

We Are Called

Being a member of the Ukrainian Catholic Church is not the same as belonging to a social club. Through the Mysteries of Initiation we are called to make a difference in the world. Many think the biblical reminder to "pray unceasingly" expects our vocation is to be a monk in the world. While this is true for some, we are all called to pray in more ways than just that one ideal. Ascetism, (living a holy life) is only one description of our approach to living out our theology. We can make a difference if, like Mary, through contemplation, we can complement the active approach of Martha to attend to others. Even so, like the monk, contemplation comes before action.

We are called not just to save ourselves, our families and friends, or just the members of our church. We are called to change the world. In Our Lord's ministry, He began changing the world, and it is in that process that we are to continue. In His ministry Jesus opposed the culture of His day. In politics, He challenged the Romans. And said "render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." He gave a guiding principle that leads us to follow the law, yet at the same time, the priority is always following God. We cannot permit immorality and that is why Jesus was crucified for the crime of sedition, as "King of the Jews". Our Lord called the Jewish leaders of His time hypocrites to show that their lifestyle was not following the teachings found in the Sacred Scriptures (the revealed Law and the Prophets). In both these instances, Jesus opposed the common culture. This used to be phrased "He was counter-cultural".

We, too, then must pick up this revolutionary banner of opposing things in our culture that are immoral. That is why even though going beyond just the personal level, we support changes in American immigration policy. We support measures that take care of the elderly through such programs as Social Security. Take care of the orphan (or neglected) through Child Protective Services.

Today, one of the issues we are called to make a difference and oppose, is concerning the body. So we have to go back to the very beginning.

Adam and Eve were created in the image and likeness of God. We are, too. This is a fundamental statement concerning who we are. It leads to our full growth in the doctrine of *theosis*, which is essential in our catechetical practice. We experience the good in our real-life experience, but we know that not everything is good. The cause of evil in the world is a matter that is debated theologically. It is not the purpose here to discuss ancestral or original sin but rather to recognize the reality of sin in our lives and our world.

The sin of Adam and Eve, no matter what we see as its cause, took place by "eating the forbidden fruit" in deliberate opposition to the directive they were given. This was an action performed by the body. With the fall, the body became the preferential instrument in how we live our lives instead of the contemplative side of our spirit. We allowed our intelligence to be subjugated to pleasure or pain impulses. Our values become those that give us

pleasure to avoid those which cause us pain. This is described by Saint Maximus the Confessor and other Fathers as *philautia*, the egotistical, passionate love of oneself. Saint Maximus stresses that self-love is rooted in the body. It develops our attachment to "self love," which is an impassioned mindless love for one's body.

The Fathers like Maximus, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa note that through the body, experiences are intensified so that we become prisoners of pleasure and pain. This is the basis upon which we instinctively or impulsively decide our choices and actions. The Fathers did not take a negative view of the body or pleasure. Still, they note the degeneration of humanity has been present since the first sin.

Now we find there is a disassociation between the soul and the body. The soul has become subject to the urges of the body and may even become its slave. The harmony that existed in Adam and Eve has been broken. This disharmony spreads to our relationship with others. It begins with the first observation of another. We are aware of their physical attributes and form an opinion of the person. We no longer relate to a person's soul and wait for its revelation, but we instead go by a first impression of the body.

We are also disassociated from all of nature. When God created the first man out of the dust of the earth and breathed in his face the breath of life, he became a living being. The dirt designates the body and the breath the life of the soul, which consists of three parts. This form of creation shows that God has made us contain the basic elements of the universe; we are a microcosm to recapitulate and unify the whole of creation. Whose most perfect beings we are was noted by Philo of Alexandria. Note the order of the creation of man. God formed man out of the dust first and then breathed life into him, so man is created at the moment of the breath of life, until then inert.

According to the Fathers, Adam was created as a union of body and soul, neither of which was sufficient to define them. Saint Irenaeus says that flesh which has been molded is not a perfect man in itself; but the visible, tangible part of a human. Neither is the soul itself considered a part by itself the human, but it is the vivifying element of humanity, still only a part of man. This unity is at the core of how we understand humanity. It is the coexistence of two substances, and yet they are clearly distinct.

As you can see in creation, there is both a trinitarian image in terms of the three parts and an image of the two natures of the Christ. As the Trinity is never divided, nor are the two natures of Christ ever separated, even death does not end the union of body and soul for each person. The body is transformed into a glorified body. So, therefore, there must be a balance between the body and soul.

Blaise Pascal talks about the "double origin" of man; we were created in the image of God and still possess certain qualities of that image. Our bodies are still a "body of beauty" and "the temple of the Holy Spirit" noted in the first Pauline letter to the Corinthi-





ans; 6:19. Still, at the same time, the body is prone to suffering sickness and death. It is then, as St Paul's letter to the Romans says, a "body of sin."

How does this relate to us? God says in the book of the Prophet Jeremiah (1:5), "before I formed you in the womb, I knew you." So, just as the action of God brought forth the first man and first woman, our conception is an action of God. Our lives, our very being, is a gift from God. We belong to God. Our goal is to become one with God to be a partaker of the divine nature.

For this reason, asceticism—living a spiritual life—is an integral part of the Ukrainian Catholic experience and expectation. It is the discipline of the body so that it is pleasing to God and united with our soul we will attain the unity with God. But since the sin of Adam and Eve, there has been a contradiction or a contraindication of the desires of the body as opposed to the desires of the soul. The unity of the human being has broken down. The soul has become subject to the body. We see this in premarital and extramarital sex. When God creates the unity between two persons, it is a sacramental Mystery. What God has joined together, let no one put asunder. But when the body and its urges and desires take over, it brings our soul into a relationship that is not of God and not of the divine unity of the persons. When someone says the prohibition of premarital sex is not found in the Bible, they are incorrect. In the Hebrew Scriptures, there are numerous examples of a man and a woman going into a tent and coming out married. So we know the act was in the tent that created the marriage. Therefore the first person there is an intimate relationship with is the person we are married to in the eyes of God. That sounds strange in our society. Our society has moved away from the monogamous relationship to polyamorous relationships, which are the degradation coming from the sins of Adam and Eve. We are called then to be counter-cultural and oppose this style of life and strive within ourselves, our families, our friends, and our world, towards the union of one man and one woman in a bond of love, respect, and nurturing. Pope Saint Paul VI noted that once we permit widespread use of contraception, it will lead to the degradation of women. Women will become objects of male sexual desire. We can see a genuine counter-cultural willingness to oppose this degradation in the "#MeToo" movement.

The philosophy of "it's my body" is the philosophy of a culture removed from the Creation. We are not just a body; we are a union of body and soul. It is a gift from God; it is a gift that we are supposed to nurture, both our bodies and our souls. That is why our Church has so many dietary regulations that come from the Fathers to nurture our bodies and provide nourishment for the soul. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and therefore is a shrine to be taken care of while we remember it is not ours, but it is Christ's. So it is not my body; it's God's body. It is in our unity with Christ. We become a member of the Body of Christ. We are not just members of Christ but members of all the other members of the Body of Christ. There are many parts but one body, so each of us is part of each other. We keep our uniqueness because God gave us our uniqueness. Still, those qualities do not make one person better or

worse than another, nor do they allow us to exclude others. St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, in chapter 12, tells us instead: individuality brings about harmony between all people and brings solidarity with others.

Of the images of the afterlife given by scripture, two are notable: the cloud of witnesses and the heavenly banquet. The first shows our unity with each other and God for all eternity. The second shows that the body too will experience joy in the life to come. As the images of Gehenna or Hell show the torment of the body. We can see that the body has played a role in a person's salvation or damnation. So that is why our body's impulses need to be kept in control because there is also bodily enjoyment in heaven.

In the unity of persons, we see the divine element. In each of us, our creation is the work of a man, a woman, and God. Men and women can come together many times, and new life is not created. Life within the womb is created only by the presence of God. Therefore life in the womb is only part from the mother and part from the father but would not exist without divine intervention.

Consequently, it belongs to God and is entrusted to humans. This new life must be protected. We, in our true sense of justice, desire that no innocent party is hurt. For those desirous of ending the death penalty, there is a guilty party, and yet we try to defend that person's life. The infant in the womb is innocent; even in the case of rape or incest. The child conceived should not be held responsible for a parent's deed. Even when the life has some defect according to our cultural standards. It still has a right to life. As we can see in Scandinavia, a government encourages the terminating of Down Syndrome children in the womb. They have decided that that is a defect that needs to be eliminated. Those who have parented children with Down Syndrome know that while it may take special effort to care for that child, their expression of love is so much greater. And besides, science is not an absolute certainty; for there have been many children that tests have shown were expected to have Down Syndrome, did not.

Remember, the Hitler regime came up with a list of genetic defects that not only were terminated in the womb but people were executed so they would not spread the defect.

We are called to protect all life from conception to natural death. Not so many years ago, Social Studies textbooks in the United States said you could judge a country by the treatment of its young and old. Then, on one side there was a picture of a modern abortion clinic and the elderly begging on the streets of the Soviet Union. Then, for the United States, photos showed a modern orphanage and a modern nursing home. Well, this may not have been an accurate presentation of the truth; it should have been seen as an active and actual presentation of how all life should be.

We are called to make a better world. Our faith membership gives us the basis that as persons created in the image and likeness of God, we should base our actions on the improvement of all humanity.