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“Charity in Truth: The Church’s Pastoral Approach to Those with Same-Sex Attractions”

Msgr. William Smith Lecture Series

“Pastoral Challenges Post Obergefell: How Should the Church Respond.”

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- Introduction
 - Good to be with you, although it’s not a topic any of us would wish we would be having to address.
 - Need to approach with Christian realism and Christian hope. The Church has done what needs to be done several times in the past. But we need to know what we’re up against.
 - Obergefell was the harvest of wild grapes that came from allowing a vineyard not to be cultivated. The writing’s been on the wall for quite some time. We really shouldn’t be surprised. This is the reaping of what’s been sown now for almost 50 years.
 - The response of the Church and of faithful Catholics to the consequences of the *Obergefell* decision involves far more than legal or political counter-maneuvers. It involves the slow, patient work in the vineyard to make sure we have a genuinely fruitful harvest.
- The Situation
 - Two main candidates for the teaching of sexuality: the Catholic understanding or ultimately the understanding of the sexual revolution, epitomized most by the mentality supporting gay sexuality.
 - Catholic understanding is that there is a meaning, a purpose, a *telos* behind human sexuality. Love and Life. Unity and Procreation. Love, Marriage, Sex and Family go together.
 - Understanding of the sexual revolution: no built-in purpose. We determine and give it its meaning. The only moral condition is consent.
 - Over the course of the last 50 years, the sexual revolutionaries have spread their version of the good news of human sexuality than those who believe in what God has revealed have. And it hasn’t even been close. It’s been almost a total rout. In terms of love, marriage, sexuality and family, those preaching the values of the sexual revolution have soundly beaten those who were preaching the Gospel of Life and Love. They had the media on their side. They had most of the educational establishment. And the vast majority of Christians not only didn’t resist the sowing of darnel by the enemy, but the majority, certainly in practice if not in theory, lived by the values of the sexual revolution. Pornography. Premarital Sex. Cohabitation. Divorce-and-Remarriage. Almost universal use of contraception. Acceptance of homosexual activity. And many of the shepherds who were supposed to defend — not just bishops and priests, but catechists, Catholic school teachers, parents and grandparents — rather than being prophetic joined the “luv song.” We can’t be surprised that after several decades in which even the majority of Catholics were living according to a lustful definition of love, without adequate reverence for the covenant of marriage, for the gift of sexuality, for the importance of the family, that we are where we are. We failed to be salty in helping preserve the corruption of our culture. We failed to oppose the father of lies as he sought to destroy families today just like he did to the first family.
 - Why’s that?
 - The basic reason is because many in the Church have behaved as if the sexual revolutionaries were right: that the Church’s teaching on sexuality is “bad news,” not “good,” as an asbestos that suffocates the deepest of human desires rather than a truth that sets people free.
 - Among those who believe in the truth taught by the Church, many have behaved as if they’re “ashamed of the Gospel.” They haven’t talked about it at all. Or they have treated it defensively. Or they have covered it in ways totally inadequate to the what the culture demands to be effective — citing authoritative Scriptural or Magisterial sources in an anti-authoritarian age, or trying to “scare the Hell” out of people through mentioning mortal sin

at a time in which there's been a loss of a sense of sin, a belief that everyone is going to heaven, and a real sensitivity toward the Church's acting as if it guilt-trips or scares people.

- There was extraordinary defensiveness, even cowardice, about the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, because of its unpopularity. This was doubly harmful.
 - First, it made people defensive about talking about the Church's sexual teaching in general.
 - Second, it paved the way for the advance of the understanding of sexuality flowing from the sexual revolutionaries, because it trained people to sever the procreative dimension from human sexuality. Once most heterosexuals began to think and behave that procreation was a totally optional part of human sexuality, then it undercut one of the clear natural reasons why people were able to see the immorality of same-sex sexual activity. Likewise once people started intentionally trying to strip human sexuality of its built in teleology, then it made it much easier for people over time — buttressed by clouded intellects and weakened wills — to agree that we determine the purpose of sex.
 - Third, even among those who were defending *Humanae Vitae*, many did it in a way that, despite good intentions, just reinforced the sense that the Church was out of touch. To a subjectivist, empirical, emotivist, age, they were teaching in an objective, realist, intellectual way. Even for those open to being persuaded, the internally consistent teaching was extraneous to their experience. That's one of the reasons why Cardinal Karol Wojtyla tried to give different premises for the conclusions of *Humanae Vitae*, first philosophically by giving a different approach to the natural law in 1968 in *The Foundations of the Doctrine of the Church Concerning the Principles of Conjugal Life*, and then theologically in his *Human Love in the Divine Plan*, popularly called the Theology of the Body.
- Even when St. John Paul II helped the Church to be confident about the good news of the Church's teachings on sexuality, even when it was serving as a Eureka moment for many and vast numbers of young people were getting enthused about it, it really didn't trickle down the way it should have. The vast majority in the Church — from bishops, to pastors, to those in marriage formation, to married couples — either ignored it because they obviously didn't think it was relevant enough for their pastoral work or marriages or never heard of it. And after the death of Pope John Paul II, it simply wasn't fostered. Pope Benedict XVI mentioned it once in eight years. Pope Francis included various references in *Amoris Laetitia*, but hasn't given John Paul II's teachings on *Human Life in the Divine Plan* anywhere they attention they may have.
- So as the sexual revolutionaries have been trying to run with the ball, many on the Catholic side haven't even been on the field; those on the field are often playing football the way that worked in previous generations; and the few who are well-coached enough to be able to turn defense to offense have been too isolated so that no effective defense has been able to be mounted.
- The weakening of the Church's credibility to teach in areas of sexuality because of a failure on the part of many to live chastity faithfully and joyfully.
 - Beyond the defensiveness and reticence of many in the Church to evangelize our culture with the good news of sexuality, beyond the use of arguments that seem esoteric to many in the culture, there's also the gradual loss of the Church's credibility to teach in matters of sexuality.
 - The huge numbers of priests and religious who abandoned their vocations at the dawn of the sexual revolution. The huge numbers who remained but who were cheating on their vocations through heterosexual or homosexual relationships, getting busted with male or female prostitutes, or caught with porn on their computers. Such well-known falls played into the frame of the sexual revolutionaries that chastity is impossible.

- The meteor that broke the camel's back was the clergy sex abuse crisis, which not only gave the impression that many priests were, in fact, perverted, but also shot the credibility of Church leaders as people who had a basic understanding of right and wrong. The homosexual nature of so much of the abuse made the Church's ability to speak credibly during the last 15 years in the gradual crescendo of clamors for same-sex unions extremely difficult at best. And it likewise filled many Catholics — bishops, priests, lay faithful — with shame, such that many were hesitant to speak out because they had had the wind knocked out of them.
- Over the decades the situation has been getting progressively worse.
 - The weakening of a marriage culture because of cohabitation and divorce.
 - The explosion of online pornography, pushing, among other practices, gay sex scenes and heterosexual sodomy, all of which have had a cumulative impact on breaking down many of the basic understanding of sexual morality prior to the sexual revolution.
- Finally, the sense of victimization in general and vis-à-vis Church teaching
 - There was a shift in the late 90s by gay leaders to focus on changing the popular understanding of same-sex men and women. Prior, there was too much of a focus on drag queens, lewd parades, anonymous encounters in gay baths and bars, and a general notion that gays and lesbians were in general perverts because so many seemed to revel publicly in perverted behavior. They recognized that if this remained the popular understanding, their public and cultural status wouldn't change much.
 - So they focused on trying to unite everyone around the quiet, hardworking, respectful gay and lesbian next door and around a general abhorrence of violence against any easily identifiable class of victims. They pushed, at first, a very refined sense of homophobia, asking people to condemn them clear attacks against those with same-sex attractions on account of their sexual tendencies. The Matthew Shepherd killing happened. And then, once they had everyone on board against true homophobia, they just expanded the definition of homophobia, trying to describe the violence of the failure to accept those with SSA "as they are," and then to accept what they do, and then to deny various of the benefits of marriage — like visiting in death beds — then denying them marriage, then still refusing to treat their marriages as equal, etc.
 - And this was particularly effective strategy against the Church, because they were able to portray the Church as homophobic, for creating a general culture of homophobia that leads so many to remain in the closet, or to commit suicide, or to be rejected by their families and culture, or to keep them second class citizens, or to be opposed to their "right" to marry. This is the main ground that was used to try to attack religious freedom. It all started in 2009 when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton instructed foreign service staff to support only freedom of worship, instead of freedom of religion, in order to create the means for people to "love as they choose." This frame of faithful Christians as oppressors and gays and lesbians as victims made it much more difficult for the Church to get a fair hearing.
- So where are we left?
 - Same-sex marriage is not only the law of the land thanks to *Obergefell* but the understanding of sexuality promoted by the sexual revolutionaries is now firmly ensconced in culture and in education, so that there's a whole indoctrination taking place even of kindergartners and preschool children.
 - The Transgender movement is even one step further in the denial of nature and of human sexuality. The same frame of victimization and oppressor is happening once again as well as an even more Orwellian response against "bigots," forcing us to change even our vocabulary as we need to refer to transgender people.

- There will be many more attacks on religious freedom than we have had up until now. Exactly what forms this is speculative, but we can foresee being forced to give up our status as civil officiants of marriage, being sued regularly by gays for discrimination in services or employment, having educational mandates given to schools, and perhaps, as we've seen in other countries, being fined or prosecuted for hate crimes for teaching the Good News. There is a sense that for the sexual revolutionaries to get what they really desire — which is a sense that their own experience is totally accepted — they have to compel others to accept them on their terms or treat them as unworthy of civilization.
 - I believe that this assessment is realistic, not pessimistic.
- What's our response?
 - In general, our response has got to be virtuous and fully Christian. We could focus on the theological and cardinal virtues.
 - Faith — We need to trust in God just as our ancestors have. St. Paul converted Corinth. They converted the debauched Roman empire. They brought back to virtue the profligate middle ages. They continue to convert people from sexual practices hostile to the Gospel in areas of mission. We need to trust in God and in the faith he has revealed. And we need to live by faith, especially living the Church's sexual teachings with joy as good news.
 - Hope — We need to believe in God's promises, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the work of the guardian angels, in the conscience God has given each person through which he continues to try to speak in the depth of their interiority, in the assurance that God draws good even out of evil.
 - Charity — In God's love for those who are caught within the grips of the evil one, substituting lust for love, disfiguring original differentiation, love, marriage, sex and family. We must get the reputation of doing everything out of genuine love, loving people more than hating their sins, loving them more than judging them, sacrificing ourselves to help save their souls.
 - Courage — We need a holy parrhesia now. We will certainly suffer various blowback, from being called nasty names to losing jobs, having some family members and friends write us off, seeing our loved ones suffer, and maybe even suffer severe punishment.
 - Prudence — We need to discern and follow what will be an effective means forward. For example, I don't think it's effective for us as Christians to play the victim card and try to gain others' pity. I don't think it will work if we're looking for it. If we go forward with courage, eventually others may themselves see what's happening, like the sentiment in Nero's circus, but it's our courage that will convert more than getting them to pity us for what our backward way of looking at things.
 - Justice — We'll need to know our rights and firmly and courteously insist on them, because we'll be able to convert people through their injustice much more quickly than we will on the areas of sexuality.
 - Self-mastery — We'll need to be very patient. We'll need to be restrained when we're tempted to fight back. We'll need to go without a lot, including others' applause or even jobs or money. We need to be humble about all of this, temperate about earthly things.
 - Beyond those virtues and others, I would add that to reevangelize with the Gospel of Human Love in the Divine Plan the present situation, we will need to look at several things. I'd like to frame it within the Church's traditional three-fold munera drawn from Christ's three essential works:
 - Munus docendi, prophetic, kerygma/martyria
 - Munus sanctificandi, sanctifying, prayer and the sacraments, leitourgia
 - Munus regendi, shepherding, leading, diakonia
 - Munus Docendi
 - First, we need to admit the failure of past decades and some of the systemic reasons. We haven't succeeded in passing on the faith with regard to these issues. And we have to renew these institutions:
 - Families

- Catholic schools
- CCD programs
- Catholic Universities
- Those who are "gay" — meaning those who celebrate sexual activity and culture based on same-sex attractions — are in even greater need of the full teaching of the Catholic Church, since in addition to the normal need for pastoral accompaniment and assistance in resisting temptations they also are vulnerable to severe attacks against the faith, considering that gay orthodoxy involves the rejection of Biblical and magisterial teaching on sexual morality and marriage, and therefore the denial of the authority of Scripture and of the Church.
- The kerygma.
 - We'll need to carry out the conversation in its larger context of evangelization.
 - Need to ground things in the fundamental yes of the Christian faith.
 - This is so that we do not fall into the frame that we're obsessed with sexual issues, whereas we know that our culture is.
 - This is also to help those with SSA, who are tempted to think they're sexual attractions are the most significant self-identifying characteristic, whereas we want to help them to focus on their divine filiation, their being loved by Christ, they're being called and challenged by Christ far more. This is the means by which to contextualize all of their behavior within their relationship.
 - We'll need to show that the Church's teaching is not what people think it is, but rather what is aligned with what they ultimately want: true and lasting happiness. We can't play into their frame. Rather we need the confident, patient, joyful and humble kerygma by word and witness of the Gospel of Human Love in the Divine Plan, showing that the true sexual revolution is the one championed not by Hugh Hefner and Harvey Milk but by Christ and the saints. This isn't going to be easy. At first some might think the claim is ridiculous. But we need to proclaim it and live it.
 - We'll need to give the why behind the what and show why the Church's teaching is an expression of love rather than prudism, of mercy rather than homophobia. We can learn a lot from St. Paul in Corinth. He didn't merely condemn the sins of incest and prostitution — and in his other letters sodomy, fornication, adultery and all forms of porneia — but he presented the positive, that we are temples of God called to glorify him in the body. He showed that the life according to the Holy Spirit was possible. That life according to the flesh wasn't a given. And the Christian message eventually triumphed.
 - Showing why the false ideas won't fulfill, knowing that the Father of Lies always tries to use half-truths.
 - We need to teaching not just to the head but to the heart.
 - Part of this kerygma is the meaning of chastity, how chastity enables rather than extinguishes true love and how lust destroys rather than develops it.
 - Central to the Church's full and authentic pastoral care of those with same-sex attractions is the assistance to live a chaste life. When mention is made of this call to chastity, some in the gay movement shriek with exasperated incredulity, as if chastity were a death sentence to a loveless life or, worse, some type of medieval castration ceremony executed in subterranean Vatican dungeons. Chastity, however, is the precondition for any real love.
 - The reason why chastity is often looked at as a curse rather than a cure is because it is not often understood, lived or preached. Even among clergy, religious and catechists, chastity is regularly confused with continence (abstinence from sexual activity) or celibacy (the state of being unmarried). When the Catechism emphasizes that "all Christ's faithful are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life," and that "married

people are called to live conjugal chastity," many married couples are left scratching their heads, wondering how they can be both "chaste" and start a family. The reason for the confusion likely stems from the fact that when term "chastity" is most often used, it's employed in the context of the sexual education of teenagers (who are called to continence in chastity) or in the description of the promises or vows professed by priests and religious (who are called to celibate continence in chastity). The confusion points to the urgency and importance for all in the Church to understand what chastity is and how all the baptized — married couples, singles, priests, religious, those with same-sex attractions and opposite-sex attractions — are called to it no matter what their state of life.

- Saint Pope John Paul II, both prior to and during his papacy, has provided the clearest, deepest, most practical and most enlightening articulation of what the virtue of chastity is. In his 1960 work, "Love and Responsibility," he wrote that chastity is the moral habit that raises one's attractions to another to the dignity of that person as a whole. There is a temptation — which we see in lust in general and in pornography in particular — to "reduce" another to the values of the body or, more specifically, to the erogenous zones. There is, moreover, the further temptation to "use" another — either intentionally in one's mind or physically through his or her body — for one's own sensual or emotional gratification; many people in our culture consensually use each other sexually in this way. This mutual utilitarianism, however, is not love, but the opposite of love. Harmonious egoisms or reciprocal narcissisms don't lead to the formation of a loving "we," but just two even-more-isolated egos. Love, rather, always seeks the true good of the other for the other's sake. When a person loves genuinely, he is willing to sacrifice his pleasure or even his life for the one loved. Chastity makes this possible, because it is the virtue that trains a person's vision as well as his will to keep his attraction to the other person up to the level of the person's true good rather than "consume" the other to satisfy his sexual appetites.
- In his papal catecheses on "Human Love in the Divine Plan," popularly called the Theology of the Body, Pope John Paul II went even further in his teaching on chastity. He described that the virtue of chastity isn't so much bound principally to the virtue of temperance — the virtue that helps us to master our appetites rather than be mastered by them — but to the virtue of piety. Piety is the habit that helps us to revere others according to their true dignity, according to the image of God in them. St. Paul wrote to husbands and wives, "Be subordinate to each other out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21, calling them to recognize and revere Christ in each other and mutually lay down their lives for each other out of love for the Lord they recognize dwelling in the other. Linked to piety, chastity helps us to see the other as sacred subject instead of a sexual object, to treat the other with reverence rather than randiness.
- St. Pope John Paul II's insights help us better to see why all of us in the Church, no matter our state of life, are called to chastity.
- Can those with same-sex attractions truly love each other? Absolutely. The Church by no means is condemning those with same-sex attractions to a loveless life; the question is what practices will be consistent with genuine love and the objective good of the people involved. The Church teaches that those of the same-sex can clearly exercise the love of friendship (philia) in which the other becomes like a second self. The Church teaches that they certainly can — and are called to — have true Christian love (agape) toward each other, a willingness to sacrifice themselves and even die to themselves

and their pleasures for the other's true good. But the Church stresses that they need to ensure the romantic attractions (eros) they have for each other do not damage the one they love by opposing or destroying the love of agape and philia. For this they need chastity, which helps them raise their romantic attractions up to the sacred dignity of the person, which is violated by same-sex sexual activity.

- Why is this message of chastity for those with same-sex attractions and everyone else so seldom heard? Some priests seem reluctant to preach the message because, sadly, either they're not living chastely themselves or they erroneously understand and experience chastity as a deprivation from which they desire to spare others. Many lay people are disinclined to call those with same-sex attractions to chastity because they're not practicing it either and don't want to seem hypocritical in calling others to live what they themselves aren't living. Others, misunderstanding chastity, think that it will relegate those with same-sex attractions to a "loveless life," rather than provide the conditions for the possibility of any true love through the integration of eros consistent with philia and agape. If, however, we're ever going to help individuals learn how to love (agape) others as Christ has loved us and assist them to discover a love that saves and leads to true and lasting happiness, we need to rediscover and repropose with enthusiasm the virtue of chastity, and help them to live it.
- There is a group called Courage, founded in 1980 by New York Cardinal Terrence Cooke and Father John Harvey, which is dedicated to helping those with same sex attractions live chastely — through prayer and dedication, genuine Christian friendship and fellowship, mutual support and good example. Not only do we need more Courage chapters in every diocese, but the whole Church needs to have the courage and charity to become a worldwide Courage chapter to help those with same-sex attractions (and everyone else) purify and raise erotic attractions to the level of their loved one's true good — out of reverence for God and for the image of God in others. Anything short of this is not worthy of the Church founded by Christ to lead us to holiness. Anything short of this full proclamation of the Gospel of chastity is not true pastoral care.
- The Church consistently holds everyone, and not just those with same-sex attractions, to the integrity of chaste love.
- Priests, religious and consecrated must become true icons of Christ's chaste and celibate happiness, so that those with SSA are able to see that is essential for making everyone see that chastity tied to purity and piety is part of the good news of great joy for all the people rather than the road to loneliness and sorrow.
- Munus Sanctificandi
 - Focus on prayer
 - Certain demons are expunged only by prayer and fasting.
 - Often we don't pray enough for those who are tempted.
 - The call to holiness in baptism.
 - The strength we receive in the Eucharist but how this is supposed to be consequential:
 - This is my body given for you. Our lives are supposed to be Eucharistic.
 - Three-fold communion
 - The Sacrament of Confession
 - Without this, people are often unaware of sin.
 - Without this, people aren't able to be free.

- We also need it to overcome the sin of judging that has really made this situation harder, because many feel they're judged instead of loved, and this has been what's led to a massive collapse of the moral authority of the Church, like we saw in Holland, Quebec and other places.
 - The Sacrament of Marriage
 - This is an opportunity for us really to stress it.
 - Married couples will need to show the beauty of the Church's teaching on love, marriage, sex and family so that people can see the alternative.
 - We don't take marriage preparation seriously. When culture, when families, took marriage seriously, we could afford to be bad at it. We took a lot of it for granted. We know that they're not getting the Gospel of Human Love elsewhere, we've got to step up our offerings. Real formation, analogous to what we give to future priests and religious, remote, proximate and immediate.
 - We also need to offer far more resources, far more preaching, on the spousal aspect of the entirety of our faith, so that our love can be more and more modeled on God.
 - We need to help families become truly loving, generous, missionary, so that they can evangelize rather than predominantly clergy and religious.
 - Sanctification and salvation
 - We'll need to show eventually how civilly-solemnizing same-sex relationships is not ordered to their long-term happiness. For this world, we'll need to know and understand statistics and psychology; for this world, we'll need patiently to know Scripture and what is said.
 - Munus regendi
 - Discipline in the Church: are we really forming disciples who follow Jesus?
 - Self-mastery, a gift of the Holy Spirit
 - Training in virtues.
 - Helping parents to parent in positive ways about the truths of faith.
 - Needing to prune Church structures and place mission over maintenance.
 - Need to identify false prophets, call them to conversion, and if not, don't let them take innocent people down with the millstones.
 - None of these are quick fixes. But we're not looking for quick fixes. We're looking for the Gospel. Now's a time it will stand out. It's a time for building.
- Last thoughts
 - Really have to get to know those with same-sex attraction to be able to minister to them and minister to the culture.
 - Pitch for Courage. Surprised how many Dioceses it cannot enter. There's a resistance. We need to show this as the Church's real care.
 - Resources:
 - Robert Reilly's *Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior is Changing Everything*
 - Janet Smith and Fr. Paul Check's *Living the Truth in Love: Pastoral Approaches to Same-Sex Attraction*.
 - USCCB, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*
 - The new evangelization is looking more and more like the first. And when we look at the first, we are filled with hope. St. Paul would tell us not to be afraid, but to be filled with that inner "woe" and confidence that we can do all things in him who strengthens, that nothing can separate us from the love of God, not even persecution and the sword, and he'd urge us to keep fighting the good fight — it's worth it — to finish the race — it's urgent — and to keep the faith by faithfully and courageously living it and passing it on with confidence as the answer to the deepest questions and needs of all those we'll meet.