

## ***A Life-Giving Vision for the Way we Live Love***

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**On April 6<sup>th</sup>, you will be guest speaker at the Tri-Diocesan Catholic Family Conference, where you will be putting a lot of emphasis on listening to God's voice...**

Yes! God continuously reveals Himself to us in and through our everyday experiences. We need to be sensitive to that voice and retune ourselves to how He speaks in a practical way. When we look back on our day, we can ask ourselves how God was present. Sometimes, God speaks through an encounter with a cashier at the grocery store. Or at soccer practice. When the coach said something to me, I can see how it was the voice of God.

### **Our God is a down-to-Earth God...**

Absolutely. He's not distant and theoretical, but very much present and accepting, through the messiness of our daily lives. God's love is incarnational. He walked among us, and with us, as a human being. God is close, communicating to us through our senses, through experiences that touch us visibly in our lives. He gives us visible signs that point to an invisible reality.

When I think on that truth, it always amazes me. God created us, on purpose, as people with bodies, with a purpose. When we say Theology of the Body, we're really talking about a whole anthropology, the way we live and encounter God as human beings. When babies start kicking in the womb, parents marvel. And when they're born, babies become signs. Without being able to even speak a word, they're gifts. They point us to God.

So, the Theology of the Body is not only just about our sexuality, although that's certainly an important aspect of human life. It's about the whole human person, in relation to God and in relation to others. It's a life-giving vision for the way we live love. We can experience pieces of heaven now, through life's experiences, and by listening to God's voice in our daily lives.

### **And yet our daily lives are not always easy. Life can be painful.**

That's quite true. Catholic families are struggling. There's an awareness of a decline of Christianity's cultural influence. And as a Church, we're struggling with the abuse crisis. These can be despairing things.

And of course, each of us experience pain of some sort, whether we're young or old. There's the job you don't want, or even severe illnesses like cancer. There's death, even infant death. I'm certainly not immune to life's pain. I've struggled too. I've known the pain of miscarriage and the grief of having my twin sister murdered.

## **And yet your faith keeps you going...**

The key is to reflect and meditate on the Incarnation. What does it really say about God? Not only did God design and create our humanity, He became one of us to show us how to love.

Part of that love is that our God was betrayed, abused and tortured, but chose forgiveness on the cross. Our God knows our pain. He knows our frustrations and struggles. He cares deeply and is near. And because he knew pain, He helps us deal the pain of illness, of life's transitions, as well as our insecurities and anxieties. With Him though, we learn how to let go and continue to love Him and each other with confidence.

Our surrender also offers us pieces of heaven. That means so much to me. It's a reminder that I have so much to give. We all do. To each other in our families. To our friends and colleagues. To society. Our Catholic anthropology has so much to offer to the world. There's an incredible capacity for us to deal with our bodies and our everyday lives, with all its joy and pain, as an essential part of spiritual life.

## **You mentioned an awareness of a decline of Christianity's cultural influence. Not an easy thing to grapple with if you're a teenager...**

When you're an adolescent, you're trying to discover who you are while facing pressure to conform to our culture's values. That's why I titled my talk for teens ***So What God?!*** What difference does God make in my life? That's the question. And teens, as well as all of us, are faced with it 24 hours a day, every day. Who does God want me to be? And to do?

But I focus on teens because there's an amazing pressure on them. It takes tremendous courage to go against the culture. So, the talk focusses on why God is important, and why our attitudes and decisions in our daily lives matter. Like all of us, teens are called to be disciples *right now*. We all need to practice listening to God.

We they practice listening to God, teens have positive, strong relationships with their parents, teachers and mentors. They become great friends. By helping others, for instance helping a friend respect a curfew at a party. By being reliable and trustworthy. And by not being afraid to disagree about current sexual attitudes. And by choosing wisely the people they hang out with.

Teens can be a profound witness by being good disciples, which means following Jesus moment by moment. It's not about being perfect, but intentional, in striving to become a more loving, forgiving disciple.

### **Discipleship is not always easy...**

Of course. But as Saint John-Paull II reminds us in his Theology of the Body, *our actions become our habits*. And our habits become our personality. Every good choice, every bad choice matter. If I decide not to take a walk today, it becomes easier not to take a walk tomorrow. And my health could be harmed. We must keep choosing to follow Jesus for our spiritual health. Do our choices take us further away from Him, or closer?

So, when a teenager chooses discipleship, we all must support and the constant choices he or she makes. We need to recognize the challenge and validate the choice with a lot of encouragement. So that when teens are asked **So What God?!**, they can answer: **Everything!**