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“And the Light Shines in the Darkness”

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Introduction

What Holy Father John Paul II gave the world had its roots in the first years of his priesthood. A poet and a philosopher, he contemplated the beauty of the created world and the mystery of God as the Creator, and already in the early days of his ministry wanted to show people the significance of the existence of the world and the meaning of human life.

He wasn't a priest, who gave specific advice – he only pointed to the highest values, the values which give meaning to life.

He taught that human life is a gift given to man by God – a gift and in the same time an assignment, a duty; because man, created from an outpour of God's love, has a duty to realize this beautiful love.

The concept of “gift” is dominant in the teaching of John Paul II. From this concept—this reality described in the Book of Revelation came his teaching about human love.

The gift of love

The teaching of John Paul II is completely different from the tendencies of the contemporary world. Today there are tendencies to blur the difference between a sacred marital act and adulterous abuse, to blur the border between norm and pathology. Into this contemporary world, which more and more destroys true human nature, he brings a totally different proposition – against the current positions taught by the media. He is a sign of opposition. He shows a different dimension of human love and calls it simply a “beautiful love”.

But to perceive and to understand this beauty, man has to have a sensitivity of the heart. A pure heart allows to understand a beautiful love; that is why young people have less difficulty in grasping it; young hearts not spoiled by pornography, not demoralized. That is why millions of young people followed John Paul II, because beautiful love enchants, and is something that an adult world is unable to demonstrate. Writing about love, Karol Wojtyla doesn't say it is easy. Just the opposite, he

says it is a duty demanding effort, hardship and time. We have to learn beautiful love, because it is not a reaction of the body or the senses; it is not only passion, but a selfless gift of oneself. A love like this engages a whole person for life – it is a complete sacrifice.

Contacts with people, profound knowledge of man learned in a confessional, and above all, a depth of faith inspired by the Holy Spirit (after many years the Holy Father tells about his daily prayer to the Holy Spirit in his book “Gift and Mystery”) allows him to see every human affair in the light of God’s plan, to see the unambiguous calling of every man to holiness, because man being created in the image of God is capable of beautiful love. However, everyday life shows human sinfulness and weakness. So John Paul II seeks help dedicating himself to “Mary, Mother of beautiful love” with his “*Totus tuus*”, and advises young people to pray to Our Lady using this title.

His Episcopal motto *Totus tuus* has been interpreted in many philosophical and theological ways. This phrase expresses his pastoral mission to protect human love, to save love threatened by degradation. Man is created to uncover his true dimension – his likeness to God. Seeking a way to safeguard the human person against debasement, John Paul II placed himself and the whole world under the protection of a Woman, who knew true love and who put everything into God’s hands—*Totus tuus ego sum et omnia mea tua sunt. Omnia* – everything, and above all this greatest treasure, beautiful love, which is saved in her. This beautiful love John Paul II wants to give to the world.

But the world is promoting ruthless, selfish, and brutal lust. While the Holy Father shows a totally different side, an opposite pole of the same human reality—human love, he contrasts lust with tenderness, and possessive, insatiable sensuality with an elation of the heart, which free from lust, delights in the joy of another and selflessly seeks only the good of the beloved.

The concept of beautiful love demands liberation from lust and egoism and shows love in the light of truth about the human person, the deepest truth of the genealogy of a person created by God. It reveals God’s fatherhood, which makes us his children, and shows the true dimension of the dignity of a human person.

John Paul II told youth gathered in Paris how love should be expressed: by tenderness and admiration. Tenderness, which is selfless giving and admiration for a person, but above all admiration and gratefulness towards God – the Creator and Giver of this gift of a person to a person; because love is giving—only giving, if it is taking, it stops being love.

Theology of the body

Love happens in a human soul, the body doesn't have the capacity to love. But man is made from a soul and a body and everything he does involves his body. A person is at the same time spiritual and corporal. Nowadays the body is given special attention and is researched in a very detailed way by science – the body and also human sexuality, which is necessary for the existence of mankind. Heterosexuality is in God's plan. God thus created mankind – “Man and Woman, He created them” (Gen 1:27). God wanted it to be this way. In human sexuality lies the mystery of God's thought, a mystery inscrutable to the human mind. It could have been done differently.

But modern man imposes his own interpretation, his own dimension of homunculus, reducing human sexuality to a tool to obtain some gain – meager gain of a passing corporal pleasure, or even monetary gain from selling this pleasure. The world makes a profit from the sexuality of the human body, while John Paul II went around this world, kissed the earth and proclaimed the shocking truth, that a human body is sacred, that it is a temple of spirit.

He shows lost modern women the truth about “the sacredness of woman's body” and “the genius of woman's heart”. He proclaims a totally different meaning of the human body – the body, which has the capacity to express a beautiful human love—a body pure, nuptial, expressing love and faithfulness. He teaches respect for the body, and admiration for its beauty. He writes about nakedness, as the truth about a man, and about shame, which guards the value of it, and shows that love has the capacity to absorb shame. He differentiates this holy absorption from shamelessness, which now spreads like a contagious disease, especially among women. To those women who let themselves be photographed, who let their nakedness fall prey to lustful gazes, he tells the truth about them, the truth about their beauty and the holiness of a woman's vocation.

He wrote to them a letter about the dignity of women, about the sacredness of the vocation to maternity. He tries to safeguard the modern woman against debasement, he shows the true dimensions of her dignity.

The absorption of shame by love

The concept of the absorption of shame by love is not fully discussed in many works about the anthropology and philosophy of John Paul II. But this concept explains how these values, which seem to be opposite, can permeate each other: the value of shame and sensitivity from one side and from another love as a total gift of oneself. Shame and sensitivity, which guard the treasure of virginity, do not disappear in love. Marital love doesn't destroy the virtue of shame, but changes it into something different, yet equally valuable: into a fullness of self-giving.

This is the only true way to the mutual self-giving of persons. Shamelessness demeans this dimension of a gift and thus demeans a person because it destroys mutual respect.

Shame, submerged in beautiful, pure love allows a person to reveal himself to the other in the whole beauty of a body in its nakedness. The gift of nakedness in the light of love is not shamelessness, but instead total trust. Such a gift cannot be anonymous and not addressed to another person. It is an integral part of a person and enriches the dimension of this “gift.” Today this treasure is forgotten and many times thrown as pearls before swine.

The pope used the word “entrust” which means more than a simple trust, it suggest also an assignment, a duty. I entrust myself to you means more than I give myself, because it suggests total security – I give myself to you and trust you, because I know that nothing bad is going to happen to me. Such entrustment of one person to another evokes a sense of responsibility. It grows and becomes a certainty; it reassures and gives a sense of acceptance and safety, gives happiness.

Teaching of John Paul II

The Holy Father wanted everybody to understand his teaching, so he presented his thoughts step by step, gradually leading people deeper into his program. It would be difficult to name all the documents in which the Holy Father talks about the true dimension of a person and gives guidance: a series of lectures on love between a man and a woman that he gave at the Catholic University of Lublin, which later came out as a book “Love and Responsibility”, all the encyclical letters which gave guidance—to men, about St. Joseph *Redemptoris Custos*—to women *Redemptoris Mater*, an unattainable model of a virginal Mother, and also *Mulieris Dignitatem* and *Letter to Women*, where he showed the true identity of woman; and also all the documents addressed to married couples *Familiaris Consortio*, *Donum Vitae*, *Letter to the Families*.

All his teaching has one purpose—that man would understand the greatness of the gifts that God gave him and at the same time assigned as duties. The gift of life, the gift of the body, the gift of sexuality and fecundity – an excess of gifts, which man seems to be unable to embrace and recognize.

From the teaching of John Paul II the detailed rules of conduct for spouses reveal themselves through the right concepts of the human person and of human love. The duty of faithfulness is a logical consequence of the total mutual self-giving of persons, in fact it reveals itself not as a duty, but as an obvious way to express a beautiful love. Also, the value of parenthood comes as a logical consequence of this concept, as a desire to make this love eternal. The desire for a child is an

instance of the desire that this love be imprinted in eternity. True love has a definitive character, it cannot harm another person.

But what fate awaits God's gifts in human hands? The world today looks like a caricature of God's plan. You need only a little imagination to perceive, how difficult was this pontificate for a man, whose beautiful vision of God's world, redeemed by Christ, was every day confronted with reality. To carry the burden of his vocation the Pope needed help, so John Paul II was above all a man of prayer. In contact with God he found strength and hope. His pontificate was a pontificate of hope – not of blind thoughtlessness that “somehow it will be all right,” but from the deepest conviction that the whole world is in God's hands, and is redeemed by the blood of God's Son.

However, there are problems, which need to be addressed and demand decisions and actions. A threat to the sacredness of marriage demands clear judgment. So John Paul II tirelessly went around the world and reminded people about the truth taught in the Catechism, that the life of a child is sacred, and that everybody, who kills a defenseless baby is automatically excommunicated by the Catholic Church – not because the Church wants to punish him, but because the punishment indicates the enormous dimension of this crime. He taught, that contraception is a sin against God's first commandment – a sin against God – Creator, that we have no right to manipulate a new human being just conceived, nor have we the right to manipulate a woman, who cannot be treated as an object; that contraceptives, conception in vitro and all manipulation, even of the smallest human being is a sin. The Church proclaims and will proclaim *non licet*—it is forbidden. This command is derived from a genealogy of the human person created by God. The dignity of a human person determines moral norms. John Paul II showed the way, and didn't hesitate to proclaim, that he wants to be known as the pope of responsible parenthood, because only responsible parenthood is the realization of the holiness of marriage.

He spoke, wrote – but also asked: “are they listening?” When Bishop Stanislaw Stefanek during the meeting of Pontifical Council for the Family thanked the Holy Father for his *Letter to Families*, John Paul II responded – “Do not thank [me], but read [it]”.

Conclusions

This teaching goes against the current of the contemporary world. Humankind is being destroyed and this world created by God is rotting and seems to be submerged in mud, which like lava is flowing farther and farther, covering more and more fertile land and changing it into a desert. A man through his own actions brings devastation on himself in a mindless lust for destruction.

But in the muddy water lilies are blooming – beautiful white flowers intact in their whiteness, from the depths they rise to the light above the dirty surface. When it seems that everything is lost, that the wave of pornography has irretrievably destroyed the treasure of purity and virginity, faithful love and the joy of parenthood, islands of new hope are growing, groups of youth and groups of adults oppose this destruction.

And young people ? Young people – sensitive to truth and beauty follow John Paul II – and cry “we are with you”. From this cry a new hope is born for the world, for the whole of mankind, a hope, that men will come to their senses, that they will find again their identity as God’s children, that they will find in themselves God’s mark.

The teaching of John Paul II is optimistic, he believed in mankind, believed that man is created by God in His image, that the world is redeemed. So he had a great hope, that man can, in spite of everything, return to his original innocence – because this is precisely why Christ came into this world.

Depth of faith brings a depth of trust – such a faith that can move mountains and trust, best expressed by the Church’s hymn “O Lord in Thee I have trusted, let me never be confounded”.

Persona humana in fieri est – tells John Paul II – a person “is becoming” and can become more and more in God’s image, can become perfect “as your heavenly Father is perfect”. A man of our time, who seems to be mindless and heartless can be reborn and find in himself “Him, who is.”

This is the meaning of John Paul II’s pontificate – and everybody agrees with this, if they have the courage to look objectively. This pope brought mankind the truth about the dimensions of the human person, human sexuality and its meaning, masculinity and femininity created in God’s image, parenthood as participation in the creative power of God. John Paul II taught this deepest truth and wanted to elevate men to the true greatness of God’s children. Man cannot live without the elation of the heart. Without looking up he only can vegetate as some sort of higher species of animal. To be happy he has to recognize a divine dimension of his own self.