



# The Holy See

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 20 February 1980*

### Man Enters the World As a Subject of Truth and Love

Genesis points out that man and woman were created for marriage: "A man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (*Gn 2:24*). This opens the great creative perspective of human existence, which is always renewed by means of procreation, which is self-reproduction. This perspective is rooted in the consciousness of mankind and also in the particular understanding of the nuptial meaning of the body, with its masculinity and femininity. In the mystery of creation, man and woman are a mutual gift. Original innocence manifests and at the same time determines the perfect ethos of the gift.

We spoke about that at the preceding meeting. Through the ethos of the gift the problem of the "subjectivity" of man, who is a subject made in the image and likeness of God, is partly outlined. In the narrative of creation (especially in Genesis 2:23-25) the woman is certainly not merely an object for the man. They both remain in front of each other in all the fullness of their objectivity as creatures, as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," as male and female, both naked. Only the nakedness that makes woman an object for man, or vice versa, is a source of shame. The fact that they were not ashamed means that the woman was not an "object" for the man nor he for her.

Interior innocence as purity of heart made it impossible somehow for one to be reduced by the other to the level of a mere object. The fact that they were not ashamed means that they were united by awareness of the gift. They were mutually conscious of the nuptial meaning of their bodies, in which the freedom of the gift is expressed and all the interior riches of the person as subject are manifested.

This mutual interpenetration of the "self" of the human persons, of the man and of the woman, seems to exclude subjectively any reduction to an object. This reveals the subjective profile of that

love. It can be said that this love "is objective" to the depths, since it is nourished by the mutual "objectivity" of the gift.

After original sin, man and woman will lose the grace of original innocence. The discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body will cease to be for them a simple reality of revelation and grace. However, this meaning will remain as a commitment given to man by the ethos of the gift, inscribed in the depths of the human heart, as a distant echo of original innocence. From that nuptial meaning human love in its interior truth and its subjective authenticity will be formed. Through the veil of shame, man will continually rediscover himself as the guardian of the mystery of the subject, that is, of the freedom of the gift. This is so as to defend it from any reduction to the position of a mere object.

For the present, however, we are before the threshold of man's earthly history. The man and the woman have not yet crossed it toward knowledge of good and evil. They are immersed in the mystery of creation. The depth of this mystery hidden in their hearts is innocence, grace, love and justice: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (*Gn* 1:31 ).

Man appears in the visible world as the highest expression of the divine gift, because he bears within him the interior dimension of the gift. With it he brings into the world his particular likeness to God, with which he transcends and dominates also his "visibility" in the world, his corporality, his masculinity or femininity, his nakedness. A reflection of this likeness is also the primordial awareness of the nuptial meaning of the body, pervaded by the mystery of original innocence.

Thus, in this dimension, a primordial sacrament is constituted, understood as a sign that transmits effectively in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from time immemorial. This is the mystery of truth and love, the mystery of divine life, in which man really participates. In the history of man, original innocence begins this participation and it is also a source of original happiness. The sacrament, as a visible sign, is constituted with man, as a body, by means of his visible masculinity and femininity. The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus be a sign of it.

So the very sacramentality of creation, the sacramentality of the world was revealed in a way, in man created in the image of God. By means of his corporality, his masculinity and femininity, man becomes a visible sign of the economy of truth and love, which has its source in God himself and which was revealed already in the mystery of creation. Against this vast background we understand fully the words that constitute the sacrament of marriage, present in Genesis 2:24: "A man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."

Against this vast background, we further understand that the words of Genesis 2:25, "They were both naked, and were not ashamed," through the whole depth of their anthropological meaning,

express the fact that, together with man, holiness entered the visible world, created for him. The sacrament of the world, and the sacrament of man in the world, comes from the divine source of holiness, and at the same time is instituted for holiness. Connected with the experience of the nuptial meaning of the body, original innocence is the same holiness that enables man to express himself deeply with his own body. That happens precisely by means of the sincere gift of himself. In this case, awareness of the gift conditions "the sacrament of the body." In his body as male or female, man feels he is a subject of holiness.

With this consciousness of the meaning of his own body, man, as male and female, enters the world as a subject of truth and love. It can be said that Genesis 2:23-25 narrates the first feast of humanity in all the original fullness of the experience of the nuptial meaning of the body. It is a feast of humanity, which draws its origin from the divine sources of truth and love in the mystery of creation. Very soon, the horizon of sin and death will be extended over that original feast (cf. *Gn* 3). Yet right from the mystery of creation we already draw a first hope, that is, that the fruit of the divine economy of truth and love, which was revealed "at the beginning," is not death, but life. It is not so much the destruction of the body of the man created "in the image of God," as rather the "call to glory" (cf. *Rom* 8:30).