



# The Holy See

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 16 January 1980*

### The Human Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love

Let us continue today with the analysis of the texts of Genesis, which we have undertaken according to Christ's line of teaching. Let us recall that in the talk about marriage he referred to the "beginning."

The revelation, and at the same time the original discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body, consists in this: it presents man, male and female, in the whole reality and truth of his body and sex ("they were naked") and at the same time in full freedom from any constraint of the body and of sex. The nakedness of our progenitors, interiorly free from shame, seems to bear witness to this. It can be said that, created by Love, endowed in their being with masculinity and femininity, they are both "naked" because they are free with the freedom of the gift.

This freedom lies at the basis of the nuptial meaning of the body. The human body, with its sex, and its masculinity and femininity seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fruitfulness and procreation, as in the whole natural order. It includes right from the beginning the nuptial attribute, that is, the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift and - by means of this gift - fulfills the meaning of his being and existence. Let us recall here the text of the last Council which declared that man is the only creature in the visible world that God willed "for its own sake." It then added that man "can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself" (GS 24).

The root of that original nakedness free from shame, which Genesis 2:25 speaks of, must be sought in that complete truth about man. Man or woman, in the context of their beatifying beginning, are free with the freedom of the gift. To remain in the relationship of the "sincere gift of themselves" and to become such a gift for each other, through the whole of their humanity made

of femininity and masculinity (also in relation to that perspective which Genesis 2:24 speaks of), they must be free precisely in this way.

We mean here freedom especially as mastery of oneself (self control). From this aspect, it is indispensable that man may be able to "give himself," that he may become a gift, that he will be able to "fully discover his true self " in "a sincere giving of himself " (referring to the words of the Council). Thus the words, "They were naked and were not ashamed" can and must be understood as the revelation - and at the same time rediscovery - of freedom. This freedom makes possible and qualifies the nuptial sense of the body.

Genesis 2:25 says even more, however. It indicates the possibility and the characteristic of this mutual "experience of the body." It enables us also to identify that nuptial meaning of the body *in actu*. When we read: "They were naked and were not ashamed," we directly touch its fruits and indirectly touch almost the root of it. Free interiorly from the constraint of their own bodies and sex, free with the freedom of the gift, man and woman could enjoy the whole truth, the whole self-evidence of man, just as God-Yahweh had revealed these things to them in the mystery of creation.

This truth about man, which the conciliar text states precisely in the words quoted above, has two main emphases. The first affirms that man is the only creature in the world that the Creator willed "for its own sake." The second consists in saying that this same man, willed by the Creator in this way right from "the beginning," can find himself only in the disinterested giving of himself. Now, this truth about man, which seems in particular to grasp the original condition connected with the very beginning of man in the mystery of creation, can be reread in both directions, on the basis of the conciliar text. This rereading helps us to understand even more the nuptial meaning of the body. This meaning seems inscribed in the original condition of man and woman (according to Genesis 2:23-25) and in particular in the meaning of their original nakedness.

As we have noted, at the root of their nakedness is the interior freedom of the gift - the disinterested gift of oneself. This gift enables them both, man and woman, to find one another, since the Creator willed each of them "for his (her) own sake" (cf. GS 24). Thus man, in the first beatifying meeting, finds the woman, and she finds him. In this way he accepts her interiorly. He accepts her as she is willed "for her own sake" by the Creator, as she is constituted in the mystery of the image of God through her femininity. Reciprocally, she accepts him in the same way, as he is willed "for his own sake" by the Creator, and constituted by him by means of his masculinity. The revelation and the discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body consists in this. The Yahwist narrative, and in particular Genesis 2:25, enables us to deduce that man, as male and female, enters the world precisely with this awareness of the meaning of the body, of masculinity and femininity.

The human body, oriented interiorly by the sincere gift of the person, reveals not only its

masculinity or femininity on the physical plane, but reveals also such a value and such a beauty as to go beyond the purely physical dimension of sexuality. In this manner awareness of the nuptial meaning of the body, connected with man's masculinity-femininity, is in a way completed. On the one hand, this meaning indicates a particular capacity of expressing love, in which man becomes a gift. On the other hand, the capacity and deep availability for the affirmation of the person corresponds to it. This is, literally, the capacity of living the fact that the other - the woman for the man and the man for the woman - is, by means of the body, someone willed by the Creator for his or her own sake. The person is unique and unrepeatable, someone chosen by eternal Love.

The affirmation of the person is nothing but acceptance of the gift, which, by means of reciprocity, creates the communion of persons. This communion is constructed from within. It comprises also the whole "exteriority" of man, that is, everything that constitutes the pure and simple nakedness of the body in its masculinity and femininity. Then, as we read in Genesis 2:25, man and woman were not ashamed. The biblical expression "were not ashamed" directly indicates "the experience" as a subjective dimension.

Precisely in this subjective dimension, as two human "egos" determined by their masculinity and femininity, both of them, man - and woman, appear in the mystery of their beatifying "beginning." (We are in the state of man's original innocence and at the same time, original happiness.) This is a short appearance, comprising only a few verses in Genesis. However it is full of a surprising content, theological and anthropological at the same time. The revelation and discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body explain man's original happiness. At the same time, it opens the perspective of his earthly history, in which he will never avoid this indispensable "theme" of his own existence.

The following verses of Genesis, according to the Yahwist text of chapter 3, show actually that this historical perspective will be constructed differently from the beatifying beginning (after original sin). It is all the more necessary, however, to penetrate deeply into the mysterious structure, theological and at the same time anthropological, of this beginning. In the whole perspective of his own history, man will not fail to confer a nuptial meaning on his own body. Even if this meaning will undergo many distortions, it will always remain the deepest level. It demands to be revealed in all its simplicity and purity, and to be shown in its whole truth, as a sign of the image of God. The way that goes from the mystery of creation to the "redemption of the body" also passes here (cf. *Rom* 8).

For the present we are remaining on the threshold of this historical perspective. On the basis of Genesis 2:23-25, we clearly realize the connection that exists between the revelation and the discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body, and man's original happiness. This nuptial meaning is also beatifying. As such, it manifests in a word the whole reality of that donation which the first pages of Genesis speak to us of. Reading them, we are convinced of the fact that the awareness of the meaning of the body that is derived from them - in particular of its nuptial meaning - is the

fundamental element of human existence in the world.

This nuptial meaning of the human body can be understood only in the context of the person. The body has a nuptial meaning because the human person, as the Council says, is a creature that God willed for his own sake. At the same time, he can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself.

Christ revealed to man and woman, over and above the vocation to marriage, another vocation namely, that of renouncing marriage, in view of the kingdom of heaven. With this vocation, he highlighted the same truth about the human person. If a man or a woman is capable of making a gift of himself for the kingdom of heaven, this proves in its turn (and perhaps even more) that there is the freedom of the gift in the human body. It means that this body possesses a full nuptial meaning.