Lesson 21 – The Holy Spirit’s Gift of Modesty

In this session, we will seek to answer the following questions:

How does Baptism lead us to purity?
What is concupiscence?
What are the three types of concupiscence or covetousness?
What is the difference between the ninth and tenth commandments?
How does purity guard against Carnal Lust?
What are the four graces from the Holy Spirit which help us grow in purity and overcome our concupiscence?
What is the catholic definition of modesty?
What are the three necessary requirements of dressing modestly?
What is the difference between virtues and vices?

MODESTY
FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Modesty is an essential base for humility; it may appear mediocre in the eyes of man, but not in the eyes of God. By this fruit of the Holy Spirit one learns to be contented with what is just required. One doesn't harbor any ambitions, nor take pride in any achievements since they appear commonplace.

Therefore, we must conduct our lives with humility, not claiming any credit for ourselves, but giving all credit and thanksgiving to God by accepting His Holy Will.

NEW AMERICAN BIBLE REFERENCES

Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, was born in a very dire surroundings, the son of very poor parents and surrounded by poverty. When the angel Gabriel came to Mary with the Good News of the coming Messiah, she replied, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her (Luke 1:38). By her modest response, Mary didn't become proud of such a gift. She kept it to herself, risking to be divorced publicly as she was a virgin. Joseph found out in a dream (Matthew 1:20) through the message of an angel that Mary had conceived the Savior of the world through the action of the Holy Spirit.

In James 4:6, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble: "4 But he bestows a greater grace; therefore, it says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (CCC) REFERENCES

There are 6 references to MODESTY in the CCC. Those listed below are taken from the Index: of the body, 2523; definition of, 2521-22; purity requires, 2521, 2533; as a sign of human dignity, 2524. We should review the CCC Article 9 to see the relationship between the battle between our concupiscence and our spiritual life.
ARTICLE 9
THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor’s.

Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

2514 St. John distinguishes three kinds of covetousness or concupiscence: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. In the Catholic catechetical tradition, the ninth commandment forbids carnal concupiscence; the tenth forbids coveting another’s goods.

2515 Etymologically, "concupiscence" can refer to any intense form of human desire. Christian theology has given it a particular meaning: the movement of the sensitive appetite contrary to the operation of the human reason. The apostle St. Paul identifies it with the rebellion of the “flesh” against the “spirit.” Concupiscence stems from the disobedience of the first sin. It unsettles man's moral faculties and, without being in itself an offense, inclines man to commit sins.

2516 Because man is a composite being, spirit and body, there already exists a certain tension in him; a certain struggle of tendencies between "spirit" and "flesh" develops. But in fact this struggle belongs to the heritage of sin. It is a consequence of sin and at the same time a confirmation of it. It is part of the daily experience of the spiritual battle:

For the Apostle it is not a matter of despising and condemning the body which with the spiritual soul constitutes man's nature and personal subjectivity. Rather, he is concerned with the morally good or bad works, or better, the permanent dispositions - virtues and vices - which are the fruit of submission (in the first case) or of resistance (in the second case) to the saving action of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the Apostle writes: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."

I. PURIFICATION OF THE HEART

2517 The heart is the seat of moral personality: "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication. . . ." The struggle against carnal covetousness entails purifying the heart and practicing temperance:

Remain simple and innocent, and you will be like little children who do not know the evil that destroys man's life.

2518 The sixth beatitude proclaims, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "Pure in heart" refers to those who have attuned their in love of truth and orthodoxy of faith. There is a connection between purity of heart, of body, and of faith:

The faithful must believe the articles of the Creed "so that by believing they may obey God, by obeying may live well, by living well may purify their hearts, and with pure hearts may understand what they believe."

2519 The "pure in heart" are promised that they will see God face to face and be like him. Purity of heart is the precondition of the vision of God. Even now it enables us to see according to God, to accept others as "neighbors"; it lets us perceive the human body - ours and our neighbor’s - as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty.

II. THE BATTLE FOR PURITY

2520 Baptism confers on its recipient the grace of purification from all sins. But the baptized must continue to struggle against concupiscence of the flesh and disordered desires. With God's grace he will prevail

- by the virtue and gift of chastity, for chastity lets us love with upright and undivided heart;

- by purity of intention which consists in seeking the true end of man: with simplicity of vision, the baptized person seeks to find and to fulfill God's will in everything.
- by purity of vision, external and internal; by discipline of feelings and imagination; by refusing all complicity in impure thoughts that incline us to turn aside from the path of God's commandments: "Appearance arouses yearning in fools";  

- by prayer:

  I thought that continence arose from one's own powers, which I did not recognize in myself. I was foolish enough not to know . . . that no one can be continent unless you grant it. For you would surely have granted it if my inner groaning had reached your ears and I with firm faith had cast my cares on you.

2521 Purity requires modesty, an integral part of temperance. Modesty protects the intimate center of the person. It means refusing to unveil what should remain hidden. It is ordered to chastity to whose sensitivity it bears witness. It guides how one looks at others and behaves toward them in conformity with the dignity of persons and their solidarity.

2522 Modesty protects the mystery of persons and their love. It encourages patience and moderation in loving relationships; it requires that the conditions for the definitive giving and commitment of man and woman to one another be fulfilled. Modesty is decency. It inspires one's choice of clothing. It keeps silence or reserve where there is evident risk of unhealthy curiosity. It is discreet.

2523 There is modesty of the feelings as well as of the body. It protests, for example, against the voyeuristic explorations of the human body in certain advertisements, or against the solicitations of certain media that go too far in the exhibition of intimate things. Modesty inspires a way of life which makes it possible to resist the allures of fashion and the pressures of prevailing ideologies.

2524 The forms taken by modesty vary from one culture to another. Everywhere, however, modesty exists as an intuition of the spiritual dignity proper to man. It is born with the awakening consciousness of being a subject. Teaching modesty to children and adolescents means awakening in them respect for the human person.

2525 Christian purity requires a purification of the social climate. It requires of the communications media that their presentations show concern for respect and restraint. Purity of heart brings freedom from widespread eroticism and avoids entertainment inclined to voyeurism and illusion.

2526 So called moral permissiveness rests on an erroneous conception of human freedom; the necessary precondition for the development of true freedom is to let oneself be educated in the moral law. Those in charge of education can reasonably be expected to give young people instruction respectful of the truth, the qualities of the heart, and the moral and spiritual dignity of man.

2527 "The Good News of Christ continually renews the life and culture of fallen man; it combats and removes the error and evil which flow from the ever-present attraction of sin. It never ceases to purify and elevate the morality of peoples. It takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation, and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes, and restores them in Christ."

IN BRIEF

2528 "Everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28).

2529 The ninth commandment warns against lust or carnal concupiscence.

2530 The struggle against carnal lust involves purifying the heart and practicing temperance.

2531 Purity of heart will enable us to see God: it enables us even now to see things according to God.

2532 Purification of the heart demands prayer, the practice of chastity, purity of intention and of vision.

2533 Purity of heart requires the modesty which is patience, decency, and discretion. Modesty protects the intimate center of the person.
Relevant words from the Bible on Modesty

**Gal. 5:22-23**  "But the fruit of the Spirit is, charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, **modesty**, continency, chastity."

**Romans 12:1,2**  "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God."

**1 Corinthians 3:16, 17**  "Know you not, that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? But if any man violate the temple of God, he shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are."

**1 Corinthians 11:10**  Therefore ought the woman to have a power (covering) over her head, because of the angels. *(Who are present in the assemblies of the faithful)*

**1 Timothy 2, 9**  "In like manner women also in decent apparel: adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety, not with plaited hair or gold, or pearls or costly attire."

**1 Thessalonians 5:22**  From all appearance of evil refrain yourselves. And may the God of peace Himself sanctify you in all things; that your whole spirit, and soul, and body, may be preserved blameless in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Deuteronomy 22:5**  "A woman shall not be clothed with man's apparel, neither shall a man use woman's apparel: for he that doeth these things is abominable before God."

**Saint Matthew 7:13-14**  Words of our Lord: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction: and many there are who go in there. How narrow is the gate and straight is the way that leads to life: and few there are that find it!"

**Leviticus 19:30**  Keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary, I am the Lord.

**Habakkuk 2:20**  The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before Him.

**Zacharias 2:13**  Let all flesh be silent at the presence of the Lord; for He has risen out of His holy habitation.

**Ecclesiastics (Sirach) 19:26-27**: "A man is known by his look, and a wise man, when thou meetest him, is known by his countenance. The attire of the body, and the laughter of the teeth, and the gait of the man, show what he is."

**Saint Matthew 5:27-28**  Words of our Lord: {You have heard that it was said to the ancients, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But I say to you that anyone who so much as looks with lust at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart.}. 
MODESTY

By Monsignor Charles M. Mangan

Dress for both men and women have changed dramatically during the last fifty years. Much of what is worn today is meant to expose rather than conceal the human body.

For centuries, Christians have looked to the virtue of modesty as it applies to vesture in order to judge what is appropriate.

The Catholic tradition has given us a valuable definition of modesty, which is the virtue that regulates one’s actions and exterior customs concerning sexual matters. It controls one’s behavior so as to avoid unlawful sexual arousal in oneself or others.

Modesty is one of the Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as “the first fruits of eternal glory”: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.

To dress modestly is to avoid deliberately causing sexual excitement in oneself or one’s neighbor. One who dresses modestly shuns clothes that are known or reasonably expected to effect sexual arousal in oneself or others. Modesty is dress pertains to both genders.

Pope Pius XII (1939-1958), in harmony with the Magisterium and orthodox spiritual authors, addressed the necessity of cultivating modesty.

“How many young girls there are who see nothing wrong in following certain shameless styles like so many sheep? They would certainly blush with shame if they could know the impression they make, and the feelings they evoke, in those who see them.

“The good of our soul is more important than the good of our body; and we have to prefer the spiritual welfare of our neighbor to our bodily comforts . . . If a certain kind of dress constitutes a grave and proximate occasion of sin, and endangers the salvation of your soul and others, it is your duty to give it up . . . O Christian mothers, if you know what a future of anxieties and perils, of ill guarded shame you prepare for your sons and daughters, imprudently getting them accustomed to live scantily dressed and making them lose their sense of modesty, you would be ashamed of yourselves and you would dread the harm you are making for yourselves, the harm which you are causing to these children, whom Heaven has entrusted to you to be brought up as Christians.

“Christian girls, think also of this: the more elegant you will be, and the more pleasing, if you dress with simplicity and discreet modesty.”

On November 8, 1957, Pope Pius presented the still-valid principles of modesty in dress.

Clothing fulfills three necessary requirements: hygiene, decency and adornment. These are “so deeply rooted in nature that they cannot be disregarded or contradicted without provoking hostility and prejudice.”
Hygiene pertains mostly to “the climate, its variations, and other external factors” (e.g. discomfort, illness).

Decency involves the “proper consideration for the sensitivity of others to objects that are unsightly, or, above all, as a defense of moral honesty and a shield against disordered sensuality.”

Adornment is legitimate and “responds to the innate need, more greatly felt by woman, to enhance the beauty and dignity of the person with the same means that are suitable to satisfy the other two purposes.”

Fashion “has achieved an indisputable importance in public life, whether as an aesthetic expression of customs, or as an interpretation of public demand and a focal point of substantial economic interests.

“The rapidity of change (in styles) is further stimulated by a kind of silent competition, not really new, between the ‘elite’ who wish to assert their own personality with original forms of clothing, and the public who immediately convert them to their own use with more or less good imitations.”

The Pontiff then isolated the difficulty with fashion. “The problem of fashion consists in the harmonious reconciliation of a person’s exterior ornamentation with the interior of a quiet and modest spirit.” Like other material objects, fashion can become an undue attachment—even perhaps an addiction—for some persons. The Church “does not censure or condemn styles when they are meant for the proper decorum and ornamentation of the body, but she never fails to warn the faithful against being easily led astray by them.”

The human body is “God’s masterpiece in the visible world”; Jesus elevated the human body “to the rank of a temple and an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and as such must be respected.”

Certain fashions and styles “create confusion in well-ordered minds and can even be an incentive to evil.” It is possible to declare when the “limits of normal decency” have been violated. This sense of decency sounds an alarm when immodesty, seduction, lust, outrageous luxury or “idolatry of matter”...exists.

What the Holy Father said in 1957 is still pertinent: “... no matter how broad and changeable the relative morals of styles may be, there is always an absolute norm to be kept after having heard the admonition of conscience warning against approaching danger; style must never be a proximate occasion of sin.”

Those who design, promote and sell fashions have considerable responsibility. If, God forbid, anyone purposely inculcates “unchaste ideas and sensations,” then “there is present a technique of disguised malice.” For decency in dress to be restored, the intention of those who design the fashions and those who wear them must be upright. “In both there must be an awakening of the conscience as to their responsibility for the tragic consequences that could result from clothing which is overly bold, especially if it is worn in public.”

Clearly, “the immorality of styles depends in great part on excesses either of immodesty or luxury.” How is immodesty to be judged? “The garment must not be evaluated according to the estimation of a decadent or already corrupt society, but according to the aspirations of a society which prizes the dignity and seriousness of its public attire.”

Wanton luxury is also excessive. If the use of riches—even those obtained morally—is not moderated, then “either frightful barriers will be raised between classes, or the entire society will be set adrift, exhausted by the race toward a utopia of material happiness.”
Let us contemplate well the following three points concerning modesty in dress.

1. The Influence of Styles. There is a “language of clothing” that communicates certain messages, even destructive ones. One who with knowledge and deliberation routinely dresses provocatively so as to entice another to impurity commits a mortal sin. The souls of both are wounded.

Jesus demanded purity in glances, thoughts, desires and actions and warned against giving scandal. Isaiah (3:16-24) prophesied that the city of Sion would be dirtied by its daughters’ impurity.

Pope Pius XII declared: “It might be said that society speaks through the clothing it wears. Through its clothing it reveals its secret aspirations and uses it, at least in part, to build or destroy the future.”

2. The Importance of Control. Fashion designers, critics and consumers are to recall “that style should be directed and controlled instead of being abandoned to caprice and reduced to abject service.” Those who “make style,” cannot allow the “craze” to dictate when that particular trend goes against right reason and established morality. Consumers must remember that their “dignity demands of them that they should liberate themselves with free and enlightened conscience from the imposition of predetermined tastes, especially tastes debatable on moral grounds.”

3. Moderation is Necessary. The respect for a standard measure is “moderation.” It provides “a pattern by which to regulate, at all costs, greed for luxury, ambition, and capriciousness.” Pope Pius urged: “Stylists, and especially designers, must let themselves be guided by moderation in designing the cut or line of a garment and in the selection of its ornaments, convinced that sobriety is the finest quality of art.”

When Christian decency is present, then one’s dress is “the worthy ornament of the person with whose beauty it blends as in a single triumph of admirable dignity.”

One needn’t necessarily wear clothes popular decades ago in order to be modest; however, there are standards which are so basic that to transgress them—regardless of the era, one’s good intention or ignorance—is to offend against decency.

Here are some practical “helps.”

Clothing composed of a transparent (i.e., “see-through”) material isn’t modest because of its obvious intent to expose various body parts needy of cover.

Shorts that are very short (i.e. exposing much of the thigh), whether for a man or woman, can’t be regarded as decent. (Athletic pursuits that use shorts and a “jersey” type of shirt may be tolerated provided that both are moderate and no temptation is encouraged.) Boys and men shirtless without sufficient reason (an allowance is made for swimming and vigorous work and exercise, as long as temptation is avoided) is problematic, given that such may well be an unnecessary occasion of sin for another.

Men and boys not only have a responsibility to dress modestly but they also are to encourage to whatever extent they can the women and girls of their acquaintance to dress modestly, even avoiding those who do not when they themselves are tempted to sin precisely because of that immodest clothing.
But it must be admitted that the sight of unclothed (even partially) bodies of women and girls has generally inspired lust and desire more than the bodies of men and boys.

Clothing that reveals the front and back of women and girls and highlights their breasts is reprehensible. Skirts that rise much above the knee, emphasizing the shape of the leg for that very purpose, are inappropriate.

A lady in her early forties stated that every time she purchases a skirt (regardless of the store), the clerk mentions that since she is tall and thin she should buy something sufficiently short that will draw attention to her legs. This lady rebukes the suggestion.

A wife and mother of two children recounted her unease when attending Mass to find herself, her husband and her teenage son and daughter in the pew behind an adolescent girl who, with bare shoulders and a short dress, causes her husband and young son undue distraction during the Holy Sacrifice. This mother’s young daughter is also adversely affected by the bad example of another girl approximately the same age.

God has made the human body beautiful. Immodest attire neither contributes to the promotion of the human person nor to the establishing of the Kingdom. The modesty practiced by Jesus, Mary, Joseph and the Saints is obtainable and necessary for us.