was Pope when he was known as Karol Wojtyla, a priest and professor at Catholic University in Poland. In this book he defines love and links it to the virtue of chastity, saying that "chastity is the sure way to happiness."

- So just what is chastity and how does it bring us happiness? Chastity is a VIRTUE that directs our sexual desires and attitudes toward the truth of love. A virtue is simply a firm habit of doing what is good. Chastity is much more than

abstinence, which means "not having sex."

"Chastity falls under the cardinal virtue of temperance, which is the virtue of controlling and moderating our desire for pleasure, enabling us to enjoy pleasure in good things the way that God intends. But chastity is not merely learning to control one's own desires. It is really about learning how to love another rightly. As seen in the title *Love and Responsibility*, John Paul II showed that a life of chastity is one that loves responsibly and purely, embracing the responsibility that comes with love, rather than running from it. Chastity says "yes" to the demands of love, while also fighting the selfish desires of lust. Only then can we say "no" to choices that actually rob us and others of their dignity."

- If we simply practice abstinence outside the context of chastity, we run the risk of bottling up our sexual energy and attempt to ignore it, this can lead to repression, which is an unhealthy response to the sexual gift. This can often lead to a sort of "slingshot effect" where a person allows himself or herself to get out of control and into reckless sexual behavior. God does not call us to either sexual repression or to sexual indulgence. He does, however, call us to a healthy chastity. Through the practice of this virtue we're able to acknowledge, not repress, our sexual desires and guide them with the deeper desire to love the way God intended us to love. Chastity is a life-giving virtue and leads to happiness. God Himself gives us the grace to live a chaste lifestyle.

- Again, love is not just about feeling good. While feeling good is part of love, it is also an active decision to do what is best for the one you love. It's a decision to give yourself totally to another person. It is to always desire what is best for the other. It's not about satisfying selfish desires or needs.

All Human Beings Deserve Love

- All human beings deserve to be loved, not to be used for someone else's gain. Our human dignity - created in the image and likeness of God - demands this. We should never treat anyone with less than love. Have you ever made fun of someone else? Have you ever hurt someone by gossiping about them or spreading lies about them? If you have, you have not been loving. We've all done it. But we shouldn't. It's wrong and sets us up to falsely think of ourselves as better than others. This is not love. It is selfish and sinful. It results in pain and suffering, not happiness.

- This is true in our boyfriend/girlfriend relationships as well as in our relationships with everyone. **We must seek to do what is best for everyone**, not just those we feel particularly close to.

- When we will the good of another person, we love them the way that God loves us. True love is not selfish, it is generous. It is not conditional, but unconditional. It loves even when that love is not returned by the other, because it only desires good for the other. We call this type of unselfish love **AGAPE love**. It is the highest form of love. It means that you always strive to do what is best for others.

- Scripture tells us that God is love and that we must love one another. We receive this instruction for our happiness, not just because God wants us to follow some arbitrary rule.

- 1 John 4:7-8, 11 "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God;

everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love." Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another.

- We are all created in God's image, which means we were created to be love. To understand the true meaning of love, we must understand that God is Love. Love is His very essence. We are all created by Love and for love. The good news is that God never gives up on us. He keeps calling us to walk the straight path, which always leads to true happiness. In fact, He loves us so much that He sent us His only son to teach us His ways and to give His life for us.

- John goes on to stress the importance of living in love:

1 John 4:12-21 - "No one has ever seen God. Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us. This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit. Moreover, we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son as savior of the world. Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him and he in God. We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God 5 whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

- We must even love the people who annoy us or harm us. Jesus tells us we must love our enemies. Love is not easy, is it?

- I remember when I was in high school we had very well-defined cliques. These groups excluded those they perceived as different than they were. We had jocks, preps, nerds, band geeks and freaks. I was a freak. Today you also have goths & emos, right? What are some others?

- People in these groups tend to think badly of those not in their group, right? In my day the preps and jocks thought the freaks were losers. And the freaks thought the preps & jocks were losers. We had very different values and goals. The jocks were all about making the football team or the cheerleading squad, while the freaks had very little extra curricular involvement. All we freaks wanted to do was smoke cigarettes and weed. We hung out in the parking lot and made fun of the other "losers." In fact, we were the losers but we didn't see it that way.

- God calls us to love everyone....the freaks, the preps, the goths and the jocks. **God calls us to think differently about others, not to think of others as different.** This is not easy, but it is love.

- When we go out of our way to welcome someone who seems to be different than we are, we are loving them. To be alive in God's love we must look out for the good of ALL, not just those who are most like us. Jesus did this. He ate with tax collectors and sinners, didn't he? This really upset the Pharisees, who just couldn't accept that a holy man would associate with these types of people. Jesus loved everyone equally...in doing so he gave us the best possible example of true love.

He accepted and loved those who were living in sin and those whose values were different than His. He reached out to everyone in love and He calls us to do the same.

- Do you belong to a clique? Maybe it's time to begin thinking differently about those you've excluded from your life. Maybe it's time to apologize to those you have hurt by your exclusive behavior, even if you don't intend to be best friends with them. This takes courage, but God can give us the strength you need to do it. Doing this just might be the most amazing Lenten sacrifice you've ever made. Pray about those you have hurt and make a resolution to make amends while you still have the time. After this school year you may never have the chance to do it as everyone goes off to college and goes their separate ways. I guarantee that if you do this you will experience love in a whole new way.

- In conclusion, we must love others the way God loves us in order to be truly happy in life.

- Jesus came to be the light in our darkness and to show us the way to His Father. He came to give sight to the blind and to be a light unto our path. He also died for us so that our sins are forgiven if we invite Him into our hearts and try our best to live our lives according to his Truth.

- Get to know Jesus by spending time with Him in prayer. He is always with us and he wants to be our friend. Many of us spend hours sharing our thoughts and experiences with our friends on Facebook, but we never share anything with Jesus. He really doesn't ask for much and you'll find that He will be the best friend you've

ever had if you simply spend some time with him every day.

- Jesus came to give us everything we need to restore our relationship with God and with others. He is the light of the world who gives us the true example of love. All we have to do is ask for His help and His grace will give us the strength we need to live a chaste and holy life. This is the only way we will find true love; the only way we will find true happiness in life.

- Do you want to lead a happy life? Do you want your journey to be filled with happiness or with despair and disappointments? Are you willing to try to love the way God loves? Will you start today? It's never too late, no matter what you've done in the past. This season of Lent is an excellent time to reflect on your attitudes and make changes. God will certainly reward your efforts.