

### What does LGBTQIA+ mean? Looking past the labels.

In the modern discussions concerning human nature, ethics, and our relationships with one another, there is a clear and almost overwhelming emphasis on sexuality. Setting aside the issue of morality, let's take a closer look at the labels so often used in our culture today: what they capture and what they do not. The terms, Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual all refer to identification based on one's experience of sexual orientation and/or gender. It's not that the terminology is incorrect, but that it doesn't say enough. The labels assigned or adopted in these kinds of conversations limit the most important part of our identity to our sexuality, often even as narrow as what we feel in terms of sexual attraction (or lack thereof). Contrast this with the name you received from your parents. The names "Kevin" and "Julia", are also akin to labels but reveal very little about the person being addressed. There are hundreds of thousands of people who share these names, but they are so varied in differences of body type, behavior, personality, political preferences, worldview, and lifestyle that you can glean next to nothing from the name itself.

One of the major problems with LGBTQIA+ labels is that there's no longer room left for the mystery of the person! A hyper-sexualized view of the human person—including heterosexuality—falls into a similar moral error as one of the errors of pornography: "The problem with pornography is not that it shows too much of the person, but that it shows far too little" (St. John Paul II). Sexual labels tend to imply that the only way, or maybe the only important way, we are to be identified is through our sexuality. But surely we can see that there is more to us than that. There is an infinite depth to every single person that we have to learn to appreciate and honor.

In his work concerning the Theology of the Body, St. John Paul II wrote, "The body reveals the person...Science can examine our flesh in minute detail, down to our cells and even our DNA. But no amount of scientific exploration can replace the truth that our bodies reveal *us* (emphasis mine), giving form to our innermost being and unique personality. Our bodies are sacramental—they make the invisible visible." Of course, we cannot forget that we are fallen creatures, still haunted by the wounds of original sin. In order to see our bodies

as sacramental, we have to order our desires, thoughts, and actions towards the One who made us.

So are there acceptable labels that capture our design as God desires? Once, when in an interview, Mother Teresa was asked her opinion regarding the relationship of those experiencing same-sex attraction to the Catholic Church, to which she replied, “You mean beloved children of God?” She continued to correct the reporter any time he tried to refer to them by any other term. This should be our perspective in our conversations regarding discussions concerning not just those with same-sex attraction, but all issues concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. Just as St. John writes in the New Testament, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” (1 Jn. 3:2) We are children of God, and the pursuit of the Christian life is that we might imitate Christ, the Son of God, in our thoughts, words, and actions. We are children of God through baptism, we are called to accept this identity and allow it to shape the way we live.

For years, those experiencing same-sex attraction have heard clearly, “This is what not to do” but have been starving for “This is what we should do”. The answer is ultimately the same as Mary told the servants at the wedding of Cana, “Whatever He tells you.” (Jn. 2:5) All the faithful—regardless of their experience of sexual orientation and/or gender— are called to lead lives in fidelity to the Gospel, in service to one another, and loving in authentic and chaste relationships that respect the dignity of each person. This is where true joy is found--the joy that we were made for. Perhaps we need to look beyond the labels and see each person, made magnificently by God and fashioned for eternity itself.

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### We Are All Called to Holiness

When you read the phrase, “a holy person”, what is the first image that comes to mind? Jesus? A picture of your favorite saint? If so, you’re not alone. But what is holiness? Holiness is a unique attribute belonging to God. Sacred things are directed towards God and his worship, but are not God in themselves. So when we say humans are called to holiness, it means we are called to become

like God. Heaven is our God-desired destiny, having been made His adopted children through baptism. When we say holiness is our destiny as human beings, it is as much a “where” as a “what”. The moral teachings of God are better understood as a map towards our destiny, not a legal handbook of rules!

So how do we get there? In his talk at the National Eucharistic Congress, Bishop Robert Barron referred to a two-tiered spirituality in the Church leftover from the 1950s: a “spirituality of the 10 Commandments” for the Laity, and a “Council spirituality”, consisting of poverty, chastity, and obedience for the clergy and religious. This is a poor distinction, however, as Barron says, “The laity too are called to heroic sanctity.” Over the years, there has crept in a sort of two-tiered chastity amongst the laity too: one form of chastity for married folks and one for everybody else. There is a grave danger in believing that this double standard is true. Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humane Vitae* gives a powerful example,

“...a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman and disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.”

Unfortunately, the Church’s teachings on sexuality have long been reduced to a list of “do nots”. But Barron hits the nail on the head when he says, “All of today’s modern issues, the objectification of both men and women, hookup culture, abortion, and pornography, are all the result of a sexuality turned in on itself...The Church isn’t against sex, it’s against sex divorced from love.” Love then, must be an outward expression of self-gift, not a satisfaction of our desires or urges. Love, simply put, is “to will the good of the other” as St. Thomas Aquinas said.

This is all good in theory, but what of our human brokenness? With rampant pornography use amongst both men and women, a culture that celebrates promiscuity, gives away contraceptives for free, and claims that happiness is only possible in romantic relationships where we can act on our sexual desires, living these ideals often feels impossible. Our brothers and

sisters who experience same-sex attraction cry out to God, “Why did you give me this attraction if you didn’t want me to act on it?”

Creation is good, and humanity was created “very good” (cf. Genesis 1:31). However, God did not say that creation was perfect. What we see in Genesis is called Original Harmony, which represents the desired cooperative relationship between imperfect creation and perfect Creator. But because creation is not perfect, it suffers, to varying degrees in its imperfections. Humanity’s imperfections have always been destined to be remedied through our Union with God. However, because of original sin, these imperfections are compounded and twisted into ever greater distortions. Our appetites and desires share in this disordering and manifest themselves in various ways. For some, an inclination toward addiction, for others, an unhealthy attachment to material wealth. Yet, whatever we have received from God is ultimately a gift and all of us are called to use every gift we have received from God to glorify him, bring about his Kingdom on Earth, and love our neighbors as if they were Christ himself.

God entrusted you with your sexuality, regardless of the type of attraction you experience. He calls you to self-mastery to glorify him and to be free to love as Christ did. Regardless of our attraction or state of life, we all fall short of this ideal at first and will inevitably struggle toward progress. Progress is only possible when we pray from our brokenness, “God, I see what chastity calls me to, I see my inability to do it, please transform me by your grace.” Living in the Spirit demands personal prayer, devotion to the Sacraments, and seeking out healthy friendships that encourage us to give our lives to Jesus Christ, for “It is not good for man to be alone.” (Gen. 2:18)

First, I asked you what image came to mind when you thought about “a holy person”. I will end with an even more important question: “Why was it not an image of you?”

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### Accompaniment by Friends & Family

There’s a cheeky saying I’ve seen on the internet that reads, “Women belong in the kitchen. Men belong in the kitchen. Everyone belongs in the

kitchen—"The kitchen has food!" No lies detected. Our God-given faculties instinctively recognize that food has a remarkable way of drawing people together. This is why Jesus was eager to dine with those he met and wanted to accompany. As Christians, Jesus expects this accompaniment of others to be part of our task of evangelization. But what does this word even mean?

Accompaniment comes from the Latin word, *companionem*, meaning literally, "bread fellow" or "messmate," derived from the Latin *com* (with, together) and *panis*, (bread). The term "messmate" wasn't originally intended to refer to our "mess" of life, but doesn't it fit all too well? Jesus met people in their mess and loved them there. That's part of what made him so appealing. Jesus was willing to meet corrupt tax collectors, sex workers, sinners of every size and shape where they were—but he didn't stay there.

Recall Christ's words to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more" (Jn. 8:11). For as long as I can remember, this story has been made the model of how to accompany those dealing with any kind of sexual sin, whether they be earnestly struggling for the good or unrepentant. Too quickly, many have emphasized the "sin no more" portion of this command, yet Jesus intentionally says "Go" first! If we remain in the circumstances where we are most inclined to sin, we are setting ourselves up to fail the second part of Jesus' command. Jesus intentionally calls us from circumstances that create chaos, unrest, and dissatisfaction toward ones of genuine connection, love, and growth.

We've probably all heard the slogan, "Love the sinner, hate the sin". But this phrase is unsatisfying. Not because it is necessarily wrong, but because so often we identify "the sin" with our identity: as if we are the sum of our weaknesses and failures. We reject labels like, "Gay Catholics," not because we don't acknowledge their experience, but because God compels us to see each person as who He created them to be. Accepting a label creates a sense of inevitability, that we are destined to live according to that label. Because we recognize and form our identities in relation to others, Christian accompaniment should, in large part, be understood as companionship that creates a sense of belonging and frequently reminds all people of their identity as a child of God through our words and deeds. Accompaniment is the virtuous

friendship between the extremes of tolerance and condemnation.

Accompaniment imitates the Lord's love, "I have called you by name: you are mine. When you pass through waters, I will be with you; through rivers, you shall not be swept away...Because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you." (Is. 43:1-2, 4) Accompaniment also affirms how God sees us, as St. Pope John II once said, "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of his Son."

So what is being asked of us? We often feel overwhelmed by our limitations, especially the limited time we can offer someone else. There is certainly a temptation to assume that everything rides on us. We may think, "*No one else knows about this, if I don't do something, who will?*" It might seem counterintuitive, but maintaining boundaries is actually an act of love. If we are using the right boundaries, acting within them is the most loving thing we could do, and a sign that we want what is best for those in our care. This includes recognizing our own limitations and calling for assistance from professionals when there is no more help we can give by ourselves.

In addition to licensed mental health professionals, there are several Catholic organizations, such as Courage and Eden Invitation, that exist to accompany and minister to those experiencing same-sex attraction or distress with their God-given gender. When we have done all we reasonably can, we also must remember that God is a Father who loves and cares for us. As Fr. Mark Mary Ames has said, "To entrust somebody to God's fatherhood, that's actually to do something." To accept what we can and cannot do for someone, and to entrust them to the Lord is both a sign of genuine love and humility.

We should not underestimate the potential of a shared meal. Christ began our restoration and elevated us through the sharing of a meal, the Last Supper, and in the meal at Emmaus when the risen Jesus broke the bread "and their eyes were opened" (Lk. 24:31) Likewise, our efforts to accompany others can also start with an invitation to eat together, loving our neighbors as good "bread-fellows", spending quality time listening, sharing in the Christian life together through prayer, worship, and friendship.

Post op subtext:

If you don't know where to start, please contact the Office of Marriage, Family, & Life at 812-424-5536 or email Megan Knies at [mknies@evdio.org](mailto:mknies@evdio.org)

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### We are Not Called to Condemn but to Invite

We all have a story that shapes what we believe about ourselves. I almost always chuckle when I hear parents tell their children, "Back when I was cool..." and then describe how their life used to be 15-20 years ago. But what changed? Obviously, things happened between those two periods of time that altered that parent's self-perception. Sadly, this also tends to happen to our overall sense of self-worth. We might find ourselves asking, "When did I stop feeling as though I was good enough?"

There's a pain in that question, I know. But at the bottom of it, there's a wound. Somewhere along the way, it arrived through an experience of sin. And from that wound, there has been a lie that the devil has repeated over and over and crept into our minds until we were led to believe that it was true. From this experience, there come times when we disqualify ourselves from the love of God or the love of others. We see this in the case of Peter in the gospels when Jesus first calls him to ministry. When Peter encounters Jesus, bewildered by experiencing the miraculous catch of fish, "he fell down in front of Jesus, saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man'" (Lk. 5:8). While it was true that Peter was sinful, he mistakenly objects to Jesus' approach, identifying himself with his sins to disqualify himself from being chosen to serve. How often do we find ourselves doing the same?

The gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke present this story as a model for how Jesus confronts our self-disqualification. Like Peter, we often identify with our sins and failures, stemming from our wounds. But Jesus' first words in responding to Peter's objection, depending on the gospel, were "Follow me" (Mt. 4:19) or "Do not be afraid" (Lk. 5:8). In each case, Jesus then offers the fishermen a new way of life: "henceforth you will be catching men." (Lk. 5:10). It is as St. Thomas Aquinas wisely notes, "Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it."

Jesus is not asking Peter to deny who he is but rather seeks to make him more of who God created him to be.

You may have heard the saying, “Jesus loves you enough to meet you where you are, but too much to let you stay there.” We see this play out in this episode as well. Peter rightfully admits his sinfulness before God, but mistakenly asks Jesus to leave. If there was ever a time Jesus would have been justified to defer to Peter’s free will, it was then. And yet, Jesus insisted, knowing Peter’s reluctance stemmed from a belief in a lie about himself: that he was unlovable, useless, or beyond hope because of his sin. As Catholic therapist and author, Dr. Bob Schuchts writes, “Suffering that is not transformed will be transmitted.” But the transformation of wounds is a fundamental part of Jesus’ mission - it is reflected even in the wounds from his crucifixion, which remain even after his resurrection (cf. Jn. 20:24-29). Jesus accepts Peter’s brokenness, symbolically represented in his failure to catch anything despite fishing all night (cf. Lk. 5:5), and presents Peter with the hope of new purpose and wholeness, “Do not be afraid, henceforth you will be catching men.” (Lk. 5:10)

For our part, our discipleship as Christians demands the imitation of Christ: not condemnation, but invitation. But invitation to what? *Freedom*, as Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house forever; the son continues forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (Jn. 8:34-36) So much of human suffering is due to the perpetuation of sin, stemming from human woundedness. Attachments to pornography, homosexually active lifestyles, masturbation, adultery, or promiscuity are all symptomatic of our desire to fix our wounds ourselves. So in place of judgment, we ought to ask God in prayer for the ability to see one another as he saw Peter. Not in his broken sinfulness, but with compassion. As St. Julian of Norwich said, “When God sees sin He sees pain in us.” But freedom is not all that is offered in Christ; we also invite others to the promise of the Gospel. When Jesus says, “Follow me,” where is he going? Where does he want to take us? To where “he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore.” (Rev. 21:4). When we recognize hope in Christ, we then dare to discard our sinful habits and attachments. We are free to do as the first disciples, who left everything behind and followed him.