

*It is more blessed to give than to receive.* –Jesus Christ

*Freedom lies at the heart of the gift-giving meaning of the body.* (TOBSL p. 31)

*To love is to give everything and to give oneself.* –St. Therese of Lisieux

### **Freedom is self-giving**

In these early chapters of Genesis, we have a window into the fullness of God's plan for creation and for human persons. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were free from the constraints of sin. They were naked and unashamed, and they were free from any urge to misuse each other. Their vision was not clouded by shame. They were free to give themselves to each other, free to make a gift of themselves. They were free to love.

Human beings were created by the Creator—by love, for love. From the beginning of time, God has shown his love to us, but he has never forced us to love him in return. Instead, he has chosen to woo us and invite our love in response. Love can never be forced. Instinctively, we know that love that is forced is not love at all. True love is freely given, and is experienced in freedom.

We need *freedom from* that which enslaves us, but freedom is not an end in itself. We are freed *for* a purpose, and that purpose is love: to live according to our true nature, as a gift. Contrary to the messages of our culture (“Buy this car! Hit the road and be free!”), freedom is not achieved by *getting* something or someone. Freedom is not the ability to do whatever one pleases without regard to anyone else. Rather, true freedom comes from being situated in a web of relationships, finding one's place there, and giving oneself away.

There are two aspects to the spousal (or *nuptial*) meaning of the body. The human body, in its masculinity and its femininity, shows that the body is a source of fruitfulness and procreation. In addition, the body has the power to express love, the power to become a gift. This self-giving love is distinctly human. Animals have the power to reproduce, but they do not have the freedom to “give.”

The self-giving nature of men and women—the spousal meaning of the body—can be fulfilled in marriage, and it can also be fulfilled by remaining unmarried for the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:12). In either of these vocations, men and women have the power to offer themselves as a gift.

### **Constraint limits freedom**

The opposite of freedom is constraint. To “constrain” is to imprison, force or severely restrict. Constraint is a consequence of sin. Just as shame limits our ability to see one another in innocence, constraint limits our ability to make a free gift of ourselves. This constraint is manifested in many ways, and we feel it in the form of uncontrolled passions. Especially, the urge to misuse each other is toxic to freedom. This results in a lack of freedom to give oneself. Without the ability to give of ourselves, we lose the ability to know who we are. By inhibiting our freedom to give of ourselves, the constraints of

sin—uncontrolled passions—touch precisely on our ability to be known and find ourselves. We must learn self-control in order for us to achieve freedom.

You are a gift—you are God's gift, to yourself and to others. The nature of the gift is to be *given*, in freedom. "A man can only find his true self by giving himself away. When we live according to the nuptial meaning of our bodies, we fulfill the very meaning of our existence." (TOBSL p. 31)

Before the fall, our first parents were transparent and open. All of creation was "aglow with the radiance of love," and they dwelt in the unmediated grace of God—his holiness. They were in full communion with God and with each other. The fruit of this communion of love was love and purity of heart. All this encompasses original innocence, which allowed them to see each other fully, naked and without shame.