

## THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

### 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

*You are not your own, for you were bought with a price.*

If there are two dominant themes in all of human history, on the television, the radio, the internet, in our daily lives, and about everywhere else, they are food and sex. Both can cause great pleasure and great pain; both can cultivate life and sow death. God created both of them, so they must be good, yet they are often dragged into some of the most sinful messes. Why do issues of food and sex resonate so deeply with us? They affect our body, stimulate us, and are matters of appetite. To make matters all the worse, there are whole industries devoted to taking advantage of this fact.

The first issue, food, is easier to discuss. I think few would be uncomfortable diving into the delicious details of Mom's meatloaf with the family or embarrassed telling friends how much they like a certain kind of food. When was the last time you heard someone say, "We need to talk about f-o-o-d"? While unbelievers go to h-e-double-hockey-stick, and the birds and the bees have s-e-x, few are ashamed to discuss f-o-o-d. But anyone who has ever told his wife that dinner was "all right" knows that food too can be a touchy issue. Anyone who has ever been told by a doctor that they can't eat their favorite foods anymore—you know, the ones that actually taste good—knows how devastating such news can be. Anyone who has ever stepped on a scale and watched that little orange indicator spin like a top knows the frustration of balancing taste buds and belt sizes. Food can improve our performance at work or in sports and food can destroy our figure or health.

If Peggy stopped cleaning the church for a few years and the trustees paid no attention to its maintenance and appearance, many of us would be up in arms. What should the Holy Spirit think if we do just that to His church, His house, His temple, His body? Now don't get me wrong, I am not claiming that everybody should look the same, any more than every church should look the same, or even that there is one ideal mold for body shape—each culture and age makes its own; God has not given us one—but I am saying that whatever our natural body type might be, our responsibility is the same: we are to take care of the temple of God.

When we fail to properly enjoy God's gift of food and drink, we can hardly blame the food. After all, food is for the belly, and the belly is for food. While the belly may growl, it hardly runs the show. Food and drink are good things, given by God for our benefit and, yes, even our enjoyment. The issue is appetite and who controls whom—appetite the Christian or the Christian appetite. Gluttony, like the sexual sin that follows, is one of the so-called seven deadly sins for a reason: like so many other sins, it is an unhealthy desire for something good.

Some in Corinth had mistakenly confused the gospel with a license to sin. They thought that the things of the body were simply the things of the body. They had the same confused notion many of the world's great philosophies and religions have had: the object of life is to get free from the body, and so the things of the body are inconsequential at best and bad at worst. Because of this, some have fallen into asceticism, starving the body and beating it, trying to torture and kill their flesh to escape from it. Others have driven into the opposite ditch of libertinism and overindulged the body, feeding, fornicating, and drinking it to death, claiming that, since the body is mere matter, what one does with it is unimportant. "Eat, drink, and be merry," they contend, "for tomorrow we will die." And then there are still other, more reasonable thinkers. They advocate, "Everything in moderation." It's not a bad slogan, but the motivation is off. Such people advocate everything in moderation, not because asceticism or libertinism, starvation or gluttony is contrary to God's will, but because it causes pain, and no one in their right mind likes pain. Christianity says "bah" to all of this. The things of the body are not things to be embarrassed by or escape from; they are things to be enjoyed and employed: enjoyed as gifts of God and employed in gratefulness toward Him.

One of the most important and unique teachings of the Christian faith is the resurrection of the body. In fact, our whole salvation hinges on a resurrected Body. It is no small coincidence, then, that of all the religions that believe there is one God, our God is the only God with a face, the only one who, by His incarnation, put

hands and feet, eyes and ears, heart and mouth on His love. One of the first things many Christians notice in the houses of worship of other religions is how bare they seem. In comparison with Christianity, which has birthed innumerable artists and artworks, musicians and musical pieces—think of all the depictions of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection in the halls of the world’s most respected museums—other faiths seem colorless and monotonous. Why? I am convinced it is because Christianity embraces the beauty of the body and what is beautiful to the body’s senses, because Christianity follows the God who has a body, who came to earth, lived, died, rose, and ascended in such an inspiring way that we cannot help but picture it.

Christianity is wrapped in flesh and blood. God has taken a body to purchase our bodies with His own Body and Blood. The most sacred and recognizable ritual of the Christian Church is one where we receive Body and Blood. Our bodies are not trifles or neutral hunks of flesh. No, they are not even our bodies. They are God’s bodies, bought at a price. *“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”*

Sometimes people get the impression that the Church opposes sex, is embarrassed by sex, is disgusted by sex, or sees little use for sex besides keeping the church full, but sometimes people aren’t listening close enough, and sometimes pastors aren’t speaking clearly enough. When God created the world, reproductive organs and all, He said, “It is good.” He brought Adam and Eve together to be companions and to bear children. He gave them an intimate and marvelous means of expressing this companionship and producing new life. He did not give them a textbook and tell them to lock themselves in their room and read it and never talk about the unfortunate and uncomfortable feat they had to perform to be fruitful and multiply. He made it part of their very being, an instinct and intuition.

Contrary to popular belief, you don’t need a semester to teach the birds and the bees. Sin is the only thing that has made it complicated. In removing sex from the context of marriage, we have removed the enduring intimacy God intended, whereby husband and wife can hold each other, not just for so long as both their names are on the lease, but into all eternity. In removing children from the context of sex, we have made sex only about pleasure and not about progeny, and, in so doing, called what God calls a blessing—children—a burden, and opened the door for every form of perversion, since whether something feels good becomes the standard of judgment. By turning sex into an industry, where bodies are bought and sold, nipped, tucked, and dehumanized, we have lost the companionship that sex was intended to cultivate so that many are left with an empty, lonely, cold desensitization to love, sitting unfulfilled in front of a TV screen or computer monitor, magazine or one-night stand. And worst of all, in sinning against God in sexual matters, by corrupting His gift into a source of depression, damnation, detachment, and disease, we have not only sinned against God, we have sinned against ourselves and those we claim to love, turning them into prostitutes of a sort who exchange sexual favors for mutual pleasure or anything less than a lifelong commitment. *“Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.”*

One of the saddest things about driving through Detroit is seeing the once majestic mansions and pristine parks that have been transformed into eyesores, vandalized by people who don’t appreciate beauty and spoiled by slumlords who want a quick fix. Don’t vandalize your body. Don’t rule it like a heartless slumlord. You have been bought at a price. You have been bought by the only God with a face, who shed for you His own Body and Blood. You have no right to wreck someone else’s property and, make no mistake about it, you are not your own.

You’ve seen those shows where someone turns a trash-heap into treasure. Well, God is the best renovator of all. Stop trying to run His temple; He who made it knows what is best for it. Confess your inadequacy for the job, and let God make you what He wants you to be: His home. And then the faith won’t simply be something spiritual for you. And then your heart really, literally will be God’s. And then you will truly enjoy life the way He created it for you to experience it, all for your blessing and benefit. Take the shutters off the windows, tear the rot up in the floor, toss out all the filth that has built up over time. God doesn’t want to live

in a pigsty. Don't get me wrong. He'll move in, but He won't leave it a pigsty. He will make that trash heap a treasure. Amen.