

“Is that some kind of dance club?”

by seminarian Andrew Trapp

Last summer, my sister Lindsay worked as a pizza delivery girl for Domino's. She tells the story of how one day she was sent to deliver pizza to a nearby Red Lobster, whose workers must have been sick of seafood! The employee waiting for her noticed the bright yellow bumper sticker on her car that says, “Chastity: The Choice of the Next Generation.” With a look of confusion, he pointed to the sticker and asked in all seriousness, “Chastity... is that some kind of dance club or something?”

If I were in her place I don't think I could have kept a straight face, but Lindsay managed to stay cool and respond with something like, “No, um, actually chastity means sexual purity. And your total is \$23.57.”

As her story shows, many young people have never heard of chastity. We might occasionally hear something about abstinence, the saving of sex for marriage, but chastity is about much more than merely avoiding non-marital sex. It is about purity of heart and body, purity both inside and out. Take as an example a young guy who is still a virgin (good!), but who is thinking lustfully about a girl, or viewing pornography, or using his girlfriend as a means of selfish pleasure (not so good!). He might technically be practicing abstinence, but he is not practicing chastity.

Chastity is the virtue that allows one to appreciate sex as a beautiful gift from God, meant to be the ultimate sign of the total self-gift and union of husband and wife in marriage. Chaste persons use their sexuality in a way that reflects true and honest love. For those who are married, chastity is a call to be faithful in both mind and heart, and to make sex a gift of self that is total, freely given, and open to life. For example, chaste spouses do not use sex as a means of control, or use the other as an object for selfish pleasure.

For those who are unmarried, chastity is a call to express affection and love in pure, non-sexual ways, such as through flowers, holding hands, romantic walks, kisses, and ski-diving. (That last one I just threw in for fun.) God is inviting you to learn how to master your sexual desires and to protect your sexuality as His precious gift, so that on your wedding night you can give that gift to your beloved with freedom and without any regrets.

Even between two people who are in a committed relationship and truly love one other, sex before marriage would be a lie. With their bodies, they would be saying, “I give myself to you totally, holding nothing back, for the rest of my life!” But they have not in fact given themselves totally to each other for the rest of their lives. They have not yet been joined irrevocably by the sacrament of marriage. Both are still holding much back from one another, and both can get up and walk away at any time.

Maybe you might be thinking, “This chastity thing, I dunno... I don’t think I am strong enough to do that.” And you are right—you definitely are *not* strong enough without Christ! But by meeting the Lord in prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments, you will receive the strength to grow in holiness and purity. It won’t happen overnight, but you will find that chastity becomes easier with time. Slowly, with God’s grace, you will grow in self-mastery. The temptations that chained you will no longer have such a hold on you. Chastity will become part of who you are.

And you will find that chastity brings freedom and joy! It brings the freedom to love our loved ones and those around us with authentic, self-giving love, instead of hurting those around us with selfish love. It gives the joy of loving others for their own sake and of being loved for your own sake.

That sure beats a dance club!

“How far is too far?” & other chastity questions for teens :
www.PureLoveClub.com

Purity help for Catholic husbands :
www.dads.org

Andrew writes reflections from seminary like this every few weeks. If you’d like to receive future ones by email, please drop him a line at atrapp@pcj.edu . His vocation story and past reflections can be found online at www.CatholicHeart.com.