

VII. LUST & CHASTITY

C.S. Lewis once remarked that he was a converted pagan living in a country of apostate Puritans. He was speaking of Britain, but much the same could be said of American culture as well. Our apostate Puritan culture has long taught us to believe that the very worst sin in the world is lust. But Dante regards lust as the lightest and least serious of the deadly sins. It is, like gluttony, an excess of love for *something* rather than the choice to reject love. What it is not, however, is an excess of love for another person, despite the fact that it involves sex. That's the main problem with it: lust is the sin of treating another person as a means to an end. Lewis remarks that the lustful man does not "want a woman." He wants an experience for which the woman happens to be the necessary apparatus. In short, lust treats people like things and insults the love they are due as human beings. In this study, pay attention to the ways in which you have been tempted (or given in to the temptation to treat human beings as things and not persons. Pay attention, as well, to the ways in which God is calling you out of the prison of lust so that you may truly be filled with God's love and respect for your neighbor.

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Read Matthew 5:27-30. Where does Jesus see lust beginning? Jesus uses hyperbole to point out the need for radical repentance from the sin of lust. Why is such drastic action demanded? What does this suggest about the addictive nature of lust?
2. John Paul II warned that people can commit the sin of lust even *within* marriage. What do you think he meant?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. God has made you so that his love can surge through you and enable you to love others for their own sake and not for your use and exploitation. Given that, why does Paul find lust so grave a sin against Christ?
4. Read 1 John 2:15-17. What does John mean by "lust"? How does it relate to pride? What does John say about this world and its relationship to lust?
5. Read CCC 2392-2400. What is chastity? Who is the model of chastity? What is the difference between chastity and celibacy?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are some of the temptations in our culture toward lust? What are some ways we can arm ourselves against these temptations?
2. Have you ever had an experience of falling in love? How was it different from mere lust?
3. People talk about pornography as a “victimless crime.” Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
4. Dante's penitent lustful must pass through fire to be cleansed of this sin. How is this again a punishment that fits the sin? What in your life needs to be burned up in order to free you from the sin of lust?
5. Do you know some model—whether in Scripture, among the saints, or in your life—of the practice of joyful chastity? What concrete step could you take today to imitate that?