

Undivided:

The Gift and Goal of Chastity

By Andrew Comiskey



Chaste friendship means we are seeking to give ourselves to others for their good, not to satisfy our own hungers or needs.'

WHAT COMES TO MIND

when you think of 'chastity'? A warring clergyman railing against the evils of sex? Or Jesus, defending the woman caught in adultery, so integrated in his manhood that he could draw near to her and look tenderly into her eyes, releasing her from the Pharisee's 'death threat' while calling her into a life of wholeness?

Jesus embodies chastity. His very witness insists that we rediscover this virtue as the goal of our sexual humanity. If we want our bodies to reflect 'Christ-likeness', we must rethink and reclaim chastity as our goal. It is at once God's gift to us and the fruit of consistent effort.

Some may be tempted to write this off as a 'Catholic' thing, perhaps the sexless state of nuns and priests. Nonsense! God calls all Christ-followers onto the path toward chastity—young and old, male and female, Catholic and Orthodox and Protestants, single and married. Persons who want to be genuinely good gifts to others will realize how chastity liberates that gift. The good we want to offer others is guided and empowered by chastity.

Accepting Our Longings

To aid us in becoming good gifts, chastity invites us to accept the essence of our bodily longings. God granted each of us with a 'longing not to be alone' (Gen. 2: 18). However we have misdirected our sexual desires they have not ceased to be God-given. Chastity asks us to consider if we are willing to align our sexual desires with the Father's will. When we speak of God's will for us we are speaking of His best for us and His best for another person. No divide here—truth benefits all.

Chastity is integration, meaning we are free to bring our sexuality into the light of open dialogue with God and others. Then, growing in holy love, we begin to take steps toward the truth of His will for our sexual humanity. But here we may find our first divide. We struggle to be open about our broken, beautiful longings.

In truth, many of us live divided lives, devout and yet ashamed of our bodily desires. We may even hate ourselves due to particular disorders of desire, like romantic fantasies, same-sex attraction, or porn addiction. Jesus



wants to look into our eyes and open up the conversation. Will you believe that His will is born out of love for you and for those you love most? Opening to Him through trusted others breaks down our 'shame divide' and begins our integration, or chastity.

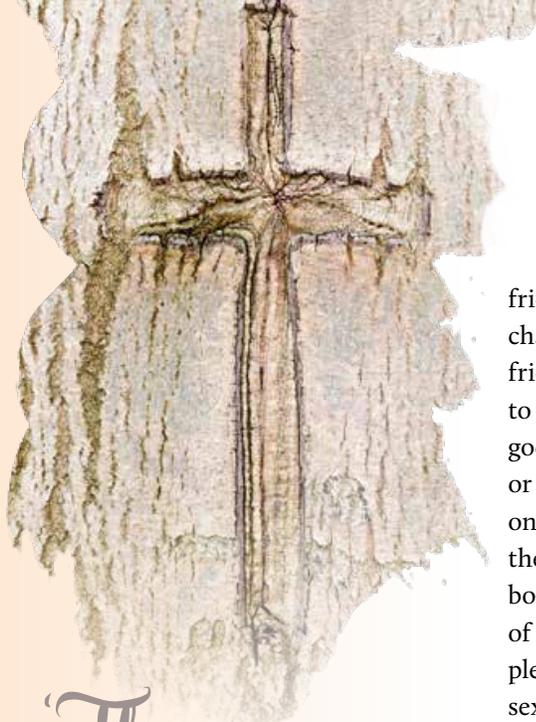
Holy Appeal

That integration makes men more virile and women more desirable. Chastity creates a kind of 'holy' appeal as men and women make peace with their gender selves. Jesus exudes that masculine 'freedom-to-be', wholly and without division. I would add that His mother Mary embodies the freedom to be a whole, beautiful woman. 'Each gender is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity, though in a different way' (#2335) sings the Catechism, a song that invites all to join the earthy, heavenly chorus of what it means to be made in His image.

Looking to holy witnesses (as opposed to the idols that drive and deride us), we can begin to let go of some of the shame and self-hatred we hold toward our own gender identities. Yes, we each possess a biological gender, and yes, we must grow into mature psychological and spiritual acceptance of our genders. The road to a secure gender identity is nothing less than the pathway to chastity—the wholeness that occurs when we throw down the stones aimed at ourselves and learn to honor how we bear manhood or womanhood in these bodies.

Accepting the Gender Gift

Here we discover that the Father's will for His human creation involves two natures: male and female. We are thus under the divine command to be reconciled to the meaning of our manhood and womanhood. In His Kingdom, there are no 'gay'



*The Lord God said,
"It is not good for the
man to be alone. I
will make a helper
suitable for him."*

Gen 2:18

selves, no LGBT community. These social constructs are earthborn and bound. Our Father in heaven invites us to repent of identifications that conflict with who we are as male and female, His sons and daughters.

We can offer to God self-rejection and any number of labels we have assumed to give us a 'self' in a lonely and confusing world. Exchanging our gender divides for His 'yes' to the whole of our personhood is a foundation of chastity. It means walking toward the beautiful horizon (and challenge) of growth into mature manhood or womanhood. Chastity summons greatness in us, to dare to journey out of cultural strongholds ('born that way'; serial monogamy) into the spacious, vulnerable land where God calls us to be good gifts to each other.

Foundation of Friendship

That gift-giving is founded in friendship, where 'the virtue of chastity blossoms' (#2347). Chaste friendship means we are seeking to give ourselves to others for their good, not to satisfy our own hungers or needs. Of course friends are only free to become lovers when they conclude that offering their bodies to each other is a pledge of lifetime commitment. Such a pledge cuts both ways. 'Although sex consummates the friendship of wife and husband, it perverts the friendship of comrades' (*What We Can't Not Know*, Budziszewski).

Chastity thus provokes a trembling in our bones as we realize that our Father calls us to steward 'the powers of life and love' (#2338) in a manner that gives life to others. We who have divided other lives through a host of relational sins do well to ask God for wisdom in resuming the journey toward chaste friendship.

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a pass from
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Why We Need the Spirit

Stakes are high in how we offer ourselves to others. That helps us understand why chastity is governed by self-control. Our passions are powerful! And people still have power to tempt us in a variety of ways. As we seek to offer our gift, others will provoke in us profound need, revulsion, lust, and the fear of rejection.

In light of these responses, the Holy Spirit's gift of self-control frees us to make decisions to love the other. We discover the good power of our will aligned with the Spirit. We can decide to love another because (s)he is worthy of love, not because we only 'feel' pure love toward them. Rejoice: we are decidedly mixed 'gifts'! St. Paul's many exhortations to purity help us here, e.g. 'Live by the Spirit and you will not fulfill the desires of the sinful nature' (Gal. 5:16). The Spirit of self-control is serving our chaste friendships well.

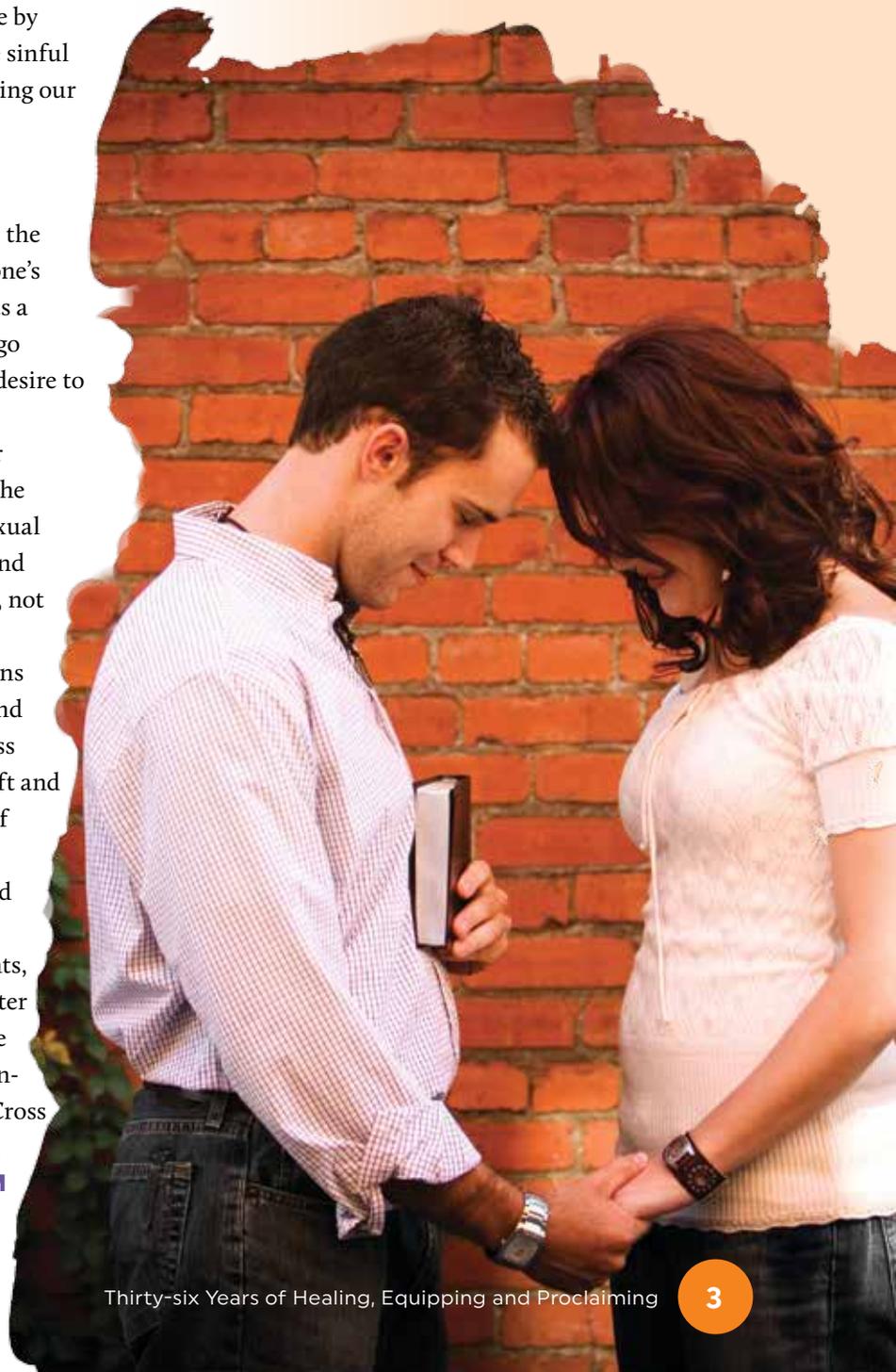
Exuberant Chastity for All

In the battle, be careful to not retreat back into the myth of asexuality. Aquinas cites the flight from one's sexuality (often concealed in spiritual garments) as a greater threat than sexual disorder itself. We can go boldly into chaste friendship, unstoppable in our desire to become exuberant expressions of our gender gift.

Chaste friendship is the foundation of all other relationships. My gift to my wife always requires the virtue of chastity, with self-control guiding my sexual offering to her as well as my expressions of need and want. I am growing in giving what serves her best, not just what please me. The single person is called to chaste friendships with both genders, as are persons invited by God into the special devotion to Him and His Kingdom known as celibacy. No one gets a pass from God's call to be reconciled to one's gender gift and to go about the splendid, disconcerting business of giving that gift away.

That's way I love chastity. The call to sexual and relational wholeness applies to everyone. Our one goal unites persons from a variety of starting points, with a host of fractures that might otherwise scatter us. The truth: it does not matter so much what are divides are—the One who makes whole the broken-hearted delights in our gathering before His one Cross in His one Church. He is preparing a chaste bride, exuberant in love with Him and one another. **DSM**

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Seven Chaste Facts

1. Chastity is about integrating our sexuality in the context of our spirituality so we can love people better. Following Jesus' lead, chastity frees us to love both genders generously.
2. Chastity applies to all people: single, married, and persons God calls to celibacy for His Kingdom. Sexual integration applies as much to priests as to parents as to teens as to widows.
3. Chastity is not the same as abstinence. Married couples must commit to sexual integration as much as singles do. Offering the gift of our bodies in marriage requires self-control if we are to be faithful and loving. And chastity frees singles (whom God calls to abstain from sex until marriage) to integrate their sexuality by learning to love people well, fully clothed!
4. Chastity is at once a gift and a goal. Yes, the Holy Spirit grants us the grace to become chaste, and yes, chastity is a goal that requires a lot of moral effort. Sexual integration is a lifelong pursuit!
5. Chastity highlights the best aspects of our gender selves. As we integrate our sexuality in light of the Father's will for our lives, His design for our masculine or feminine souls will mature and manifest itself from the very core of our beings.
6. Chastity makes us more appealing, not less. The chaste man becomes more virile, the chaste woman more genuinely appealing. Holy desirability beats cheap display anytime.
7. Chastity points beyond itself. Chaste friendships of any configuration point to the faithfulness and unfailing love of God, who helps us to love persons wholly because they are made in His image. And chaste marriage points to where we are all heading: the wedding feast of the Lamb where 'the bride who has made herself ready' will know Him fully (Eph. 5: 27-33).

‘God began to show me quickly how my habitual sins of envy and pride blocked me from living for Him in a united way... Envy lurks in everyday encounters... I had given jealousy a place in my heart.’



Undivided:

Loving with a Whole Heart

By Becky Turner

THIS YEAR I WANTED to grow closer to Our Lord during Lent but I was not sure what my focus should be until I was at Mass on Ash Wednesday. The words from Joel spoke to me: “Rend your hearts, not your garments and return to the Lord, your God” (Joel 2:13). I felt convicted. I did not want to simply look like a follower of Jesus; I needed to open more fully to God’s will for me. To let Him have control of my heart, I needed to give Him permission to “rend my heart”.

Part of this journey included attending a prayer group at our local parish called *Chastity and Mercy* (a new prayer/group study Andrew C. developed). I have not typically struggled with sexual sin so I was unclear how I might shore up the virtue of chastity.

However, through participating, I have gained new insights about this virtue. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches “The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behavior that would impair it” (#2338). For example,

God began to show me quickly how my habitual sins of envy and pride blocked me from living for Him in a united way.

Envy lurks in everyday encounters. I was out with friends listening to their recounting of different happenings in their lives. On the outside, I was nodding politely and murmuring appropriate responses but inside I was thinking: ‘why am I not doing what they are doing or getting these things?’ Looking back on this meal, I realized that I was filled with envy. I had a difficult time being truly happy or sad for my friends. I had given jealousy a place in my heart. I am not integrated as the virtue of chastity calls me to be when jealousy becomes lodged in my heart. I cannot give freely to another when I am focused on myself.

After my friends and I parted, I was able to have a time of prayer; the Lord opened my heart to the sin. I was reminded of how Jesus looked with so much love on the Samaritan woman. He invited her to trust Him in such a complete way as He invites me to trust in Him in the same loving way. Jesus died for me. If I look to Him, He will lift me from the darkness.

Halfway through Lent, we as a staff set aside a couple of days for an in-service to learn to work better as a team. One might think this would not be a time when pride could rear

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Undivided:

Becoming Fruitful

By Andrew Franklin

'Jesus wants me undivided in my devotion to Himself, to my church, and to my family... As He calls me into chastity, He's calling me to become the man He created me to be.'

NO ONE IN MY WORLD is really talking about chastity. It's just not a word or concept in my friends' vernacular. A few weeks ago, a colleague at my good and lively church flipped through the *Living Waters Guidebook* on my desk and chuckled, "A journey into chastity? Wow! Are you, like, bringing chastity back?"

Well, yeah, I replied. I guess you could say that I am.

The enemy has played off of the evangelical church's silence on the true purpose of our sexuality and intimate relationships. The world is noisier than ever about lust. But, sadly, no one talks about chastity.

Growing up in the church but without a healthy understanding of my body or its sexual purposes, my heart was wide open for someone to tell me why I wanted what I wanted (a same-sex partnership) and what to do with that. A liberal college course on human sexuality gave me plenty of words for multiple sexual activities, and the performing arts community became a venue for my sexual mantra: "Go after love however you define that! Find someone that makes you happy and have fun with them!"

I guess you could say that my journey into chastity began ten years ago, when I realized that going after love however I defined it made me a hurtful and dangerous man for

others. The mercy of Jesus allowed my heart to be broken by my own lust. Merciful Jesus spoke to me—told me He wasn't angry with me but that He had something better for me if I would give myself—conflicted desires and all—to Him. I said yes to Jesus—a man who, for once, actually had my best interest in mind.

The ensuing years found me learning how to interpret the longings of my heart, how to direct my desire for intimacy into life-giving, pure friendships. I began to speak truthfully and learn how to use my relational drives to bless rather than use others.

When I would misuse my body through fantasy, pornography, or masturbation, it would deaden my gift and the gift I wanted to impart to those closest to me. So I learned, in fits and starts, how to refuse lust so that I could experience intimacy. Over time, I have worked out my desires for intimacy and they became less twisted. Eventually, I had enough clarity to see a beautiful woman named Jordyn for who she was, and to pursue her in a pure and joyful dating relationship that led to an exuberant wedding.

Before marriage, as we prayed and discussed how we would approach our marital sexuality, I saw more clearly than ever before: 'my sexuality is about creating and nurturing new

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Undivided:

Becoming My Own Man

By Daniel Delgado

'...He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.'

Zephaniah 3:17

CHRISTOPHER WEST ended the first night of his course on Theology of the Body by inviting the class to be open to what Jesus wanted to show us about Himself during the week. I prayed in turn: "Lord, I open myself up to You." Some people say that you should be careful what you pray for.

That night I had a dream, which at first involved Anderson Cooper. My old self longed for him. It is no secret that Anderson Cooper is white, successful, rich, smart, and openly gay. He represents the type of guy I would have sought after because he embodied what I longed for but could not have, including a privileged ethnic status. It was a lot easier to romanticize him than to face the reality of my own poverty.

In my dream, Anderson was dressed like a reporter but acting like a chiropractor. I was on a living room floor on my knees in a prayer-like position. He began using pressure points on my body and kept asking me: "Where is the pain?" I was unresponsive until he angrily picked me up and said, "Stand up!" It is important to note that I didn't feel pain or same-sex feelings in the dream. Rather, it revealed the way

in which I was disintegrated; hating myself, my gender, and seeking a type of man as if he were my 'other.' This revealed how divided I was, unable to stand properly.

As I stood up, Anderson Cooper supported me and I saw that I was in my natural father's living room. My father was sitting on the couch with the other children. Yet his eyes were on me. My father looked despondent and disturbed by what he was seeing. I cried out, "What? What is it?"

A little history: I was a child of divorce and my father was rarely involved in my life. He had been violent to my mother and was scary to me, hard to please. I walled myself off from him; I did not trust him and I didn't believe that he loved me. Recently, as I have gotten more healing, I have been slowly growing closer to him. I can now see the good of his humanity.

Back to the dream: at the center of the table next to Dad was a box of tissues. He stood up, grabbed a tissue, and brought it to his eyes. I drew near to the crying man who reached out and hugged me.

Anderson Cooper was gone. Nothing was separating my Dad and I any longer. I did not need to be supported by old fantasies. The embrace of my father was enough.

I woke up in tears. It was a powerful encounter that I will always

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its head but it did. Each staff person took a personality test and shared their results. After I took my test at home and read my personality 'profile' that the test identified, I did not recognize myself. So I took the test again then emailed our in-service leader with a different result. When it was my turn to share at the meeting, I explained what had happened, took some good-natured teasing then proceeded to read my new profile. Everyone agreed that the character traits fit me well.

However, I was ashamed to realize I had mistakenly read the wrong profile. My personality seemed to be under scrutiny and it was hard for me to be calm. I felt embarrassed but my coworkers loved and cared for me. I realized that if I cannot be vulnerable in front of them, with whom can I be? In weakness, I interrupted the meeting and explained what happen. Later that day, I recognized the sin of pride and fear of man. St. Paul helped me sort out my divided heart: "It is not that I have already... attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus." **DSM**



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life.' This had spiritual implications as Jordyn and I dedicated ourselves to serve the Church in fostering and nurturing lives there. But it absolutely also had physical implications! What we did with our bodies must mirror the heart and character of God and His call to both faithfulness and fruitfulness.

Jordyn and I have been married for 3 years now, and chastity continues to be a goal bigger than us, yet so worthy of pursuit. God has blessed us with a wild young boy and a baby girl on the way. Increasingly, God calls me to lay aside my childish ways of seeking comfort and pleasure, and to wholeheartedly focus my energy, attention, joy, and love into this beautiful family.

Occasionally, I am still tempted to direct my sexual desires into a fantasy or image that promises a quick escape from the challenges of our young family. In those moments, Jesus is faithful to call me to rise up and face challenges rather than to run from them.

More often, I'm tempted to compromise chastity through mundane distractions. With my wife and son in front of me, am I instead choosing to stare at my smart phone and give my energy and attention to a virtual world? In moments of free time, am I "taking a break" from husbandry and fatherhood, or am I using moments of solitude to strengthen & sharpen myself in the Lord so I can give myself to others better?

Jesus wants me undivided in my devotion to Himself, to my church, and to my family. He sees me as a man who can thrive as a lover and as a father. As He calls me into chastity, He's calling me to become the man He created me to be. There's not a more difficult or a more satisfying journey. **DSM**



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cherish. In truth, this dream is all about integration. It helped me accept the fact that I am like my father: a Latin man who is passionate, present, and making peace with his gender. Anderson Cooper I am not! The Heavenly Father wanted me to know that I'm maturing into the man He created me to be. **DSM**



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Mission Statement

Based on the biblical foundations of compassion, integrity, and dependence on God, Desert Stream Ministries proclaims to the world the transforming power of Jesus Christ. We equip the body of Christ to minister healing to the sexually and relationally broken, through healing groups and leadership training for the local church.

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