

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

Life in Christ – Part 5: Lust – Look at THAT!

Last week, we discussed the disordered affections that come from the Capital Sin of Avarice. These disordered affections pertain to the unhealthy desire for material goods. This week, we will explore the disordered affection for another person, which emanates from the Capital Sin of Lust. This disordered affection manifests itself in actions against the Sixth and Ninth Commandments. “You shall not commit adultery” [DT 5:18] and “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” [DT 5:21], respectively. The proper, ordered affection for another person expresses itself in love, especially in spousal love. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote, “Consequently, sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.” [FC, 11] Therefore, the difference between Love and Lust is that Love offers a gift of self to another and Lust wishes to take from another.

One corollary to this comparison of the gift of Love with the theft of Lust is how one considers the other person. Love cares for the entirety of the person, whereas Lust segments or denigrates the person. One example of Lust would see another as merely a body or, worse yet, parts of a body. It is this form of Lust that has launched and sustained the multi-billion dollar industries of pornography and prostitution. Other criminal activities, such as human trafficking, also get their start in this form of Lust.

When we reduce people to what they look like, we have entered into the sin of Lust, and we have stripped their personhood from them.

For example, when we are “admiring” a woman’s curves, are we also considering the fact she might be a very gifted attorney? Or, when we are enthralled with a man’s abdomen, are we also considering his heart for philanthropy? The sin of Lust keeps us from considering the whole person and only focuses on their physical appeal.

We might ask ourselves at this point, “What is the difference between Lust and attraction?” Attraction leads one to desire to get to know better the whole person. Lust is the desire to get to know the physical, with little to no attention paid to the rest of the person. Attraction is an interest in the person for *their own sake*. Lust is an interest in the person for *our sake*. In regards to treating another as a person, the philosopher Immanuel Kant says, “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end [in themselves].” [Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785)] Perhaps, if we want to know if our interests are pure or are purely lustful, we can ask ourselves, “Am I interested in this person for who they are, or for what they can do for me?” or “Am I more concerned for the other or for myself?” In fact, this sort of Lust can even find its way into married life. Continuing the earlier quote from *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul says, “The total physical self-giving [of spouses] would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving...” [FC, 11]

Lust comes from an unimpeded appetite for pleasure. Next week, we will explore this concept further as we discuss the Capital Sin of Gluttony.

