

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## A GUIDE FOR *GOD'S PLAN* FOR A JOY-FILLED MARRIAGE FACILITATORS

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Bullet point answers begin with a word or phrase in **bold** to help with memorization of the points to be made. These are not complete answers to people's questions. Bullet points should not be read to an audience. They are intended as an outline to which you, the teacher, must add the proper content.

All answers are derived from *Good News About Sex & Marriage: Honest Questions and Answers About Catholic Teaching*, Revised Edition by Christopher West (Servant, 2004). Numbers refer to pages in that book for further study and reference (page numbers differ in the original edition).

### **General Pointers for answering questions:**

- Let people know up front that the present format doesn't allow exhaustive answers to questions, but that you are happy to offer some "food for thought."
- You might also state up front that you do not have the answer to every question, but you are happy to direct people to resources or organizations that could answer their questions.
- Do not make up answers. Have the humility to admit when you are unable to answer a question and then offer people a resource to have their questions answered.

- If the questioner is being aggressive or combative, ask for his or her name and use it while addressing the question. “Thanks for that question, Bill. I appreciate where you’re coming from, and I can tell how much this topic is affecting you. Allow me to offer you some food for thought.” It helps to diffuse any sense of being adversarial.
- *Always affirm in some way the person asking the question.* Even if a person is challenging Church teaching, there is usually some point or element of truth that can be affirmed. For example, behind the angst of the question of women’s ordination is the truth that women have been unjustly discriminated throughout history. Affirm that, and then demonstrate logically and sensitively the “why” behind the “what” of the Church’s teaching.
- *Discern the root of the question.* Sometimes questions are asked that are already “root” questions. In other words, there is nothing behind it, no deeper issue that needs to be addressed. Other times there are deeper or more important issues “underneath” a given question. For example, behind questions of Church authority is the question of “objective truth.” Is there such a thing and can we know it with certainty? Don’t ignore the questions people actually ask, but help them get to the real issue(s). It also may be important to ask for an opportunity to address their “deeper” questions outside of the formal setting. This will allow for more time to explore these issues with the person asking the question.
- *If they pose a seemingly hostile question, how do I respond?* First, you want to be aware if this person is simply very curious and aggressive about getting questions answered, or if the person may actually feel threatened and begins to get aggressive, particularly if it is a point of possible embarrassment or anger. The lesson to be learned here is when you “back a lion into a corner” you want to make sure the lion has an exit or it will strike at you. For example, Joe asks, “What do you mean every act needs to be open to the possibility of life?” Your response would be: “Joe, thank you for your question. I don’t want you to feel that you are alone in this very important question and the truth is that only a small percentage of Catholics actually know that the marital act should remain open to the possibility of life each and every time the couple engages in it. However, now that has been clarified, let me address this topic further.” Here you are trying to mitigate the feelings of embarrassment that Joe might have for asking a question he might believe to be too simplistic or maybe something he disagrees with, and therefore, responds with aggression. You have, in a sense, given him an out, but also achieved your desire ends of catechizing him a little more about a particular truth. In this hypersensitive age in which we live, the method of delivery is almost as important as the message itself. We are, as St. Paul says, becoming all things to all men for the sake of the Gospel—yet we’re not compromising. We’re simply strategically thinking on how best to approach a given person in a given situation—always desiring, though, to continue to charitably turn up the heat towards deeper conversion.

- While marriage preparation is not strictly a form for apologetics, it does happen that people approach you with questions (sometimes not purely out of charity or sheer curiosity) but rather with a posture of doubt or even by attacking what we believe as Catholics. Below is a helpful guide to responding to questions and hopefully intelligently answer the question but also win over a person who is searching for the truth.

### 1. LISTEN CLOSELY AND IDENTIFY CLEARLY THE OBJECTION

What is the objector really saying? Often times we argue a point that really isn't the objection, but rather *our* favorite argument. Therefore, it is important to be able to answer the *actual* objection.

### 2. RESTATE THE OBJECTION

You do this for several reasons. First, you do this to make sure you understand the objection at hand. Second, you do this to be fair. You want his objection to be as clear and as strong as possible. Third, you also do this to build credibility for yourself. And finally, you do this to rapport with the person. Now they know that you really understand their position.

### 3. CLARIFY THE TERMS

Many times the objector does not have a clear understanding of Catholic doctrine. Before you can explain the importance of the doctrine, you must correct any misconceptions.

### 4. PRESENT YOUR REPLY

Show the basic evidence from Scripture and Tradition to support the Catholic position. In addition, show how the Church teaching has remained unchanged.

### 5. REPLY TO SECONDARY OBJECTIONS

Use the same four steps from above to answer any further objections that the objector may have.

## 1. GENERAL THEOLOGY OF THE BODY:

### 1. I'm single, what does the ToB teach me about my state in life? Isn't remaining single also a vocation? (see 170)

- **Affirmation:** Acknowledge that the Church has not done the best job reaching out to single people and it's easy to feel "left out" as a single person in the parish, etc.
- **Circumstance/choice:** distinguish being single by circumstance and single by choice.
- **On hold:** even if a person is single by circumstance, this doesn't mean life remains "on hold."

- **Nuptial gift:** every way a single person is a sincere gift to others (workplace, friends, family, community, parish, etc.) he or she is living the “nuptial meaning of the body.”
- **True Marriage:** awaits us in heaven, and everyone is invited regardless of his or her state of life or circumstances here on earth.
- **Therefore,** no one should think that his or her life is meaningless without a spouse. Accepting this gift and giving ourselves back to Christ is how we all fulfill our call to nuptial love, whether we’re married or not.

## 2. Why haven’t I heard about the ToB before now? (see 68).

- **Affirmation:** Acknowledge that most people haven’t heard this beautiful vision before...
- **Trickle down:** Always a slow trickle down effect in the Church, this is actually much faster than usual.
- **Crisis:** part of it has to do with a crisis in Catholic education. People have been scared of talking about the “difficult” teachings of the Church.
- **Challenge:** let’s take responsibility for spreading this message ourselves....

## 3. What’s the level of authority of the ToB?

- **Root:** discern if the real question is “do I have to believe this”?
- **Authority:** The 129 Wednesday audiences are low on the totem pole of papal authority, but they still fall under the Magisterium of the Church, to which we, as Catholics, owe our religious assent.
- **Experience:** Pope doesn’t argue primarily from authority in the ToB. He does so to the extent that his reflections are based on Holy Scripture. Moreover, he wants to appeal to human experience. He asks: Does this message ring true deep within us or not?

- **Doctrine/Theology:** The ToB is not presenting new doctrines, but giving us a theological system for understanding doctrine. While you may or may not like this theological approach, the doctrine itself (Church's sexual ethic, *Humanae Vitae*) is presented authoritatively.

#### 4. How did the Pope come up with this?

- **Background:** trace Wojtyla's history as a young man under Nazism and Communism – degradation all around him forced him to search for deep answers to life's most difficult questions. He was attracted to questions of the "human person" and came to see man and woman's relationship at heart of culture.
- **Couples:** As a wildly popular college professor and chaplain, Wojtyla worked extensively with hundreds of dating, engaged, and married couples. He counseled thousands of people in confession. He also saw the value as a cleric to socialize with lay people so as to understand the challenges and joys of being person living marriage as a vocation.
- **Love & Responsibility:** is his philosophical reflection in which Wojtyla explores the ideas about human love and sexuality, published in 1960 the book provides a personalistic approach to sexual morality.
- **Whole life:** was spent pondering the question – what does it mean to be a human person?

## 2. QUESTIONS ON CHURCH AUTHORITY

### 1. How can an old celibate priest tell me about sex? (see 41)

- **Affirmation:** it does seem strange, at first. Married people do have a special knowledge about sexuality. However, to assume that priests have nothing to offer on the subject would be like thinking a male obstetrician has nothing to offer his female patients, because he's not a woman.
- **Root issue:** debunk the idea that celibacy is a rejection of sex using all that's taught in ToB, reiterate firmly that celibacy, properly lived and understood, is a living out of the deepest truth of sexuality.

- **JP II:** was able to speak so convincingly about sex precisely because he lived the full truth of his own sexuality in “total self-donation” to his bride, the Church. He also had an advantage because due to the perspectives of the thousands of couples and individuals he counseled over the years. As well as the collective wisdom drawn from his role as a Confessor where he heard the myriad of problems and issues facing couples in the intimacy of the confessional.

## 2. Papal infallibility: What it is and is not. (see 32-36)

- **Root Issue:** we want to debunk the idea that Catholic teaching only affects the person if the Pope speaks in an extraordinary way. This argument has been used for years to say couples need not follow *Humanae Vitae* because it is not infallibly proposed. Rather, the “ordinary” teachings of the Church found in encyclicals, letters, and Wednesday audiences need to be included in our understanding of what needs to be accepted by a Catholic.
- **Extension of Christ:** Christ promised that his Church would teach the truth (see Jn 16:13). It is an extension of Christ, not a quality of a person who becomes pope. Infallibility belongs to the office, not the person *per se*. Does not mean the pope is impeccable.
- **Two ways:** *ex cathedra* statements (“from the chair” of Peter) – this is the extraordinary way; and when the Magisterium of the Church agrees definitively on a matter of faith and morals – this is the ordinary way.
- **All elements of doctrine:** infallibility extends to all elements of doctrine taught by the Magisterium, including moral doctrine.
- **Logic:** Only makes sense that God would establish an infallible authority on earth to make his will known. We believe that the authors of the four gospels did not error when writing these gospels, why wouldn’t this not continue within the life of the Church in the person of the Vicar of Christ? Otherwise, determining matters of eternal significance would amount to a guessing game. The formation of over 20,000 Protestant denominations since the Protestant Reformation shows what happens

without an infallible authority. In essence, the doctrine of infallibility is like a guard rail on the side of the road, it is a negative protection, not new inspiration, which guards the Church against making a mistake regarding issues of faith and morals.

### 3. Scandal in the Church. (see 34)

- **Affirmation:** We should all be sickened by scandal in the Church, but we shouldn't be surprised if we have a realistic view of human nature. History has shown that some terrible things have been done in the name of the Church.
- **Wheat & weeds:** Christ chose sinful men as his closest collaborators (he had no other choice!). One would betray him and another deny him. He said the wheat and the weeds would grow together within the Church until the end of time.
- **Root issue:** While certainly a scandal, in the Church is no excuse for us to turn a deaf ear to the Church's teachings. This, in fact, is the cause of scandal in the Church. Turning a deaf ear, then, makes us part of the problem rather than a solution to it.
- **Example:** Do you believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John sinned? They also, by the grace of God communicated the Gospel without error, right?

## 3. MARRIAGE/DIVORCE/ANNULMENT

### 1. What makes a marriage valid or invalid? (see 50)

- **Not a Magic Trick:** Marriage is not something that magically "happens" to a couple by standing at the altar. Marriage only happens if the couple ministers the sacrament to each other.
- **Many factors:** determine the validity/invalidity of marriage, too numerous to detail here (recommend they read chapter 3 of *Good News* or other book on annulment by Ascension press – *Annulments and the Catholic Church: Straight Answers to Tough Questions* by Edward Peters, J.D., J.C.D.).

- **In short:** must not have any *impediments*, follow the proper *form*, have the *proper capacity* to exchange consent and do so freely and unconditionally, and commit to what the *Church intends* (freedom, totality faithfulness and fruitfulness) by marriage.

## 2. What is an annulment? (see 50).

- **Affirmation:** Yes, there is a lot of confusion out there on this issue.
- **Not Catholic Divorce:** Divorce says you were once married and now are not. An annulment (more accurate term: declaration of nullity) is an official statement by the Church that, despite appearances, a valid marriage never in fact took place.
- **Divorce is impossible:** Nothing under the sun can end a valid, consummated marriage between Christians. Church does not so much teach that divorce is wrong, but that divorce is impossible
- **Children are not Illegitimate:** The legitimacy of children is not affected by a declaration of nullity. Canon Law declares that the children born of an annulled marriage remain legitimate (see c. 1137). They do not become illegitimate, for it is technically reserved for those born out of wedlock.

## 3. Refusing marriage to permanently impotent people is cruel. (see 54-57).

- **Affirmation:** Does seem a little odd at first. We'd all feel sorry for a person who was physically maimed and couldn't function sexually. But we mustn't let our emotional reaction to this teaching to cloud sound reasoning.
- **Root issue:** Difficulty with this teaching usually stems from the fact that the modern world has severed sex from its inherent *marital* meaning. Sexual union is the consummate expression of marital love. If sexual intercourse is absolutely impossible, so is marriage.

- **Blind analogy:** Blindness is a sad and unfortunate reality. But sympathy for the blind should not lead the state to issue them driver's licenses. The ability to see is a prerequisite for driving. Similarly, the ability to engage in intercourse is a prerequisite for entering the kind of relationship called marriage. Just as you need to be capacitated to fulfill the responsibilities and duties of driving an automobile, you also need to be capacitated to fulfill the responsibilities and duties of the married state, which is sexual intercourse with your spouse.
- **Other loves:** Doesn't mean such people are incapable of love. They are simply incapable of fulfilling the vocation called *marriage*.

#### 4. PREMARITAL CHASTITY

##### 1. It's okay to have sex if you love the person. (see 66)

- **Affirmation:** I agree. But what does it mean to love the person sexually?
- **Language of Body:** Sex is meant to express the language of divine love. That's the basic Christian proposal. God's love is free, total, faithful, and fruitful. That's called the marriage commitment.
- **Ready for Marriage:** If that's the kind of love you are wanting to express, then go see a priest. You're ready to get married. If not, don't confuse the desire for sharing sexual pleasure with an authentic and full definition of love.

##### 2. How far is too far? (see 74-78)

- **Wrong question:** This is a legalistic and minimalistic approach to morality. People who truly love each other aren't looking to "get away" with as much as possible before they "break the rules." They're looking to love one another as sincerely as possible.
- **Real Question:** should be "What does it mean to love?" And *what more can I do, what more can I sacrifice* to love this person sincerely?

- **Drawing a Line:** merely at behaviors doesn't do justice to the human heart. It's possible to hold hands with the wrong motive or intention.
- **Personalistic Norm:** is the true line. It states that you must never treat a person as a means to an end. The opposite of love is not "hatred," but to use someone as an object for your selfish pleasure.
- **Homework of the soul:** You have to be honest with yourself and your own motives. No one can do that "homework of the soul" for you by simply giving you a list of dos and don'ts.

## 5. MARITAL CHASTITY

### 1. Why do married couples have to be chaste? Isn't the wait over? (see 88)

- **Mistaken notion:** that we are called to be chaste *until* marriage. If that were the case, spouses wouldn't need to love one another.
- **Chastity:** is not the same thing as abstinence. It is the virtue that orders all our sexual desires towards the truth of love.

### 2. Delicate foreplay issues. (see 90-96)

[Note: it is very important to read your audience when such delicate and sensitive matters come up in a group. Discretion in your choice of words is important. Depending on the setting, it may be best just to refer people to *Good News* rather than answer specific delicate questions in public.]

- **Affirmation:** These are important questions for us to understand. Thanks for being courageous enough to ask.
- **Delicate matters:** Since these are such delicate matters, it might be best for me to refer you to chapter 5 of *Good News About Sex and Marriage*.

- **Basic principle:** is that the acts that prepare a couple for normal sexual intercourse can be loving and good, but couples must be careful not to cross the line from love to lust – merely to seeking pleasure for its own sake at the expense of the other. Ejaculation of the man’s seed should be sought only through normal intercourse.

### 3. Doing things the moral way cramps spontaneity. (see 98)

- **Define terms:** Spontaneity in this sense usually refers to abandoning oneself to the passion of the moment. If that “passion” is lust, yes, the Church’s teaching will “cramp your style.” Virtue calls us to a much richer and more beautiful kind of spontaneity.
- **Spontaneity of love:** is the fruit of virtue. When, through ongoing conversion from lust to love, authentic love wells up as a passion of the heart, spouses can and should “abandon themselves” to it.
- **Piano analogy:** Anyone can walk up to a piano and “spontaneously” bang on the keys and make meaningless noise. A concert pianist can also “spontaneously” tickle the keys and make music that raises our hearts to the heavens. But we know behind the beauty of the spontaneous music is a lifetime of effort, discipline, and sacrifice.

### 4. How do you know the line between love and lust in marriage?

- **Affirmation:** Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference. There can be a fine line.
- **JP II quote:**

[Paraphrasing] We must learn with perseverance and consistency the meaning of our bodies, the meaning of our sexuality. We must learn this not only in the abstract (although this, too, is necessary), but above all in the interior reactions of our own “hearts.” This is a “science” which cannot really be learned only from books, because it is a question here of deep knowledge of our interior life. Deep in the heart we learn to distinguish between what, on the one hand, composes the great riches of sexuality and sexual attraction, and what, on the other hand, bears only the sign of lust. And although these internal movements of the heart can sometimes be confused with one another, we have been called by Christ to acquire a mature and complete evaluation. “And it should be added that this task *can* be carried out and is really worthy of man” (ToB, p. 172).

## 6. CONTRACEPTION

[Note: It is critical that you spend quality time fine-tuning your responses to this issue. This is the lynch-pin of all sexual morality. If you can successfully explain this, you can successfully explain anything the Church teaches about sex.]

### 1. What's wrong with contraception? (see 109)

- **Affirmation:** Heap lots of affirmation on those who have questions about this. “Yes, Molly, I can totally relate. It does seem odd, at first, doesn't it? I mean, it seems like the Church is just denying people a modern convenience. What's the big deal? Let's take a deeper look.....”
- **Define terms:** (see 114-115) birth control, artificial birth control, contraception, artificial contraception. The Church is not opposed to “controlling births.” Nor is she opposed to all things “artificial” (that would make wearing polyester immoral). The Church is opposed to those methods of controlling births that are “contraceptive” – that impede the procreative potential of a given act of intercourse.
- **Why?** Because rendering the sexual act sterile radically changes the meaning and significance of the act, the spouses' relationship to one another, and the spouses' relationship to God. It does “violence” to God's creation and the physical and spiritual integrity of spouses. If spouses choose to engage in sexual intercourse, they must do so with respect for God's design for the act.
- **Wedding Vows:** Body has a language that is meant to express wedding vows, and one of the promises you make at the altar is to “receive children lovingly from God.” Rendering the act sterile turns the “I do” of wedding vows into an “I do not.”
- **False Sign:** Contracepted intercourse is not an act of love that images the divine. It makes of the spouses a counter-sign of God's life-giving love and a kind of “anti-sacrament” of Christ's love for the Church.

## 2. Difference between contraception and NFP. (see 114-117)

- **Clarify:** The real question is what is the difference between sterilizing the act yourself and just waiting until it is naturally infertile.
- **Euthanasia analogy:** To which I respond, what is the difference between killing Grandma and just waiting until she dies naturally?
- **In short:** If you can understand the difference between euthanasia and natural death, you can understand the difference between contraception and natural family planning.
- **Same difference:** One is an act of God. In the other, you take the powers of life into your own hands and you “make yourself like God.” Wasn’t that the original temptation in the Garden of Eden?

[Note: In ten years of trying to come up with an easy-to-understand and compelling way of explaining the difference between contraception and NFP, nothing has worked for me as successfully as “killing Grandma v. waiting till Grandma dies naturally.” See talk 7 of my video series *Created and Redeemed* to see how this is explained in a virtually “fool-proof” way.]

## 3. What constitutes serious reasons for using NFP to avoid children? (see 118)

- **Avoid extremes:** Some wrongly think that only the most grave reasons such as a deadly disease or extreme poverty would justify avoiding a child. Others think that just about any reason whatsoever justifies avoiding children.
- **Avoid selfishness:** The Church teaches that it is the parents’ duty to “make certain that their desire [to space births] is not motivated by selfishness” (CCC, n. 2368). That’s it in a nutshell.

- **Some reasons:** Just reasons could include financial (hard time feeding the kids you already have, just lost a job, etc.), physical (legitimate health concerns), emotional (already have 5 kids under the age of 6 and you need a break).

4. Is it morally acceptable to take the pill for medical reasons? (see 128)

- **Principle:** Medical procedures that cause sterility are not in themselves immoral (e.g. hysterectomy, removal of cancerous testicles) so long as the sterility they cause is not directly willed or rejoiced in.
- **Abortifacient:** The same would apply for the annovulant pill, however the “pill” has the further effect at times of causing abortions. A wife on the “pill” for medical reasons would need to abstain completely to avoid the danger of an abortion.
- **Alternatives to pill:** The good news is there are medical alternatives to the pill (recommend contacting the Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction).

5. I've already had a vasectomy (or tubal ligation). What should I do? (see 132)

- **Affirmation:** There is no unforgivable sin except the refusal to admit that we need forgiveness. Go to confession to a priest who understands and upholds the Church's teaching and be confident in God's mercy!
- **Physical v. moral evil:** must distinguish these. If I cut off my arm, there are two evils involved – moral (mutilating my body) and physical (I'm now missing an arm). If I go to confession and sincerely repent, the moral evil is gone, but the physical evil still exists.
- **Restoration:** If it is possible to restore my arm (my fertility through a reversal), I should. But it might not be possible.
- **Book:** Recommend the testimony book *Sterilization Reversal: A Generous Act of Love* published by One More Soul.

## 7. REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

### 1. What is the Church's teaching on reproductive technologies? (see 136-142)

- **Flip side** of the Church's teaching in *Humanae Vitae* is the Church document *Donum Vitae*. There is an inseparable link between sex and babies. Contraception seeks sex but divorces it from babies. Some reproductive technologies seek babies but divorce them from sex.
- **In short:** If a technology or procedure assists the marital act in achieving its natural end, this can be laudable. If it replaces the marital act as the means by which a child is conceived it is immoral.
- **End & Means:** We are dealing here with a good end (the desire for a child) but a bad means (producing the child apart from the marital embrace). The end never justifies the means. (See Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2373-2379).

### 2. The Church is cruel for denying a couple the right to have a child. (see 144)

- **Affirmation:** The desire for children couldn't be more natural. The pain of infertility should not be underestimated.
- **No right:** No one has a "right" to a child. A child is a gift from God and cannot be demanded.
- **Couple's right:** The only right a couple has is to engage in the marital embrace. They are free to optimize the chances of conception in their embrace – technology may be able to help with that. But whether their union results in a new life must be left in the hands of God, the Lord and Giver of Life.
- **Children's rights:** If we are to speak of "rights," we must recognize that children have the right to be conceived by an act of love between their parents.

3. Is it morally acceptable for a man to masturbate to supply a semen sample for a sperm count? (see 146)

- **End & Means:** Good end, bad means. Masturbation is an intrinsic disorder which means nothing can justify it.
- **Other means:** There are other means of collecting a semen sample from a completed act of intercourse.

4. We already have a child from in-vitro. What do we do? (see 147)

- **Affirmation:** Every human life is a treasure from heaven, whether or not that child was conceived as God intends. Receive and treat that child as a treasure.
- **Trust in God's mercy:** Nothing is beyond the scope of God's healing and redeeming love. We only need trust in it and admit when we have turned from God's ways to our own.
- **Confession:** Find an understanding priest and trust fully in God's mercy.

## 8. HOMOSEXUALITY

1. What light does the Theology of the Body shed on homosexuality? (see 151)

- **Body reveals the person:** This basic truth demonstrates that, since the body is clearly oriented toward the opposite sex, so too is the person at his or her deepest level oriented toward the opposite sex.
- **Cut off:** Some people might be cut-off from that deepest part of themselves, but orientation toward the "other" is still at the deepest level of the person.
- **Sexual "re-orientation":** All of us or sexually disoriented in one way or another because of the effects of original sin. Same-sex attraction is only one manifestation of a universal human problem. The redemption of sexuality is offered to one and all as a living possibility. With Christ's help all of us, regardless of our distortions, can gradually reclaim God's original plan for our lives. (see 154-156)

2. What's wrong with two people of the same sex loving each other? (see 152)

- **Nothing:** But what does it mean for two men or two women to love each other? Is mutual masturbation an act of love?
- **Root question:** What does it mean to love someone sexually? Basic proposal of the ToB is that the "language of sexual love" is stamped in our bodies as male and female and it is meant to express the free, total, faithful, and fruitful love of God. Does homosexual activity qualify?
- **Another root question:** (for those still resisting) Do we determine reality? Are we free to "eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"?

3. Why would God make people this way and tell them they can't live this way? (see 154)

- **Root problem:** need to understand that we live in a *fallen* world. All of creation is affected by original sin. God created an original order that was "very good" and human sin has distorted it.
- **Jesus words:** to the Pharisees can apply to homosexuality as well – "In the beginning it was not so." Homosexuality is not part of God's original order and plan for human life.
- **Biological?:** Even if science could prove the existence of a "gay gene" or the like, that wouldn't demonstrate "God made me this way." All of biology is impacted by the fall. Alcoholism is said to have roots in biology. Does this mean the only way such a person can be happy is by binging on booze?

4. I know a gay couple who love each other very much. I see how they care for each other and their children. I refuse to believe they're living in sin. (see 157)

- **Affirmation:** I'm sure the love they have for each other and the children they care for is genuine in many ways. But that doesn't mean everything they do in their relationship is loving and good.

- **Recognizing goodness:** in some areas of a relationship does not mean the whole relationship is necessarily a good thing. Whatever is erotic in their relationship can only be based on a misunderstanding of who they are as men or women.

## 9. CELIBACY

### 1. If the Church is so gung-ho on marriage, why does it promote celibacy? (see 164)

- **Affirmation:** does sound strange at first. But a deeper look reveals the Church's understanding of celibacy flows directly from her understanding of marriage.
- **Foreshadowing:** The purpose of marriage is to provide an earthly foreshadowing of the "Marriage of the Lamb," the eternal union between Christ and the Church that awaits us in heaven.
- **No Marriage in Heaven:** when Jesus says this, he's pointing to the fact that marriage on earth will be fulfilled in the marriage of heaven.
- **For the Kingdom:** In Mt 19, Christ calls some to "skip" the sacrament of marriage in order to devote themselves entirely to the marriage that alone can satisfy – the marriage of Christ and the Church. It is celibacy not for celibacy's sake, but *for the kingdom*.
- **Not a Rejection of Sex:** but a living out of the ultimate purpose and meaning of our creation as male and female and our call to union – to point us to Christ's union with the Church.

### 2. Does the Church still teach that celibacy is a higher calling than marriage? (see 165)

- **Affirmation:** There has been a lot of misunderstanding of St. Paul's teaching that he who marries does well, but he who refrains does better (see 1 Co 7:38). Marriage is not a "second class" vocation. Nor is it only for those who "can't handle" celibacy.

- **JP II's ToB:** firmly denounced any interpretation of these words that would belittle or devalue marriage.
- **Value of Marriage:** determines the value of celibacy. The value of a sacrifice is determined by the value of that which a person sacrifices (no merit if a non-smoker gives up smoking for Lent). If marriage were "bad," every Christian would be called to renounce it.
- **Objective/Subjective distinction:** What's better – heaven or earth? Celibacy is "better" by virtue of its object, it is a choice for the heavenly marriage. Subjectively speaking, the better vocation for you is the one to which you are called by God.

### 3. Why aren't Catholic priests allowed to be married? (see 166)

- **Some are:** We often forget in the West that Eastern Rite Catholic Churches have married priests. They are just as Catholic as Roman Rite priests. It is a discipline of the Latin or Roman Rite of the Church to choose her priests from among those men who have embraced a life of celibacy for the kingdom.
- **Important Symbolism:** While it's not essential that a priest be celibate, a celibate priest retains an important symbolic value in imaging Christ, who himself was celibate. Christ was not married to a particular woman because he came to "give up his body" for all humanity, for his Bride, the Church.
- **Free choice:** the vocation of celibacy, like the vocation of marriage, must always flow from a free choice. The Church forces no one to be celibate. As a discipline, the Roman Church chooses her priests from among those men who have freely chosen celibacy as their life's vocation.

### 4. Why can't women be priests? (see 168)

- **Affirmation:** We must work to overcome all exaggerations of the differences between the sexes that have been used to favor men and oppress women. But in the final analysis there are still differences that matter. Men and women are not simply interchangeable.

- **Where difference matters:** What is one thing a woman can do that a man can't? Be pregnant and give birth. What is one thing a man can do that a woman can't? Father a child. This is where sexual difference really matters.
- **Not a career choice:** Women are right to insist that they can be doctors, lawyers, politicians, astronauts – those things traditionally denied them by men. But priesthood is not a career choice. It is spiritual fatherhood and in order to be capable of being a father in the spirit, you must be capable of being a father in the flesh.
- **Eucharist union of Bridegroom & Bride:** The Eucharist is the consummation of a mystical marriage. Ephesians 5: the one flesh union is a great mystery and it refers to Christ and the Church. The difference of the sexes matters precisely here.
- **Priest acts as Bridegroom:** giving up his body for his bride, the Church. For a woman to attempt to confer the Eucharist, this changes the relationship altogether. It's no longer bridegroom to bride, but bride to bride. Just as in the case of two women, there is no possibility of a true communion and there is no possibility of new life.

#### 5. Why didn't Joseph and Mary have sexual relations? (see 171)

- **Dispel myths:** Married people often get the impression that if they were *really holy* they wouldn't desire sex or wouldn't engage in it – just like Joseph and Mary. We get the idea since Joseph and Mary didn't have sex, there must be something wrong with sex. Wrong!
- **Exceptional Calling:** Mary and Joseph were given an exceptional calling to unite the two Christian vocations in one. Celibacy, remember, is an anticipation of the heavenly marriage. So they were called to unite the heavenly marriage and the earthly marriage. Their vocation united heaven and hearth.
- **The Fruit:** And what was the fruit of their marriage? The union of heaven and earth – Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.