

Male and Female He Made Them

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. ~ Genesis 1:27*

TODAY'S MATERIAL CULTURE, drenched in purposeless sexuality, too often has robbed men of their ability to rejoice in their masculinity and women to rejoice in their femininity.

Men are either expected to belong to a "guy" culture based on beer, sports, and crudity, or are expected to be "sensitive" in ways that are a caricature of true masculinity. Women are expected either to bury their true selves in blatantly sexual behavior or to neuter themselves so that they are indistinguishable from men. If anything, the age-old "war of the sexes" has become an ever-escalating series of pitched battles, with marriages, children, and happiness the casualties. Can we live any other way?

When God created humanity, he made both males and females in his image (see Gn 1:27). Following the general story of creation in the first chapter of Genesis, however, is a second story that focuses only on humankind. Adam, the first man, is made by God "of dust from the ground" into which God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gn 2:7). Eden is described and God forbids Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (see Gn 2:8-17). Then God says to himself, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gn 2:18). Adam cannot be completely himself, by himself; and none of the animals can provide the companionship essential to his nature (see Gn 2:19-20).

Eve is then created from Adam's rib (see Gn 2:21-22) and, when God brings her to Adam, he cries with joy: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gn 2:23).

The story of Eve's creation from Adam's rib is often used as the first justification for the subordination of women — Eve was not created simultaneously with Adam, and

she is created from a part of Adam's body. Yet the story can be looked at another way. Clearly, both are created in God's image, and we learn later that both Adam and Eve enjoyed God's presence (see Gn 3:8). Adam, when presented with Eve, sees her as "another self." Eve, created to be Adam's "helper fit for him," is in a

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certain sense a representation of God himself, from whom comes our help (see Ps 54:4). They form "one flesh" (Gn 2:24), a communion of persons that is a reflection of God's own inner life. This communion is one of harmony and love; they were "both naked, and were not ashamed" (Gn 2:25). They needed to conceal nothing from each other.

That original harmony lasted only until Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Their act of mistrust in God's benevolence, and their desire to "be like God" (Gn 3:5), led immediately to shame (see Gn 3:10-11) and recriminations — Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent (see Gn 3:12-13). Among the terrible results of their sin was that lust and dominance

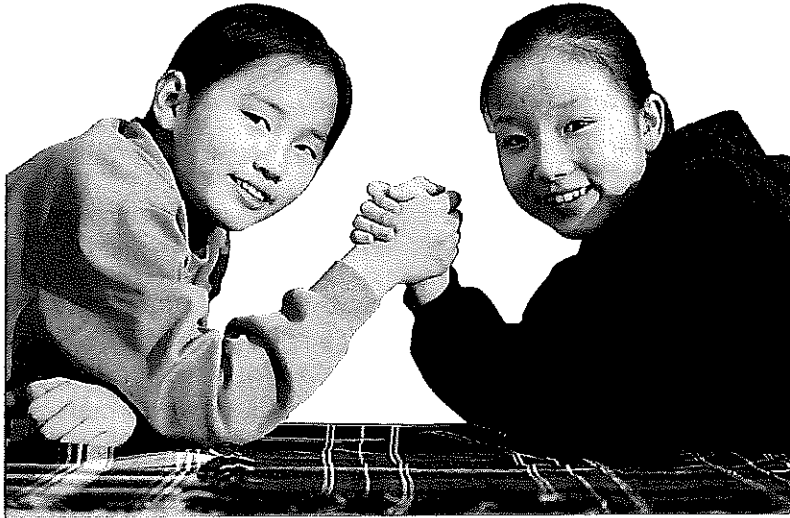
would mark relations between them: “[Y]our desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gn 3:16). The Scripture thus teaches us that disorder between men and women does not come from our nature, but from sin.

The important lessons we learn from the story of creation and the fall of our first par-

ents are these: First, from the beginning, we have been willed by God to be male and female, to be men and women. Knowing that God is all-wise and all-good, and that he made his creation “very good” (Gn 1:31), we must realize that our sexuality reflects God’s wisdom and goodness. This does not mean that God is male or female, but that the perfections of each sex — those of husband and father, and those of wife and mother — reflect something of God’s infinite perfection. We cannot be fully human without being male and female.

Second, we are created to be loved, not used. God willed humankind for itself (see CCC 356), and Adam and Eve were willed “for each other”¹ (CCC 372). Neither is a means (a tool), an object to be used by the other. Using another as an object of pleasure destroys his or her very personhood.

Third, the sexual urge is created by God. God’s first command to humans was not a prohibition, but the positive command, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gn 1:28). Sex is not dirty, and sex is not merely biological, as it is with animals. Rather, it is a conjoining of persons, “a man ... cleaves to his wife” (Gn 2:24). And the result is a new person whom the parents have



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created in cooperation with God, as Eve recognized: “I have [be]gotten a man [that is, a child] with the help of the Lord” (Gn 4:1). The differences between the sexes are designed by God for the “goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life” (CCC 2333). The union of husband and wife and the conception of

children is an image in the flesh of God’s own outpouring of love and generosity.

This is what Pope John Paul II came to call the “nuptial meaning” of the human body. We are made for community, and the fullness of interpersonal communication occurs within the committed marital relationship of a man and a woman. Only in this kind of relationship can we be free to give ourselves fully, each a gift to the other, experiencing as completely as possible the original deep communion shared by Adam and Eve before they sinned. We have the capacity, the responsibility, the vocation of love.

This is possible only with God’s grace. Jesus came to restore our brokenness, and his grace helps heal the wounds of sin. Jesus tells us that “from the beginning” God made humankind male and female (see Mt 19:4), and “from the beginning” God intended lifelong marriage (see Mt 19:8), telling his listeners: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mt 19:6). Later in the same conversation, he assures them: “With God all things are possible” (Mt 19:26).

(CCC 355-356, 369-372, 1605-1608, 2331-2336)

¹ Genesis 2:24