**Why I Am Catholic**

We protect virtues

We continue to protect and promote the virtues of virginity, chastity, and abstinence and to explain their value, necessity, and importance.

We live in a time where 80 percent of high school seniors have already had pre-marital sex. Two generations ago, virginity was still something our society valued and most young women and many young men were still virgins on the day of their marriage. Today most young people are not giving that gift to their spouse. They gave it away already.

Many young people do not consider religious vocations because of the vow of chastity. They ask, "How can someone never have sex?" This speaks volumes about the focus and obsession of our society. Virginity is made to seem impossible. It is seen by some as almost a disease—that if someone is a virgin there must be something wrong with them.

In my almost eight years of priesthood, I have known brides who preserved their virginity until marriage. And they took great joy that with God's help they had persevered and waited. They believe they made better choices because sex was not the dominant influence. They found guys who treated them with dignity and respect and not as sex objects.

Statistics show that couples who wait until marriage have more complete relationships, greater knowledge of each other, and much lower divorce rates. Couples where sex and the physical relationship are the focus have higher divorce rates and higher rates of adultery. They also have a harder time with Natural Family Planning (NFP) which requires periods of abstinence in marriage.

"All the baptized are called to chastity. The Christian has 'put on Christ,' the model for all chastity." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2348) "'Some profess virginity or consecrated celibacy which enables them to give themselves to God alone with an undivided heart in a remarkable manner.' . . 'there are three forms of the virtue of chastity: the first is that of spouses, the second that of widows, and the third that of virgins.'" (2349)

The model of virginity is St. Mary. St. Augustine writes in the late 300s: Mary "'remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin." (510) "With her whole being she is 'the handmaid of the Lord.'" (Lk 1:38) "By the Holy Spirit's power and her faith, her virginity became uniquely fruitful." (723)

"From the very beginning of the Church there have been men and women who have renounced the great good of marriage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, to be intent on the things of the Lord, to seek to please him, and to go out to meet the Bridegroom who is coming." (1618) "The virgin is 'constituted. . . a sacred person, a transcendent sign of the Church's love for Christ, and an eschatological image of this heavenly Bride of Christ and of the life to come.'" (923)

"'Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginity." (1620)

In 1902, St. Maria Goretti, age 11, died rather than lose her virginity. "She was martyred after dying from multiple stab wounds, inflicted by her attempted rapist after she refused him because of love of Jesus and her loyalty to God's commandments." (*Wikipedia*) We need to return to a time of purity of heart, mind, and body so we can focus on Jesus rather than ourselves.