

Episode: (Third Talk) Love and Responsibility: A Podcast Mini-Series

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So we continue where we left off with the statement, we should love the person complete with all his or her faults and virtues. And up to a point independently of those virtues, in spite of those faults. Even though we are hurt, we need to look beyond the mirror at legal facts. For example, "She did this to me." We have to see the person who maintains great value, even in the midst of shortcomings and sins. After all, as we have seen throughout these reflections, true love was directed to the person, not just what he or she does for me. So when the beloved is having a not so beautiful moment, is not pleasing to me. And, in fact, it does something to hurt me. Will I still offer total love and acceptance? Or the kind of total acceptance that Saint John Paul II says spouses should have for one each other is, of course, analogous to the way the Lord loves us. Despite our many sins and failures, God remains committed to us, looking at us patiently, looking at us mercifully in the face of our faults. He continues to love us even when we do things that hurt our relationship with him. This radical divine love for us is seen most powerfully in the Eucharist, where Jesus gives himself to us, his very body and blood and Holy Communion. But John Paul II encourages us to think about the mystery of Holy Communion from the other angle as well. We can say not only that each of us receives Christ, but also that Christ receives each of us. Think about that. When we receive Holy Communion in the state of grace, God not only gives himself to us in the Eucharist, but he also receives us into his divine life. And he receives us as we are, with all our shortcomings, weaknesses and sins. Therefore, if we wish to be more Christ like in our marriages, we must first and foremost develop a deeper attitude of love and acceptance for our spouse as he or she is with all the imperfections. Instead of trying to change our beloved, or becoming irritated with these faults, we must remain firmly committed to our husband or wife, as persons who have been entrusted to us as a gift.

Our fundamental attitude toward the beloved in the midst of weaknesses must not be one of agitation defensiveness or annoyance, but rather one of unwavering acceptance in our heart for the other, bearing patiently with all the faults. When we do this, we begin to love as God loves. Authentic love requires much effort, virtue and sacrifice. If we are to love the way that God loves us, our initial experience of love must mature. No matter how powerfully we may experience certain feelings, desires and emotions, these must be molded and integrated with the other higher objective aspects of love. In fact, St. John Paul II says that love is put to the test specifically when those powerful feelings grow weaker. When essential and emotional responses start to lose their effect, nothing then remains except the value of the person. And the inner truth about the love of those concerned comes to light. At this point, the reality of the relationship can no longer be disguised. It's true nature will come out into the open. If a couple's love is based on the true gift of self and commitment to each other as persons, well, then that relationship will not only survive but grow stronger and sink deeper roots. However, if the relationship was nothing more than two people coming together for sensual or emotional

experiences, the relationship will no longer have any foundation on which to stand. Once those feelings fade into the background, in this kind of relationship, the persons involved in it will suddenly find themselves in a vacuum. And that is why it is important for love to be built on self-giving and responsibility. The objective object of love that we discussed in the previous class, that is the only way for love to mature and to endure. But when love is immature, the person is constantly looking inward absorbed in his own feelings, and here the subjective aspect of love reigns supreme. He measures his love by the sensual and emotional reactions he experiences in the relationship. And since these feelings themselves are unstable and constantly changing, it's the nature of feelings. While then a relationship that is based merely on these subjective aspects will follow the ups and downs of these feelings.

On the contrary, a mature love is when it looks outward. First, it looks outward in the sense that it is based not on my feelings, but on the honest truth of the other person and on my commitment to the other person in true self-giving love. Granted the emotions still play an important part, but they are grounded in the truth of the other person has. He or she really is not my idealization of that person. The emotion becomes serene and confident, for it ceases to be absorbed entirely in itself and attaches itself instead to his object to the beloved person. Here we see the proper role of the emotions in a relationship. When my subjective feelings are grounded in the objective truth about the other person, my emotions then they themselves take on a new quality, they become integrated with authentic love. The Holy Father's says that the emotions become simpler and more sober. Having moved beyond the idealization of emotional love, the mature love based on a commitment to the other person is concentrated on the value of the person as such, and makes us feel emotional love for the person as he or she really is not for the person of our imagination, but for the real person. Secondly, a mature love looks outward in the sense that the person actively seeks what is best for the beloved. The person with a mature love was not focused primarily on what feelings and desires might be stirring inside him. Rather, he is focused on his responsibility to care for his beloved's good. He actively seeks what is good for her, not just his own pleasure, enjoyment, and selfish pursuits.

At this point, St. John Paul II brings up the virtue of chastity. And so introducing the topic with the unusual subtitle, *Resenting Chastity*, the virtue that is probably resented most today is chastity. The Holy Father's says the chastity is the virtue that frees love from utilitarian attitudes. He writes, "the essence of chastity consists in quickness to affirm the value of the person in every situation, and in raising to the personal level, all reactions to the value of the body and sex. Thus, chastity helps purify our hearts of selfish desires, and makes self-less mature love between two persons possible. Today, however, chastity is no longer seen as something good, something noble, something we should all pursue. Just the opposite. Chastity is often portrayed as something evil, something harmful for human persons. Some argue that chastity is damaging to the psychological health of young men and women. Sexual desire is natural, they say, therefore, it is unnatural to restrict it in any way. After all, a young man must have sexual relief." Don't forget this is being written, this was written in 1960. Nothing has changed on the contrary. But then the Pope asks why this resentment? He says that the main reason modern man views chastity as an obstacle to love is that we associate love primarily with the emotions or with the sexual pleasure we receive from the person of the other sex. In other words, we think of love only in its subjective aspect. But as the Holy Father has shown, a true lasting love needs a much stronger foundation. It has to be based on virtue, a commitment to the other person's good and mutual self-giving. In other words, the objective aspects of love. And so the real questions in love are not the subjective ones. Such as, do I have strong feelings and desire for my beloved? Does he or she have strong feelings and sensual desire for me? Because anyone can have feelings and desires for another person. But not everyone has the virtue and commitment to make self-giving love possible. The problem is that the subjective aspects of love develop more rapidly and are felt more intensely than the objective aspect. Because of this, many people confuse the feelings of love with love itself.

On the objective level, it takes a lot of time and effort to cultivate a virtuous friendship. Relationships centered on total self-giving love and on a profound sense of responsibility for the other as a gift don't just happen

spontaneously. On the other hand, with the subjective aspect of love, it does not take much time and effort at all to experience sensual desire or emotional longing for a person of the opposite sex. In fact, such reactions can happen in an instant. Furthermore, these sensual emotional responses can be so powerful that they dominate how we view the other person. Here we can interject a quick image or metaphor, that if a young couple thinks that they can measure their relationship by their emotional feelings, their sensual feelings, well, it's really like trying to measure the temperature of an entire house by putting the thermostat, the thermometer on top of the furnace—you will not get a very accurate reading to say the least. So the Holy Father then goes, he turns to a consideration of chastity as the guardian of love. Now we can see why chastity is so necessary for love. Far from something that hinders our love, chastity makes love possible. It protects love from falling into selfish, utilitarian attitudes. It enables us to love selflessly, irrespective of the powerful emotions, or sensual delight we may receive from our beloved. If we are to truly love a person of the opposite sex, we must see their full value as a person and respond to them in selfless love. John Paul II says that chastity allows us to do just that. He writes, "The essence of chastity consists in quickness to affirm the value of the person in every situation and in raising to the personal level all reactions to the value of the body and sex." Men and women without chastity are in a very sad situation. They are not free to love. They may have good intentions and a sincere desire to care for the beloved, but without chastity, love will never flourish, for it will not be pure, it will be mixed with a tendency to view the beloved, primarily in terms of sexual values. John Paul II explains that without chastity, men and women cannot selflessly love the beloved as a person, because the heart is so preoccupied with emotional and sensual pleasure. We must see chastity as a positive virtue that enables us to love and protects love from being tainted by the selfish tendency to use the other person for our own pleasure. John Paul II says that chastity is emphatically not, quote, "one long no. Rather it is first and foremost a yes. A yes in our heart to the other person, not just to his or her sexual values but to the entire person. It is a yes, that requires us to say no to other things in order to protect love from falling into utilitarianism."