



Sermon for 2/27/22

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

Clarity Is Charity 2

In the recent Synod on Synodality listening sessions I heard the clear call for clarity in doctrine from the people of Sts. Peter and Paul. Thus was born a sermon series called Clarity is Charity. This is the second part of that series. In this sermon I would like to address **the nature of man** as understood by the Catholic Church. This is a very important topic in our day where much confusion reigns. We must correctly understand these things as they form the basis of the whole edifice of Catholic Doctrine. Our knowledge of the truth about who we are derives from the natural law and divine revelation which I discussed in the first part for this series. One preliminary statement is on the use of the term ‘man’ and ‘mankind’ to indicate the whole of humanity, that is, all who share in human nature, whether male or female, old or young. Man and mankind are the classic words universally understood and used in English to convey the truth that we share a common nature. **This is the term used often in the Catechism of the Catholic Church to denote this reality.** The use of this term should not be misconstrued as representing any type of denigration of women.

The first thing that we must clearly state is that **human nature is an objective reality, not subject to change according to societal notions**, nor is it something that is a mere projection of the subjective experience of man. Rather, we believe that the nature of humanity is **built into the very fabric of our being** and is established by the one who created us. We express this in the statement that comes from Divine Revelation, *“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.”* (Genesis 1:27)

From this statement we can derive certain truths about the nature of man. CCC 355:

- 1) **Man occupies a unique place in creation.**
- 2) Man in his own nature **unites the spiritual and material worlds.**
- 3) Mankind is **created ‘male and female’.**
- 4) God created humanity **for the sake of relationship with himself.**

Let’s be clear about the first point: **Man occupies a unique place in creation.** Humanity is not just one of many animal species on the same plane of existence. He is not a poison or a parasite on mother earth. He is the only creature made ‘in the image of God’. **From this unique place in creation man derives his dignity.** CCC 356 *“Of all visible creatures only man is ‘able to know and love his creator’. He is ‘the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake’, and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity.”* A subsequent truth that must then be asserted is that *“God created everything for man. . .”* (CCC 358). St. John Chrysostom says: *“What is it that is about to be created, that enjoys such honor? It is man – that great and wonderful living creature, more precious in the eyes of God than all other creatures! For him the heavens and the earth, the sea and all the rest of creation exist.”* CCC 299 *“For God willed creation as a gift addressed to man, an inheritance destined for and entrusted to him.”* CCC 307 *“To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence by entrusting them with the responsibility of ‘subduing’ the earth and having dominion over it.”* CCC 373 *“...This sovereignty is not to be an arbitrary and destructive domination. God calls man and woman, made in the image of the Creator ‘who loves everything that exists’, to share in his providence toward other creatures ...”*

Let’s be clear – creation exists for the sake of man. And humanity has a duty of stewardship over the earth, which is the true meaning of ‘subduing’ and having ‘dominion’ over it.

In the second place, we clearly teach that man is not just a body, but also has a soul which is spiritual. CCC 363 *“In Sacred Scripture the term ‘soul’ often refers to human life or the entire human person. But ‘soul’ also refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God’s image: ‘soul’ signifies the spiritual principle in man.”* Let’s be clear: **We must reject all philosophies and ideologies that reduce man to the merely material and physical.** CCC 365 *“The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the ‘form’ of the body: i.e., it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in*



man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.” Let’s be clear: **We also must reject all philosophies and ideologies which despise the body or see the body as an encumbrance to true freedom.** CCC 364 *The human body shares in the dignity of ‘the image of God’: it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit. . . . For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.*” **Let’s be clear: the human person is a composite of body and soul, not simply a bunch of tissues and neurons, nor an entombed spirit. Our dignity is found in uniting both matter and spirit in one nature.**

Next, we acknowledge that God created man, male and female he created them. CCC 369 *“Man and woman have been created, which is to say, **willed by God:** on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. **‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God:** man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator. Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity ‘in the image of God’ . . . they reflect the Creator’s wisdom and goodness.”* CCC 371 *“God created man and woman together and willed each **for the other.**”* CCC 372 *“Man and woman were made ‘for each other’ - not that God left them half-made and incomplete: **he created them to be a communion of persons,** in which each can be ‘helpmate’ to the other, for they are **equal as persons . . . and complementary as masculine and feminine.** In marriage God unites them in such a way that, by forming ‘one flesh’, they can transmit human life: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’ By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents cooperate in a unique way in the Creator’s work.”*

Let’s be clear: Humanity consists of men and women who are equal in dignity even if distinct in form. Gender and sexual differentiation is not an arbitrary imposition or a social construct, but a reality willed by God in his creation. Equal as persons, men and women are complementary as masculine and feminine. Men and women were made for each other in a fruitful life-giving love we call marriage.

Finally, we acknowledge that humanity was made for friendship with God. CCC 374 *“The first man was not only created good, but was also **established in friendship with his Creator** and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him, . . . surpassed only by the glory of the new creation in Christ.”* CCC 375 *“ . . . our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original ‘state of holiness and justice’. This grace of original holiness was ‘to share in. . . divine life’.”* CCC 376 *“As long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die. The inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation, comprised the state called **‘original justice’.**”* CCC 379 *“This entire harmony of original justice, foreseen for man in God’s plan, will be lost by the sin of our first parents.”* **Let’s be clear: Humanity was made for friendship with God. This friendship was lost by the disobedience of Adam and Eve which we call Original Sin. Jesus Christ came to restore humanity to friendship with God by the gift of a new creation in grace. Without the intervention of Jesus Christ, we cannot hope to restore friendship with God.**