

A Glorious Body

BY MARY BETH
NEWKUMET

My dear friend, Colleen, just had her fifth child (my godson, Danny!) The night before she delivered I went over to see her and witnessed an extraordinary scene of domestic harmony. Thanks to Colleen's nesting instincts, everything was clean, uncluttered and organized. The household was running like a well-oiled machine. On the way home, I thought of my own house and despaired. My family, I fretted, is a mess. Far from a well-oiled machine, we are slovenly and disorganized. I walked back through my front door, and began bellowing at the untidy (yet truly wonderful) people who live in my house. Needless to say, they did not appreciate the ambush to their persons as the result of a surface disorder!

A MAD HOUSEWIFE MOMENT

I confess this mad-housewife-moment to show how easy it is to get caught up in the "well-oiled machine" view of life. Look around and you'll see what I mean. In our homes, our workplaces, parishes and neighborhoods, the well-oiled machine is often our model for happiness and unity. If everything is running smoothly, we are content. Yet, beneath the surface, isn't there an underlying personal frustration as our language and perspective increasingly focuses on the harmonious working of systems, parts, plans and structures? While we search for answers to our social, corporate and political problems, discussions don't ever seem to reach the heart of the matter. So all we come up with is surface solutions.

Really, it's no wonder that the pattern of relationships in our culture begins to take on an increasingly mechanical, and sadly impersonal, form where things run fairly smoothly, but no one really knows who you are.



MACHINE VS. BODY

The Church offers something radically different from this cultural diminishment of community: not a machine, but a body. A unique flesh and blood body. A body made for union.

Now if you look at my family from the body perspective instead of the machine perspective, the "problem" of our clutter disappears. As a body, the six persons in my immediate family are moving toward the fulfillment of what the Lord wants us to be. (With dustballs.) But the change in outlook from family-as-thing to family-as-body is significant.

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Mary, the first
Steward of Christ

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The machine view of family life cannot see the “communion of persons,” the one Body living in this disordered house. It sees only exterior reality, only what our life looks like from the outside. While it assesses our appearance, our level of education, our social status and the propriety of our clothes, this brittle machine perspective can not grasp the deep inner life of each person. It can not see our interior union.

THE CHURCH OFFERS A BODY

The full life of the Church takes the body seriously. This will surprise the many good Catholics who think the Church prefers to think as little about the body as possible! But this is not true. Our life with Christ through his Church can not reach the depth of love that the Father intended if we are concentrating only on our souls. “The flesh is the hinge of our salvation,” said Tertullian in his *Apologia* of 208 A.D. As “enfleshed souls,” each one of our bodies are *essential* for participation in divine life. While so much of our culture reduces the body to a brittle, surface and material thing, the Church raises the body up as the path to infinity.

The Church’s vision of body is completely united with an interior life at the heart of man: the soul. “The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the ‘form’ of the body,” says the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. “It is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body” (CCC#365).

So often we blame our bodies for their passions, their weaknesses, their inadequacies, their flab!

But the more aware we are of our bodies as completely united with our souls, the more respectful we will be of these temples of the Holy Spirit. Seeing the sanctity of our own bodies enables us to see the dignity in the “enfleshed souls” of others, especially people with sick, dysfunctional, deformed, aging and dying bodies, and in the case of unborn babies, bodies forming in their mother’s wombs. Furthermore, as we grow in awareness of the close affinity between the health of the spirit and the health of the body, we will grow more able to read the hearts of the members of our own families whose spiritual illnesses keep their bodies depressed, anxious, sad and weary.

CHRIST HAS GLORIFIED YOUR BODY

“You have been purchased at a price,” St. Paul said of the Cross. “Therefore glorify God in your body” (1Cor. 6:20). Only through the body — yes even that thickening, aging, cellulite-ridden body — can we fully appreciate the great dignity of each human person. This is the reason the Church never ceases calling for the protection and respect of “enfleshed souls” from their conception, through childhood, adolescence, courtship, union, sickness, death and burial. Anything less reduces the body — and therefore, the person — to a brittle, exterior thing.

As Catholics, we are called to be the Body of Christ by bringing our glorified bodies to the people we know. We cannot sit and contemplate just our spiritual lives, while avoiding the very human, perhaps even very scary body, of the person in our house or neighborhood! In the *Interior Castle*,

St. Teresa of Avila reminds us that “though angelic spirits, freed from everything corporeal, may remain permanently enkindled in love, this is not possible for those of us who live in this mortal body.” It is up to us to seek the companionship of other flesh and blood bodies, to look beneath the mechanical surface of our relationships and achieve the kind of union that the Lord wants for each one of us. ❖

Life After Sunday

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His Body Language

It is important to understand the Church’s “Body language” in order to fully appreciate the grandeur of “Body” that happens at Mass. In the Gospel, Christ reminds us of the original plan for man and woman, which was to leave their own families and

time of the Mass when Christ, the Bridegroom, freely offers himself to his Bride, the Church. “At this holy Table,” wrote St. Augustine, “Christ has consecrated the mystery of union with us.”

This mystery of union is not a symbol, but a reality. The act of

love consecrated during each Mass is the act that binds us



cleave to each other so they could “become one body.” This image of nuptial love — of two becoming one — is exactly what St. Paul means when he calls Christ, the Bridegroom, and his Church, the Bride. The Body language used to describe both Christ and his Body, the Church, springs from the nuptial act between a husband and wife.

The Eucharist, then, is very much about body, and of course, very much about love. It is the

all together into one Body. In this way, each of us takes on a Marian form (so much more beautiful than the machine form!), giving our “yes” to the Lord, allowing him to pour his divine life into us and then making it fruitful. This spousal union, this “communion,” links us to each other through Christ in an utterly human and glorious way. (It also makes the Church a far more passionate Body than most people recognize!)

Getting There...

Once we understand the importance of body, we begin to realize the depth of responsibility this communion brings to us. As St. Paul proclaims, each of us can contribute great good or great harm to the one Body with its “many parts.” This Body consists not only of the “enfleshed souls” here on earth, but also the souls in Purgatory and Heaven awaiting the resurrection of their bodies on the last day. As one Body, these members can pray for us just as we can pray for them and to them. When you visit a cemetery, remember the souls of all the dead who are buried there. Ask them to help you build up the Body of Christ on earth. ❖

CHRIST IN THE FLESH

Although the priest says the amazing words, “this is My Body; this is My Blood” every Sunday at Mass, we will not appreciate the Eucharist as body and blood if we don’t recognize the sanctity of our own bodies and the bodies of the people in our lives. Christ’s Body is a living reality. He became “enfleshed” in the womb of Mary during the Incarnation. He becomes “enfleshed” again in the Eucharist. He is “enfleshed” through our bodies living in communion with him in the life of the Church. This is what we mean when we say we are his Body!

The Feasts of the Body

During the months of June and July, the feasts of the Sacred Heart and the Body and Blood of the Lord keep the Lord’s body-liness in front of us, making sure that Jesus does not float away in our minds into an ethereal divinity. Jesus came to us in his body. He dwells within the Trinity with a Resurrected body and a human heart. “Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique, unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his ‘heart,’” wrote Pope John Paul II (Redeemer of Man). Do you have a statue of the Sacred Heart in your home? Especially during this time in history when the appreciation of the body has been so greatly diminished, ask the Lord to bring your family a new understanding of his Body and Blood, soul and divinity. ❖

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The Nuptial Body Holds Nothing Back

BY JOHN M. CAPOBIANCO

“And the two shall become one body.” Let’s face it, this phrase from Genesis is heard ad nauseum on the big wedding day. As a former wedding photographer putting myself through college, it was my privilege (or my cross depending on the couple involved), to share in many of these sentimental days with young couples. After working a good number of these special events, weddings for me became rather frightful occasions. After all, one hears



the words over and over: “This one is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.” “What God has joined together...” “The greatest of these is Love.” “Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the Church.” (You mean, nailed to the cross!)

What in the world is going on here? Is this merely sentimental wedding chatter or is some really mysterious wild union occurring? I never met a bride or groom who didn’t believe their love was going to last. Yet many didn’t. And of those who are still together, how many have become truly one body truly united in Love? How many more are living separate lives in the same house with unfulfilled desires, passionless familiarity, diminished hopes and lots of cultural elixir to dull their heartache? As I looked through my lens at so many brides and grooms, I couldn’t help imagining what their union

would be like in five or ten years, not to mention throughout their lifetime. “The two shall become one body.” How is it possible? Does anyone really get there? And how could I continue to take wedding pictures? Thank God for career changes!

MARRIAGE IS A SHOCK ABSORBER

Marriage is the natural sacrament, according to the Church. Flannery O’Connor called the Sacraments “shock absorbers” of God’s love, explaining that if God loved us full force, it would blow us away. So he gives us the Sacraments to ease us into – to absorb the shock of – the enormous passionate life of Love he wants us to share. The Sacrament of Marriage, lived day to day, administered by spouses to one another, eases us into union with this Love. When both spouses are open to God’s grace, the union of hearts takes place in almost imperceptible increments. God works through our marriages – through the mutual gift and commitment of our bodies and lives for our spouses – to draw us into his Union of Love. Our bodies were created for this union – this Trinity of Passionate Communion – that is the purpose of all creation. From this perspective our everyday gestures, expressions and acts are precious moments which become God’s

movement of our mutual gift into one body. Getting there in marriage is such a subtle thing – touching the divine – that sometimes we may neither recognize it nor appreciate it.

Perhaps it is easier to recognize only when it is no longer there, when it is too late. Take the sadness of a spouse who has lost a mate through death after a lifetime of being together. The grief is almost unspeakable. A profound emptiness overwhelms the heart. One almost feels like one’s reason for existence has vanished, so total has been the interior commit-

Getting There...

Even in marriage, when one person is looking at the other as a thing instead of a gift, there is often a sense of shame deep in the heart. In his *Theology of the Body*, Pope John Paul II explains that shame is an interior response to any circumstances when the body is reduced to a thing. This is the inner disquiet a husband or wife feels when he or she holds back from fully loving a spouse. ❖

ment, so complete the living for the other. In the midst of what seems like years of petty arguments and misunderstandings and hurt feelings, God brought about a unity of hearts that now reaches beyond the grave. Why? The feeling of loss is so consuming because, in death, the united body has been torn apart. The one has become a half. For years the

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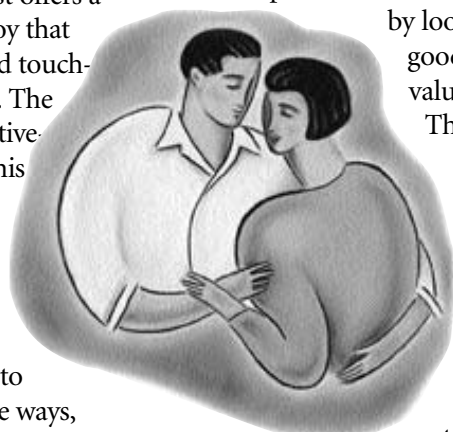
Teaching the Body as Gift to Young People

The gift of ourselves to other people must necessarily involve our bodies. But when young people lose sight of the gift they have received from God, the body can become an object of lust. When that happens, says Pope John Paul II in the *Theology of the Body*, “the relationship of the gift is changed into the relationship of appropriation.”

The whole idea of body as gift scares many good Catholic parents because they often feel incapable of helping their kids see the body in its proper context. Christian chastity discussions, then, easily fall into a vision of human life that seems to many kids to be passionless and limited. Yet, the fullness of life with Christ offers a passion and joy that truly soars and touches the infinite. The young instinctively recognize this in their quest for true love. *Real* true love means seeing your body as a gift to be given in the ways, times and circumstances that the Lord has put into place for maximum happiness. Before marriage, this means offering your body with gestures of deep affection and friendship. During marriage, it means offering the whole gift of yourself with the possibility of the fruitfulness of children.

WWJD OR HWJLTM?

The *What Would Jesus Do?* slogan used in interdenominational chastity education and Christian formation of many



young people is a start, but it does not bring the fullness of a life of love in Christ. Where it falls short is in asking young people to promise to hold themselves back by looking to Jesus’ good example and values to guide them. This works well until they find someone who sets their heart on fire. Then the “example Jesus” of the WWJD slogan can sometimes disintegrate into a sanitized Jesus who never had these feelings of longing for a beautiful body! Without a relationship with a living Presence, young people then feel left on their own in uncharted territory — where as far as “example” tells them — Jesus never went.

The Church offers a life with Christ that does not just want us to do things “for him” or to try to live up to his behavioral style, but rather to allow him to live in us *in communion with our bodies*.

HWJLTM: *How Will Jesus Love*

PASSIONATE PARTNERS

Our culture has equated passion with sex for so long, that we have lost a language for the deepest meaning of love. The history of the Church is full of passionate partners who deeply loved each other by living a celibate life. Yet the Lord’s plan for their love was full — and fruitful. St. Francis of Assisi and his beloved, St. Clare, built up the Franciscan orders. St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac formalized a mission of charity. St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal co-founded a congregation for older women and widows. Together, they all pursued a unity of mission that kept the Lord right in the center of their passionate love for each other. And that’s why it worked, satisfying the deepest longings of their hearts! ❖

Through Me? The Lord wants us to approach the friends we love by allowing us to live his moral life and passionate love through our bodies. This vision of love offers the full spectrum of what is possible with our bodies, souls, hearts and minds, because it is a profound love that looks to the needs and desires of the Other first. For young people, this means taking the whole person into consideration — their hearts, their destiny, their fertility and the Lord’s plan

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Getting There...

Many parents are afraid to acknowledge the depth of passionate love that young people can feel for each other. This dismissal causes a disconnect between parent and child. Instead of shutting them down, tell them you know what it feels like to be in love. (Isn’t it glorious?) From your own experience of love, talk to them about ways to express their soaring hearts, while counseling them to keep their fertility for the time when they are ready to care for their children. ❖

How the Body Works



The parish is where we live as a body of people, a visible sign of his Body in the world. The parish also is the place where we take care of this Body by taking care of its members through stewardship of the gifts that we have been personally given. This is how the Body with its “many parts” is fortified and refreshed by the time, talents and treasure offered by each unique human person.



The corporal works of mercy proclaimed and recommended by the Church (*see sidebar*) are works of the body, to care for the bodies of others. So many of our “good works” have been institutionalized that just giving money can become a surface gesture for many people. (Remember the machine?) Perhaps we need to think again about the dignity of bringing our own bodies to minister to the bodies of others. There are needs of the body close by to all of us: neighbors who would appreciate a home-cooked meal during a stressful time; sick parishioners craving visitors; community shelters longing for volunteers. These opportunities to care for Christ’s Body in the body of that friend or stranger bring richness to our lives and joy to our world. ❖

The Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feed the hungry
- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the sick
- Visit the imprisoned
- Bury the dead ❖

Getting There...

My husband, Kerry, and I live in a Christian community, the Emmaus community of Pittsburgh, Inc. In our community, people with and without disabilities live together and share our lives in common. This lifestyle, based on the beatitudes and a spirit of the Gospel, fosters mutual growth among all of our members. The community was founded by Lorraine and Ken Wagner who raised four children, the youngest of whom has a developmental disability. For a long time, Lorraine and Ken saw a need for better residential services to meet the needs of special persons. They knew that what was missing was a spiritual dimension and a true sense of belonging in the community at large. The community chose the name Emmaus because of our philosophy that it is only when we break bread with others — literally while at meals, and figuratively in the sharing of lives — that we recognize Jesus in each other. We recognize the gifts and talents of people with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities when we live together and create a family style home for people who have no one else to care for them.



While many of us are Catholic, Emmaus is an ecumenical community welcoming people of all faiths. My husband and I felt called to this ministry after several years of discerning how we might share our lives with others. The Emmaus community is a way of life for us. It is an opportunity for us to practice our faith on a daily basis. We are called to recognize Jesus in the people we live with, in the “relief” staff, in our volunteers, and in the members of our community who meet on a monthly basis to help improve the lives of people with mental retardation. Kerry and I live with Bill, Camille and Frank. Each has a unique and special presence in our home. Bill is a man with Downs Syndrome. He is a huge sports fan with a great sense of humor. He likes to tease and he is quickly learning to be teased. Camille and Frank are brother and sister. They came to live with us after their mother died. While they are still grieving the loss of their mother, Camille and Frank are beginning to open up and we are discovering the beauty and gifts of both. It is a process of loving and caring.



All of us are called to recognize Christ in others. When we see a person in our parish who has a developmental disability, do we think to include him or her in our socials, on our committees, as altar servers? Each person does have a gift to share. Some people simply need the proper supports to participate fully. We as Church are called to be responsive to all people. — Karen Jacobson, Pittsburgh, PA ❖



The Body as Power Tool

The reduction of the body to a mere thing can be seen easily in women’s magazines — and now men’s magazines, too — that promote the body as a tool to get what you want: whether it be power, great sex, the mate of your dreams, good health, vigorous old age, etc. The conventional wisdom holds that by changing, sculpting, reforming and manipulating what you have, you can control the world around you and change your destiny. This includes everything from fewer college tuitions (vasectomies!) to rolling back the years (face lifts!)

Body Beautiful

According to People Magazine, most of today’s runway models are a size 1 or 2; Marilyn Monroe, the model of feminine beauty just 40 years ago, was a size 12! As the beauty bar continues to be raised (or lowered!) by the fashion, television and movie culture, you can see the alienation and sadness in young people who feel they can never live up to the body beautiful image. Consider the stories about the mutual friction about appearance between the jocks/cheerleaders and the Trenchcoats at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. By continuing to trumpet the value of just one aspect of the person, we marginalize the beauty of each unique person expressed in each unique body. ❖

“You have the power,” *Cosmopolitan Magazine* assures women in a recent article. “You can figure out exactly what attributes really do appeal to that particular guy in your life and play to your strengths (or more accurately, his weaknesses.) What does he focus his eyes/lips/hands on?” This manipulative message — that the condition and appearance of the body are the power tools for a successful life — creates much emotional turmoil and pain, especially for women who grow to believe that their bodies are the only part of them that will ever be appreciated. By isolating the body from their personhood, many women are crushed as the body as thing mentality keeps them from experiencing the glory of their full femininity. The tragic consequence is that some begin to use their bodies as tools to pursue their own satisfaction or allow themselves to be used by someone else. The result is often depressing loneliness.

PRESENT A GLORIOUS BODY

The body as power tool is the complete antithesis of the Lord’s plan for the body as a gift. The mutual attraction between men and women was created for a good, to help them express the pleasure of their companionship.

As Catholics who experience the full impact of the body as gift from the Lord, it is essential that we bring the Lord’s vision of body to life in our world. Don’t be afraid to speak his Body language.



Discussions that deteriorate into shouting matches over moral values vs. freedom of speech or simply dissolve into tolerant silence are not worthy of the Lord’s gift. Let us find the best ways to present this glorious Body to our world — a world infatuated by the beauty of the body yet petrified of the full impact of its loving union with Jesus Christ. ❖

Getting There...

PROJECT RACHEL

It is against the nurturing love of a woman’s nature to destroy the body of her own child. Women who have had abortions suffer greatly from a crushed spirit — whether they realize it initially or not. Those who later come to mourn their child are lovingly cared for by a national group called Project Rachel, where they can move toward reconciliation and peace within the life of the Church. For information on this beautiful program, visit www.projectrachel.org. ❖

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you think of the people around you as the Body of Christ? (p. 1 and 2)

- Why do you think the “flesh is the hinge of our salvation”?
- How has Christ “glorified” your body (cf. 1 Cor 6:20)?

How do you learn Christ’s body language? (p. 3)

- Why does Christ continually propose himself on Sunday “in the flesh”?
- How do you express Christ’s “body language” at Holy Communion?

How does the culture propose “holding back” in marriage? (p. 4)

- Have you ever experienced the Sacrament of Marriage as a “shock absorber” of divine union?
- How can spouses look at each other as “gifts” instead of “things”?

Why is it so important that we teach “the body as gift” to young people today? (p. 5)

- Why is WWJD by itself inadequate when you are “longing for a beautiful body”?
- Have you ever experienced passionate celibacy?

How are you making sure the “Body works”? (p. 6)

- What does your parish community do to live the Corporal Works of Mercy?
- In eating meals and sharing lives, how does the Emmaus Community care for bodies in need?

How does the culture propose the body as a “power tool”? (p. 7)

- How does your life with Christ overcome the cultural drumbeat about your own body?
- Why is the world infatuated by the beauty of the body yet petrified of the full impact of its loving union with Jesus Christ?

His Body Language

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To retrieve the sense of body that the Lord has in store for us, let us pray to the Father and ask him to open our hearts to the wonder of his Son’s presence in the humble bread and simple wine offered to us at Mass. Wondered St. Catherine of Siena: “Your Son went down from the heights of his divinity to the depths of our humanity. Can anyone’s heart remain closed and hardened after this?” ❖

The Nuptial Body Holds Nothing Back

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Sacrament of Marriage has conditioned the body to become “nuptial” – a selfless gift, holding nothing back. This is what Pope John Paul II means by the phrase “the nuptial meaning of the body.” The body was destined to be given to another as a gift. Now in death, the other is no longer there to receive and reciprocate. The sense of incompleteness is almost palpable. (A similar sensibility occurs when the loss is from abandonment, estrangement or infidelity).

HOLD NOTHING BACK

A nuptial body holds nothing back and never stops, reaching out to the other. In death, this means a spouse’s love is caught up into the love of Christ beyond the grave. One remains connected beyond death through the Body of Christ and never stops reaching out through prayer to and for the deceased spouse. Especially through the Eucharist, this experience of “one body” even when a spouse has died is possible.

When both spouses are still together in marriage, a nuptial body means giving oneself fully to the other, and reaching out steadfastly – even if one is not ready, willing or able to receive the full gift of the other. Through Christ, people can become new! Invite the Lord back into your “one body.” ❖

Teaching the Body as Gift to Young People

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for their life and future. It means keeping nuptial love within marriage because that is when human love blossoms bodily into intimate passionate divine love! Before marriage, what is best for the beloved is loving a friend with one’s whole heart, but saving the full gift of the body for the time that the Lord has planned. (Kind of like compounding the interest of a mutual fund!) ❖

From the Monsignor.....

BODY IS SOMETHING WE ARE

Body is not something we have, it is something we are. A body is a material expression in time and space of our personhood. It is how we become present. That is why both our fall and our redemption must be understood in terms of relationships in and through the body. And that is why it is so central for us to view our reality in the doctrine of the Body of Christ. We are created to be the body of Christ, predestined to be the body of the risen Christ, so that is why we even have bodies to begin with and our redemption takes place when our bodies are redeemed by the union with Christ, when there occurs a contact with his body and we are assimilated into him. This contact occurs through the sacraments of course, and above all through the Eucharist that configures us, that makes of our bodiliness, the bodiliness of Christ. And so therefore body is at the very heart of the Christian mystery and any departure from that mystery is going to show itself in our attitude towards the body.—Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, U.S. Ecclesiastical Advisor for Communion and Liberation, an international movement in the Church. ❖

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