

Parents are called to help children understand the dignity of their bodies

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Today as we gather on this Feast of the Assumption of Mary, we remember how God's plan for each of us to rise from the dead and to participate in eternal life was made clear in Mary's life. We are all to share in the gift of resurrection – the raising up of our bodies. Mary is raised first for she is unique in salvation history as the only mother of God, and she is the new Eve for all redeemed humanity. Because she is sinless, her body does not suffer decay before she is raised up bodily by Christ. Although each of us has sinned, we too are destined to share bodily resurrection.

The uniqueness of Mary occurs only because of Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ, Mary would have no significance for us. In the light of the saving action of Christ, Mary is hailed as the Mother of God. Her dignity has been proclaimed by the Church from her earliest days and taught by the Church from the earliest of times.

When we look at Mary's life we see the dignity of the human body and the truth that our bodies will, one day, truly be raised up. We see the confirmation of the promise that we too will share in eternal life -- not just our souls, but also our bodies will be glorified. In one of the greatest and most miraculous apparitions of Mary, our Lady of Guadalupe left us an image of herself. This image serves as a reminder to us of the truth of the Assumption: that Mary has entered into heaven in all her humanity. Her body is also in the glorified state. It is God's plan for each of us whom he has redeemed to also share in this glory, body and soul.

Today's feast day also points out to us the importance of prayer and, once again, Mary is our model. My sisters and brothers, look at her Magnificat. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: the Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his Name. He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation" (Luke 1:46-50). That is not just the prayer of Mary, but must become the prayer of every disciple. Each of us is truly blessed by our God, and our lives are meant to glorify God as Mary's did. Mary recognizes that she, although she is sinless, is a human being like you and me. She recognizes that she is his lowly servant. Her words teach us how to pray.

Someone once told me that one day as he prayed the Magnificat, he suddenly realized that it became his prayer and not simply Mary's prayer. The change in his relationship with God, once he made the Magnificat a prayer of his own heart, was amazing. He realized that he was lifting up his own heart to God, recognizing what God had done for

him, recognizing the depth of his mercy, the depth of his love -- that God is the one who has filled the hungry with good things, that God is the one who remembers his promise of mercy, not just once or twice, but forever. His is an eternal promise of mercy. You and I are called to receive that promise of mercy personally, as Mary received it. We are called to say “yes” to that mercy and to that steadfast love.

Finally, this feast day of Mary reminds us of the dignity of the human body. My sisters and brothers, we live in a time in which the human body is treated, at best, poorly. We fail to recognize the true dignity of the human body. From the very beginning, when God created man and woman, he created them in his image and likeness. His creation of the human body is part of how we reflect the image and likeness of God, and this gift was confirmed in the bodily incarnation of Jesus Christ. The body is sacred before God. The body is a good before God. His own son, the Word made flesh, took on a human body and this body is now seated at the right hand of the Father.

We live in a time in which the body is seen as something that can be discarded, put to any use whatever that we want, or treated solely as an object for sensual pleasure. Yet this is not the truth of the dignity of the human body. Parents are especially called upon today to help form the hearts and the minds of their children so that their children will recognize and reverence their bodies. Our children view the media, the internet and advertisements each day. The message communicated is that the body is a sensual object for pleasure alone or something that is not to be treated with reverence.

My sisters and brothers, open your eyes and look at the reverence that our God has for the human body. Look at the love that our God has for the human body. In creating us in his image and likeness, he has given to us the gift of our bodies. God has shown us the dignity of the body, both through Jesus and through Mary. Their bodies are a challenge for each of us to ponder and pray about. How do I reverence my own body? Do I reverence my own body with the same reverence that God has for my body? How do I treat my body? Do I see my body as a gift entrusted to me by God?

Two ways in which the dignity of the body is not respected are unnecessary transformations of the body's inherent beauty or overexposure of that beauty in ways that lead to misuse of our sexuality. We live in a society that has embraced multiple body piercings, tattoos, clothes that expose the body, and so many other different and strange things that none of us would have thought possible 25 years ago or maybe even 15 years ago. The use of multiple piercings or tattoos indicates that the body is a thing to be modified to express ourselves, yet the body is not a thing. Immodesty in dress does not proclaim the beauty of the body, although the body is truly beautiful. Instead, it leads us to use one another as objects, because we fail to respect the full meaning of our sexuality as a gift for life-giving, permanent, faithful love. What does that say? It says that many people clearly do not recognize and respect the goodness, the dignity, the beauty and the true meaning of the human body.

We, as Catholics have a responsibility to speak to society the truth of the human body, the dignity of the body. And parents, in forming the hearts of your child, you must not

just say “no.” “No, don’t get tattoos. No, don’t get piercings. Don’t pierce your nose, your eyebrows or other parts of your body.” More importantly, you must teach and explain to your children that their body is truly a gift, that their body is created in the image and likeness of God, that their body is to be revered, that their body is to be treated with dignity and that, one day, they will share bodily in the resurrection of Christ. We too will have a glorified body like Jesus and Mary.

In conclusion, on this Feast of the Assumption of Mary we recognize Mary who was assumed into heaven. We honor her and we call her blessed with Elizabeth. “Blessed are you among women” (Luke 1:42). We are a new generation that proclaims Mary blessed. As the Mother of Jesus, she is our mother. She always leads us to Christ. She desires only the good for us. I encourage each of you to reflect upon your own personal relationship with Mary, recognizing yourself as her beloved daughter or son, as one whom she loves as much as she loves her only son, Jesus. That is the depth of her love for each one of you. She loves each of us and cares for us tenderly.

Second, let us also reflect upon the words of Mary in the Magnificat and how we can make that prayer our own prayer. As we pray, let us pray from our hearts. Each of us may stand before God and recognize ourselves as his servants, upon whom he pours out his blessings, mercy and love. My dear sisters and brothers, I encourage you either today or sometime during the week to take 10 minutes in quiet and pray the Magnificat.

Finally, let us reflect upon the truth of the dignity of the human body. Each time we proclaim the Creed, we say that we believe in the resurrection of the body. Let us honestly embrace the challenge to examine how we approach the human body. Do we see the body through the eyes of God who has created the body in his image and likeness and who treats the body with such reverence that he will allow it to rise from death? My dearest parents, I encourage you, do not be afraid to form the hearts and minds of your children. Help them to understand the truth, the goodness, the beauty and the dignity of their bodies. Teach your children to see their bodies through the eyes of God and to treat their bodies with reverence. Be sure that you examine your own attitudes and use of human sexuality first, so that you may be the best of teachers.

In the end, it is God’s plan that we will be able to stand before our God and proclaim all that he has done for us. We will proclaim, with Mary, the greatness of the Lord. Not only will our spirits rejoice with God our Savior, but so, too, will our bodies when we live with him forever in heaven.