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## Pope Francis: “Lust makes relationships toxic”

Lust “destroys relationships between peoples”, **Pope Francis** said to the faithful gathered for the weekly catechesis in the Paul VI Hall dedicated to this theme. In order to substantiate this assertion, he made reference to the daily news:

“How many relationships that began in the best of ways have then turned into toxic relationships, of possession of the other, lacking respect and a sense of limits?”

**These are loves in which chastity has been missing: a virtue not to be confused with sexual abstinence”, since the latter is connected with the “will never to possess the other person.”**

“To love is to respect the other, to seek his or her happiness, to cultivate empathy for his or her feelings, to dispose oneself in the knowledge of a body, a psychology, and a soul that are not our own, and that must be contemplated for the beauty they bear”, the Pope explained: “That is love, and love is beautiful.” Conversely, lust, “makes a mockery of all this: lust plunders, it robs, it consumes in haste, it does not want to listen to the other but only to its own need and pleasure; lust judges every courtship a bore, it does not seek that synthesis between reason, drive and feeling that would help us to conduct existence wisely. The lustful seeks only shortcuts: he does not understand that the road to love must be travelled slowly, and this patience, far from being synonymous with boredom, allows us to make our loving relationships happy.”

“In Christianity, there is no condemnation of the sexual instinct”,

Francis pointed out, while “this beautiful dimension, the sexual dimension, the dimension of love, of our humanity is not without its dangers.” In fact, “after gluttony, the second ‘demon’ that is always crouching at the door of the heart is that of lust.” “While gluttony is voracity with regard to food, this second vice is a kind of ‘voracity’ with regard to another person, that is, the poisoned bond that human beings have with each other, especially in the sphere of sexuality”, the Pope argued, citing the Song of Songs as a positive example: “a wonderful poem of love between two lovers.” The Holy Father reminded the faithful that St Paul “already had to address the issue in the First Epistle to the Corinthians”, whose reproach “concerns precisely **an unhealthy handling of sexuality by some Christians.**” Falling in love “is one of the most astonishing realities of existence”, Francis said: “There are so many newlyweds here: you can talk about this”, he said off text. “Why this mystery happens, and why it is such a shattering experience in people’s lives, none of us know”, the Pope remarked: “One person falls in love with another, falling in love just happens. It is one of the most astonishing realities of existence. Most of the songs you hear on the radio are about this: loves that shine, loves that are always sought and never attained, loves that are full of joy, or that torment us to the point of tears.” “If it is not polluted by vice, falling in love is one of the purest feelings”, the Pope remarked: “A person in love becomes generous, enjoys giving gifts, writes letters and poems. He stops thinking of himself to be completely focused on the other. This is beautiful! And if you ask a person in love, ‘Why do you love?’ they won’t have an answer: In so many ways their love is unconditional, without any reason. You must have patience if that love, which is so powerful, is also a little naive: lovers does not really know the face of the other, they tends to idealise them, they are ready to make promises whose weight they don’t immediately grasp.”

“Sexual pleasure that is a gift from God is undermined by pornography: satisfaction without relationship that can generate forms of addiction”,

the warning concerning lust, which is a “dangerous vice.” “Among all human pleasures, sexuality has a powerful voice. It involves all the senses; it dwells both in the body and in the psyche, and this

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is very beautiful; but if it is not disciplined with patience, if it is not inscribed in a relationship and in a story where two individuals transform it into a loving dance, it turns into a chain that deprives human beings of freedom.” “**We have to defend love**, the love of the heart, of the mind, of the body, pure love in the giving of oneself to the other. And this is the beauty of sexual intercourse.”

“Winning the battle against lust, against the “objectification” of the other,

can be a lifelong endeavour”, Francis noted. “But the prize of this battle is the most important of all, because it is preserving that beauty that God wrote into His creation when He imagined love between man and woman, which is for the purpose of using one another, but of loving one another. That beauty that makes us believe that building a story together is better than going in search of adventures. Cultivating tenderness is better than bowing to the demon of possession – true love does not possess, it gives itself; serving is better than conquering. Because if there is no love, life is sad, it is sad loneliness.” At the end of the audience, after a performance by circus artists, the Holy Father expressed his “sympathy and solidarity” with the victims, all civilians, of the rocket attack on Erbil, calling on everyone “to avoid any step that increases tension in the Middle East and other scenarios of war.”

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