

Conference 6: The Dimension of Sign in Marriage

- Introduction
  - Earlier this morning we covered the substance or “matter” of the sacrament of marriage in the plan of redemption, which was the first part of the second triptych of the Theology of the Body. Now we come to the “form” of the Sacrament, which together with that matter forms the “sign” of marriage and efficaciously brings about that grace.
  - It is one of the most immediately practical aspects of the Theology of the Body, what’s called the “language of the body.” Our gestures say something, something that can be read by ourselves and by others. That language has a built in grammar. It’s true, like any speech, if there’s an adequation between what is being said and what genuinely exists. It’s a lie when this correspondence is only pretended. Jesus praised Nathanael for being without guile and criticized many of the Pharisees for being actors (that’s what the word hypocrites means in Greek). This section therefore is not just relevant to the sign of marriage but also to the sign of our being called as Christians to be little Christians, other Christs.
- Overview of the Dimension of Sign
  - “Language of the Body” and the Reality of the Sign
    - Man and woman enter into the sacrament of marriage by expressing their mutual consent to take the other in fidelity, come what may. They administer the sacrament to each other, which the priest witnesses. The sacramental words by which the couple expresses their mutual consent is merely the sign of the coming into being of marriage. Without consummation, the marriage is not yet constituted in its full reality. The sacramental words can only be fulfilled by means of conjugal intercourse, determined from the beginning by the Creator, in leaving father and mother, cleaving to each other and becoming one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24). Both the words and the reality are important with regard to the structure of the sacramental sign, which effects the saving grace it signifies.
    - For the sacramental sign to be constituted, the reality must correspond to the words. It is determined by the “language of the body,” in which man and woman express the reciprocal gift of masculinity and femininity in one flesh as the basis of the conjugal union of persons. The sacramental sign is constituted by the fact that the newlyweds use the same “language of the body” as the beginning. They give it an intentional expression at the level of intellect and will in the words of the liturgy. “I take you as my wife/husband” imply the unique and irrepeatable “language of the body” situated in the communion of persons, which we hear in the promise to be faithful in sickness, sadness, and to honor and love all the days of one’s life. The language of the body is not just the substratum but the constitutive element of the personal communion. Man and woman become for each other a mutual gift in their masculinity and femininity, discovering and reciprocally expressing the significance of the body irreversibly for life. The sign is comprised both by the words of administration and the recollection of this “language of the body” until death. This is a visible and efficacious sign of the covenant with God in Christ.
    - Prophets teach us about a “prophetism” of the body (especially Hos, Ez, 2<sup>nd</sup> Is) in analogy to the language of the body.
      - Hosea condemned Israel’s infidelity not just with words, but in the language of the action of marrying a prostitute, in which the husband shows is both merciful and demanding. Ezekiel used the symbol of Jerusalem’s adultery (Ezek 16 and 23), saying she “played the harlot” with any passerby.

- In these passages, the body speaks a “language” of which it is not the author. Its author is the person with the everlasting vocation to the communion of persons. Man cannot express this language of personal existence and vocation without the body. Since his creation, man’s most profound words — of love, giving, fidelity — demand an adequate “language of the body,” without which they cannot be fully expressed. This refers both to marriage and to celibacy for the Kingdom. By means of this “language of the body,” the prophets express the spousal depth of the Covenant and all that is opposed to it, of good and evil, fidelity and adultery.
- The prophet’s “language of the body,” like any language, is not just moral, but the expression of categories of truth and falsity. The body speaks the truth through fidelity and conjugal love, and lies when it commits “adultery.” This is not substituting ethical with logical categories. Truth is a correspondence between what is said and reality. Fidelity and chastity correspond to the spousal significance of the human body in its masculinity and femininity; adultery contradicts and opposes this meaning.
- **The essential element for marriage as a sacrament is the “language of the body” in its aspects of truth, which constitutes the sacramental sign.** The language of the body enters into the integral structure of the sacramental sign whose principal subject is man, male and female. The words of consent constitute this sign, because in them we find the spousal significance of the body expressed by the words “I take you as my wife/husband.” In these words is confirmed the essential “truth” of the language of the body in conjugal love, fidelity and integrity. In pronouncing the words, the newlyweds set themselves in the line of the “propheticism of the body.” The language of the body expressed by the ministers of the Sacrament constitutes the visible sign of the Covenant and the grace it imparts, going back to creation and sustained by the redemption of the body. The woman and man address each other in the second person singular, “you” and “I,” and the language of the body through the words constitutes the communion of persons.
  - The person reads the meaning of the language of the body in its spousal significance. God created man and woman capable of expressing this language, in creation and then redemption. They express it the language of the body in the sacrament, in which not only do they embrace the personal reality of the communion of persons, but the very sources of its prophetic eloquence and sacramental power.
  - The spouses need to ensure that the sign originating in the language of the body is continually “re-read” in truth, remaining organically linked to conjugal morality. In the truth of the sign, there is the procreative significance of the body, paternity and maternity. The man and woman commit to “accept children lovingly and responsibly and bring them up according to the law of Christ and the Church.”
  - A body as such does not speak, but man speaks re-reading the significance of the body and what can be expressed by man only through the body. Man does not speak with the language of the body, but permits the body to speak “for him” “on his behalf,” with his personal authority. This is akin to the “propheticism of the body,” because the prophets speaks in the name and with the authority of a person.
  - They’re called to form their life together as a communion of persons on the basis of that language. By means of their conduct and comportment, actions and gestures, the spouses are called to become the authors of such meanings of the language of the body, in which their love, fidelity, conjugal morality and indissoluble union are nourished. The meanings of the language of the body are synthetically “programmed” into conjugal consent so that the spouses may later, day-by-day, identify themselves with it. There is an organic link between rereading in truth the integral significance of the language of the body and the later use of that language in conjugal life. The spouse’s body language is called to speak “prophetically” the truth that has been reread and live according to this truth. Otherwise, he is guilty of a lie

and falsifies the language of the body. **There are “true” and “false” prophets.** Spouses are called to be “true” in bearing witness in their body language to spousal and procreative love. We base all of this on what we have analyzed before concerning the key words of Christ and the individual dimensions of the theology of the body.

- The person who rereads the language of the body and then expresses is historically the man of concupiscence, who can re-read and express not according to the requirements of marriage as a covenant and sacrament. He can do it “adulterously.” The man of concupiscence has been called to the ethos of redemption. The three-fold concupiscence doesn’t destroy the capacity to reread continually in truth the language of the body, but it causes many errors in rereading the language. These errors give rise to sin.
- In the ethos of redemption, it is possible to pass from error to truth, from sin to chastity, in life according to the Spirit. Historical man can reread it in truth and express and continually renew fidelity no matter what all the days of life. He is capable of forming in truth that language in conjugal and familial communion. The sacramental sign contains a specific theological anthropology, a hermeneutics of man and a hermeneutics of the sacrament. Man, the author (co-author) of the sacramental sign of divine creation and redemption, is a conscious subject of self-determination. Man is capable of discerning truth from falsity in the language of the body. He is the author of the meanings of that language, whether true or false.
- Song of Songs
  - The Song of Songs shows us how to read this language of the body well, as a sign of the gift that is the person, of the singular language of love originating in the heart. It has a rich language of the body, the visible sign of man’s and woman’s participation in God’s covenant of grace of love offered to man.
  - Body language expresses itself in mutual fascination of the bride’s femininity and the groom’s masculinity. Their loving words concentrate on the “body,” as the visible sign of their attraction toward the other person. Love for the person in the body unleashes a special experience of the beauty of the person, which gives rise to mutual satisfaction. “You are all beautiful, my beloved” (Sg 4:7). The “I” of the woman speaks to the man in every feminine trait — almost without words — leading to enchantment. The body language finds a rich echo in the groom’s words about his satisfying experience of beauty.
  - In Song of Songs 7, the man’s words not only praise her feminine beauty, but speak of the self-giving of the person. The bride responds to his longing with the gift of herself in love, which is both spiritual and sensual. They reread the significance of the body in truth toward the sign of their mutual gift of self. The language of the body is part of the process of mutual attraction in affectionate solicitude and mutual rediscovery. In meeting each other, the search continues interiorly with the heart “awake.” This aspiration born of love on the basis of body language is a search for integral beauty and purity. We see eros as the form of love at work in the energies of desire and in the subjective certainty of mutual, faithful and exclusive belonging. But we also see the restlessness of “eros,” which is asymptotic and needs to be self-controlled. The person cannot be fully appropriated and mastered by another. In re-reading this body language, man and woman conclude that the fullness of their belonging is found in the mutual gift in love that never dies (“stern as death”). This truth about interior love and the gift continually calls them to express it their mutual belonging in mutual self-giving.
  - The horizon is eros found in Song of Songs is open to another horizon of love in Paul, speaking another language, inviting to another communion. This “agape” brings eros to completion by purifying it.
- When the “language of the Body” becomes the language of the Liturgy (reflections on Tobit)
  - Tobiah’s and Sarah’s love is not expressed in poetic words, but by their choices and actions in body language, especially prayer.
  - Tobiah’s prayer — which is first of praise and thanksgiving, then supplication — situates the language of the body on the objective and essential terms of the theology of the body. Their

conjugal pact expresses and realizes the mystery originating in God, in God's original covenant with the human race in eternal Love. They respond to God, asking for his mercy and the grace to live faithfully to a happy old age. They ask to be able to respond to love. Both together form this sign of marriage. Through the one and the other the "language of the body", reread in the subjective dimension of the truth of human hearts and in the "objective" dimension of the truth of living union, becomes the language of the liturgy

- We see this as well in Eph, when we re-read it on the basis of the language of the Body. The body is called to speak a holy language of love and marriage is meant to inject sanctity into human persons.

- Rereading Eph on the basis of the language of the body

- We find in Ephesians 5 a "mystical" language of the body. Marriage is a "great mystery," fulfilled in the spousal union of Christ and the Church. The text extends the analogy of the union of Christ and the Church to the sacramental sign of the marriage covenant between man and woman. In extending the mystical analogy to the "language of the body," re-read in the truth of spousal love and conjugal union, the language of the body is brought nearer to the dimension of real sanctity. **The sacraments inject sanctity into human persons,** expressed and effected in the liturgy.
- The liturgy elevates the conjugal pact of man and woman based on body language re-read in truth to the dimension of mystery, enabling the covenant to be fulfilled as a mystery through body language. The liturgical language of this sacramental sign signifies not just the coming-into-being of the marriage, but also its whole duration as a sacred, sacramental reality, rooted in creation and redemption. The liturgical language assigns to both man and woman love, fidelity, indissolubility, unity and conjugal honesty through the "language of the body." It also gives them as a duty all the "sacrum" of the person and the communion of persons in this language. **In this sense, liturgical language becomes body language, a series of acts and duties that form the "spirituality" or "ethos" of marriage.** In daily life, these acts become duties and duties become acts, commitments of a spiritual nature.
- The language of the body is an uninterrupted continuity of liturgical language, expressed not only as the attraction of Song of Songs, but also a profound experience of the sacrum, which mysteriously infuses masculinity and femininity, going back to the "beginning." The mutual "reverence for Christ" and "respect" to which the spouses are called is the spiritually mature form of mutual attraction going back to Genesis. This mature form is found in the Song of Songs and in Tobit.
- This spiritual maturity of attraction is the **gift of piety** (fear of the Lord). Paul's teaching on chastity as "life according to the Spirit" (Rm 8:5) allows us to interpret that "respect" as a gift of the HS. Ephesians seems to indicate chastity "out of reverence for Christ" as a virtue and a gift. Through the virtue and gift, the mutual attraction of masculinity and femininity spiritually matures, dissociates from concupiscence, and discovers the freedom of the gift, united to femininity and masculinity in the true spousal significance of the body. This liturgical language — of the sacrament and the mystery — becomes in their common life the "language of the body" in depth, simplicity and beauty
- Through the continual expression of the sacramental sign of marriage in the language of the body, man and woman encounter the great "mystery" and transfer the light (truth and beauty) of that mystery to the language of the practice of love, fidelity and conjugal honesty. In this way, conjugal life becomes liturgical (an act of worship).

- Applications

- Body language

- John Paul II talks about how "liturgical language becomes body language," a series of acts and duties that form the "spirituality" or "ethos" of marriage." But it points to the larger issue of the "body language" we use in the sacraments.

- We need to ask, is there a correspondence between the language of the liturgy and our body language. If someone were deaf, could they get the gist of what we are doing vis-à-vis God and vis-à-vis them by just observing us?
  - Story of St. John Vianney before the Tabernacle.
  - Story of Spanish military salute and the way some priests make the sign of the Cross.
  - Story of old Irish priest who would slam the monstrance.
  - Story of priest who would say with in a total absolutely lifeless monotone, “This is the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Happy are those called to this supper” as he brought it down to the paten before anyone could say “Lord, I am not worthy...”
- This gets to the whole subject of the *Ars Celebrandi*, which is so important for us as priests.
  - B16 said to priests this is “mens concordet voci,” the mind according with the words we say, that we really mean the words, that it doesn’t become a mere rite or recitation. We recognize the one to whom we’re speaking and we say the words to him with all their reverence and depth.
  - The TOB also makes us very aware of what we say by our body language as well and I think this is clearly part of the ars celebrandi. Do are gestures adequate to what we’re doing?
  - I am very close friends with a family in Portugal. The wife, Maria, had been a Carmelite novice in France before she realized God was calling her to marriage. She now is the mother of eight in Lisbon, a contributor to the Portuguese version of *Communio*, a true contemplative in the middle of the world. During the year for priests, she and her husband started a movement specifically to thank priests, having dinners in their honor, taking out full-page ads in their national newspapers with thousands of names just to say to the priests of Portugal, “We love you and we’re so grateful for all you do to bring us to God.” Because she’s a busy mom who wants to attend Mass each day, she’s often traveling all over the place in Lisbon to attend while fulfilling her duties as a mom. Because she knows I preach a lot of retreats to priests, she once wrote me a heart-felt letter sharing some of her observations about a lot of things in the hope that her observations from the pews may be of use to us.
  - I’d just like to share with you a few of her thoughts about the “body language” involved in the ars celebrandi:
    - If it is said that children learn by imitating their parents’ example, you could say that a thousand fold for the priest and his community.
    - A priest’s way of kneeling reveals a lot about the intensity of purpose and love with which he enters the Church to say Mass. Right knee to the floor, before the altar or the tabernacle, never less than one full second, shows us you know it is God you are adoring.
    - After the readings and homily, we need a little time to assimilate. If you sit down after the homily and wait a little before you proceed, you will be training us into listening with our hearts to the Word of God. Every Mass can then become like a short retreat.
    - [Please pray and don’t rush through the offertory.] I try to tell my children that at that time, the angels will take whatever it is we want to entrust God with them to the altar. But they can only do so if we [have time to] formalize in our hearts what particular blessings we are grateful for, what joys or sorrows, worries or intentions we may have. Most people are unaware that this is the time to offer this particular Mass, their entire life, everything to God, with Jesus.
    - If the consecration words are said in a lower tone of voice, with no hurry, powerfully, it will help us re-center at that most important moment of the Mass. For a mother trying to get her young kids to be attentive, it is wonderful to be able to tell them that when the priest speaks slower and with a different tone of voice – that that is the moment when Jesus becomes present on the altar, especially if there are no [altar server to ring the] bells. We need time also to help our little ones say their adoring “My dear Jesus, I love you so,” or something of the kind.

- A particular priest, whose piety has greatly impressed me, holds the consecrated host and chalice way up high for 8 full seconds and then puts his right knee on the floor for 3 full seconds (to time yourself one suggestion is to find a prayer that takes that long to be uttered and then say it slowly, for example the Fátima prayer “My God I believe, adore, hope and love you; I beg your forgiveness for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you”).
- It will also become very telling if you put the Host down very delicately with the reverence of knowing that it is no longer a piece of bread but our living God, as real and true as He is in His majesty in heaven. I always think of the awe with which Our Lady must have put down the sleeping Baby Jesus in His cradle!
- Your posture is also very revealing. If you close your eyes once in a while and pause in silent prayer after having invited us to a more intentional prayer with the “Let us pray” we will learn the timings and different intensities of the liturgy and we will know we can pray with our body too. We are in no hurry. You may pause when you like and when you want us to pay further attention. If sometimes you change the rhythm or tone of a prayer we will ‘hear’ that you are praying and not just repeating prayers.
- Let your gestures be graceful, gracious and aesthetically very beautiful. Very extreme gesture like holding your arms straight up, tend to make us focus on irrelevant things like the shirt the priest is wearing. ... What you do with your hands at all times is very important: if you prefer not to use the very classical way of putting the two hands together, there are other ways of joining hands that confer prayerfulness and composure. But choose one and stick to it as your particular spiritual posture, your ‘signature’. Your hands are precious. You have been consecrated to perform the biggest miracles. Don’t let the knowledge of your own shortcomings interfere with what God is doing through you.
- As the Blessed Sacrament is taken to the tabernacle, hold [the ciborium] up high! Our Lord is going to stay in the tabernacle, He is no longer on the altar, and it is instructing to see that He deserves reverence and adoration.
- How great [it is] when we can tell you are not a bureaucrat of the Mass and that the Mass, this particular Mass, the Lord and this community is the real object of your love and the affection of your priestly heart.”
- Speaking through gestures
  - Pope Francis is teaching us all quite a bit about the new evangelization and about the priesthood. His body language is incredibly eloquent and has the whole world listening.
    - Rather than speaking about the dignity of every person he embraces the handicapped, the mentally challenged, the visibly repulsive with great love and affection, which is worth more than 1,000 homilies.
    - There is a correspondence between what he believes and what he does. BBC interview the day after his election. Difference between symbol and sign.
    - Story about the hemorrhaging of Catholics in Brazil and Argentina during his O Globo interview. A mother doesn’t interact with her children primarily by correspondence, but by hugging, embracing, drawing near.
  - Is our body language similar? Can people read our priorities?
    - This shouldn’t be empty gestures, symbols, but should flow from the heart, but it does matter.
    - Do we make time for our people? Do we want to embrace them as a father of a family on Sundays, spending time with them after Mass, or do we demonstrate that we find them a nuisance?
    - Do we show a special care for those on the extremes? Or do we have a specialized ministry to the beautiful, witty, and wealthy?



- Conclusion
  - We know that Christ himself taught not only by his words, but also by his gestures. He never said merely “Do what I say!,” but always, “Follow me.” He washed feet and explicitly said that he was doing this as an example so that just as he had done, so we, too, would do. He who is the Truth incarnate, the word made flesh, who gave us the command to love one other as he has loved us first, to love not just in sentiment but in deed. We finish by asking him to send the Holy Spirit so that we may align our actions to the Truth he is and have our priestly lives become a continuous proclamation of the words of consecration that we will pronounce together in a few minutes.