

The Beauty of Modesty

Here I am, a woman in her mid-twenties, who has only now finally discovered the beauty of womanhood after so long. How did I come to this wonderful discovery? What opened my eyes? Why did I not discover it years ago?

The answer probably lay in my discovery of Truth.

For most of my life Truth lay dormant; it was only after I was baptised several years ago, that I began to discover God's ways as His grace poured into my life. I strove to fathom the problems around me in the world, and little by little God opened up more glorious truths – and exposed more terrible evils. The closer I journeyed to God Who is Truth, the more painfully aware I was of the brokenness around me and the neglect of God's natural order which He destined for our physical and spiritual good. I saw that to love God; to love Truth, was a risk of a lifetime, but one in which my joy increased and made my life worth living.

It so happened, that the path of God took me to a place where I discovered my call to Religious Life. I was so excited, that I began to wear a veil on my head; this was at first due to my desire to be a nun, but then later I discovered more about how God designed women – and men – to live. When I looked around me I was sad to see how mankind has forgotten God's ways, which the Church had taught so faithfully over the centuries. The Church, as the light of the world, brings Christ to others, and shines in the darkness so that those who see her may have hope. Yet we all have a free will to choose whether we follow the Light or not. But how can we have the power to choose if we do not have the knowledge of both ways? For this reason, God places them before us. Which will you choose? It is your decision...

Because of my interest in the veil, I turned more intensively to the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church, our Mother. As a mother, she feeds us, her faithful children. Like a little daughter, I eagerly desired to imitate her and follow her teachings – those she got from her Father, Spouse and Teacher, God the Holy Trinity. In a world of relativism and moral compromise, her guiding light of Truth was the only one which shone steadily through all time. Wisdom would be justified by her fruits.

This is what Mother Church taught me...

As Woman is to Man, so the Church is to Christ. Christ was not created for the Church, but the Church for Christ. As the Church is *for* Christ, so also is Christ *by* the Church; He is born and carried to others through the Church – just as Woman is created *for* Man, and as Man is born *by* Woman in her womb. The Church cannot live without Christ, yet Christ cannot be brought to others except by His Body, the Church. Therefore the role of the woman and man is comparable to the role of the Church and Christ.

As the Church bears Christ the Life of the world in the womb of Faith, so Woman bears Mankind in the secret of her womb. Woman has a vocation of Life-bearing. God implants new souls in her womb and the new life grows in her; a precious life conceived by the union between Man and Woman in co-operation with God. Women have the role of motherhood, whether physical, spiritual or both. This life they nurture makes them sacred and holy – and what is sacred and holy is veiled in mystery and needs to be nurtured and protected against what is profane.

All that is made by God, and pertains to God, is sacred and beautiful. God, the author of Beauty, gives life, and so life is sacred. God covers Himself with mystery; we have to enter in secret to find Him. Profanity entered the world through the devil, the enemy of God. He comes to destroy what is life-giving; this he does in subtlety.

Women, as life-bearers, have to be especially safeguarded against the enemy; this is what led me to discover the importance of Modesty. This is a virtue that shows respect for one's sacred body, and for others – and for women, who bear new life, it is particularly important. Women have the natural traits of beauty, tenderness, vulnerability, and openness, which are also shown by the way their bodies are designed. The enemy hates openness.

Modesty protects against the enemy, for it safeguards the moral integrity and prevents occasions for sin to come in and destroy what life and goodness is there. It is of particular importance, because it is so external and visible to others. The language of the world is conveyed in external appearances. Pope Pius XII said that “modesty is the bulwark of chastity ... because it moderates acts closely connected with the very object of chastity”. Chastity is fidelity to God's plan for how we use our bodies; it is purity from sexual immorality. To be sexually immoral is to

allow the enemy to come in and destroy lives. Why would we want to allow that, if we have learned how special we are, and hence have the power to choose better? Immorality breaks down the family of society, and the communion between persons. This is the evils that modesty prevents outwardly like a shield. Modesty encourages us to have consideration for community, and respect for our own bodies as well as others. It not only preserves us from destruction, but our families and children as well; it protects all of society.

What then, are the requirements for modesty? Firstly, a foundation of knowledge of the truth about ourselves and God is needed. If someone is modest outwardly, but inwardly does not understand it or desire it, then their modesty will fail, just as a house without foundations will collapse. We need to learn what respect is; for ourselves and for others. How do we begin to learn this? By a *desire to seek* this knowledge that brings us the happiness that God wants us to have; by asking God to teach us how special and precious we really are. Secondly, a *love* of this knowledge of the Truth is needed, for without love, all we do is in vain. And lastly, we need to put this knowledge of modesty into practice in our lives; to live as Jesus lived.

There is an inward and an outward modesty. Inwardly, our heart and mind must be at peace with who we are, and who God is. This peace is found in knowledge of Truth. We need a humble, obedient and open heart that lets God in, as a window lets in light; a heart that submits to God and fights against the false, selfish desires of the flesh that only give pleasure for a day, yet torment for ever. We need a mind determined to give God the glory and honour for our talents, one which does not seek vain attention, but takes an unobtrusive position in life. This sounds too much for the attention-loving ego to bear, but when we take away all the glory we do not own, we have nothing left, as all our glory comes as a gift from God. We shall discover that in giving God all glory, we will find greater joy than we can imagine.

Outward modesty sets us facing others with a moderate and respectable attitude and appearance, born out of a peace and acceptance of truth within; to avoid extremes in behaviour and attracting undue attention to ourselves; to have good manners towards others. Another important aspect of modesty is how we clothe ourselves. The Church teaches that there are three conditions that our way of dressing should meet.

Firstly, we need *hygiene* – to dress in a way that we look after our bodies, for example, dressing to cover our skin from too much sun exposure so to avoid harming it.

Secondly, we need *modesty* – to cover our bodies in order to avoid showing the intimate, private parts of our bodies, and the areas around them, to others. Our private parts are for the procreation of the human race, and are meant to only be shown to our spouse in married life. The concealing of these parts especially applies to women, who are naturally more attractive. The very meaning of the word “private” shows that it is not meant to be public. To cover our bodies respectfully, is to also respect those around us and help them to act more respectfully to us. To dress modestly is to love ourselves and others and to help them to avoid occasions of sin. This way, we don’t only benefit ourselves, but we help others on their path to God as well.

Thirdly, we need *decorum* – to clothe ourselves in a manner that shows respect for self and for others; to have, as much as possible, good grooming habits; to have clean bodies and clothes, to wash our faces, and brush our hair; to have a neat appearance, which is suitable for the occasion, whether it be menial work, or going to family, or to church.

How much should we cover to meet these needs? The Church has not given any official guidelines, but it is generally considered praiseworthy, for women in particular, to wear clothing that totally covers our breasts, our shoulders and back, to wear skirts (or a pair of feminine pants) that are long enough to come below our knees, and to wear sleeves that cover our shoulders and upper arms. It is also better to not wear anything too tight or transparent that hints at what should be hidden.

The point is not to make rigid rules on what to wear or not, but that we respect our sacred bodies. In this way, we can still be flexible and wear anything we like, but also dress with good taste and avoid vulgarity. It is also better to avoid dressing like the opposite sex. In many occasions, our work may require us to adjust to the situation, but if respectability is met, we can still fulfill modesty. Modesty enhances our beauty as women; it brings out our inner beauty whilst still retaining our outer beauty.

I went through a time in my life when I had no respect and love for myself; I did not have good grooming habits and dressed untidily. But I found that dressing respectably made me feel better inside. Sometimes by practising it on the outside, it moves deeper into our hearts and we begin to believe that we are respectable and special. Many people living in this broken world struggle to realize that they have any worth and value. We are constantly bombarded by the world with messages that “if we have assets, we must flaunt them!” This mentality is a selfish and cruel commercialization of something so sacred! To flaunt ourselves is to prostitute our bodies. Are we that worthless? No!

Even if we have been told all our lives that we are worthless, nothing – and I mean NOTHING – will change the fact that we have been created by a God of such love and holiness. Everything He made is good and full of worth to Him. He created nothing useless. This is the Truth.

We do have a free will, but in living the way God made us to live, we will certainly find more happiness. Consider the goods we buy at the shops. Each of them is meant to function in a certain way, and yet if we use them in the wrong way, we will find they break sooner. It is like this with all created things. Every thing and every one has a function in life that, if followed, will prolong happiness. Does it not make our lives better to follow our destiny? Do we want to have fleshly pleasure in this life and hell in the next, or do we want Godly pleasure in this life and heaven in the next? In the end, it is for us to choose. Choose life, choose joy, choose truth.

Choose God. He makes all the difference.

Dolores S. Steenhuis
August 2009AD