

# **SELF-RESPECT:** Acknowledging why you are so important

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## **Studying what the Lord teaches us about sexuality**



### **Introduction**

#### **General aim of the lesson**

This lesson seeks to help the students realize how immensely important each one of them is, in truth and before God. It helps them see how important their lives are and how important are the things that deeply affect their lives. In a special way, it helps them see the importance of their sexuality, and of responding to the gift of sexuality in the light of the Lord's teaching, and in ways that respect how things really are.

#### **Specific objectives**

1. To assist the students in realizing personally — in the light of faith and their experience — how very important each one of them is, and how important it is that they lead their lives wisely and well.
2. To address the problems that arise for people who are wrongly persuaded that they are not worth much, and are not very much loved.
3. To realize that thinking and feeling rightly and wisely about sexuality is very important for them.
4. To help the students understand that sexuality has important purposes. God created sexuality to serve the wonderful and lasting good things He wishes it to bring to our lives.

### **These are the things we will talk about . . .**

#### **Outline of the lesson**

##### ***Opening Prayer***

1. *You* are an important person, having been created in the image of God.
2. People who do not know how important they are often make mistakes with life.
3. The sexuality God gave you is important and good.
4. We have to think and behave intelligently to understand sexuality in this confusing world.

#### **Path through the lesson**

##### **Opening prayer**

It is important to open all the classes in *The Catholic Vision of Love* with prayer. Prayer reminds students that God is concerned with the precious things

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of ordinary life. God is not just a mystery and a warm feeling at Mass on Sunday or during special rare moments. God makes sense of everything, and is our Friend and Guide in all aspects of life.

A useful prayer for this lesson is paraphrased from Psalm 139. Copies can be made for the children, and perhaps used for the next class also. Or the prayer can be used as a responsorial psalm, and the students can be asked to repeat the first verse (italicized below) after each of the verses that you read.

*O LORD, You have made me and You know me.* You know when I sit down and when I stand. For You formed my inmost parts. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You, for I was fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are Your works! You know me right well. When I was formed in my mother's womb, Your eyes beheld all that I am. How precious are Your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

### 1. You are important

This section treats one of the most important foundations of moral living. Young people need to realize how very much they are loved, and how important they are. They need to realize that since their lives are really precious, the way they live their lives is something very important.

Realization of the preciousness of one's life is very different from the shabby and weak kinds of phony self-love some people are taught by the world. False self-love is divisive; it leads people to have pride for shallow reasons, as the lesson indicates; and it makes people despise one another, and cease to be loved by one another. The roots of real self-love are deep in faith and in the experience of the love we have from people who really care about us. This session needs thoughtful presentation.

### 2. Mistakes people make when they do not love themselves.

Unfortunately, although all people should feel loved and important, many young people do not. Obviously we are not speaking of arrogant, vain self-love, but that deep and important acceptance of how much God loves us, and how much each one of us deserves to be loved for the reasons faith celebrates.

In every class we teach we should be seeking not to tell but to show children how important we think they are, how much we really care about them, and love them. Faith can only be taught to people if they understand that they are most important and precious to us, as the New Testament shows so constantly.

Some people seem to feel that they are not worth anything. If anyone gives them a little affection, that quickly becomes dearer than all else, since they are starving for some affirmation. And they can be led into all kinds of

trouble if they are shown affection by confused and tragic people, and not effectively shown affection by good and secure people who do really love them.



### **ACTIVITY A — Things that make you important**

Activity A, which includes “Things that make you important” and “Reflection on the activity,” and Activity B, “Questions to think about,” can help in guiding students to see the sorts of traits that are most important, that make us really worthy of God’s love and the love of others.

For Activity A, the catechist could use plain paper, or have silhouettes of boys’ and girls’ heads prepared ahead of time, on which the students record their qualities. Choose whichever option that time and the catechist’s personal talents or assistance from helpers permit. The silhouettes could provide additional visual assistance for the students in comparing complementary qualities. This segment could be omitted, and returned to at the end, if the catechist judges that there might not be time for everything in the lesson.

For “Reflections on the activity,” one could discuss with the whole class, in pairs, or in small groups. Individual written reflections could also be used.

### **ACTIVITY B — Questions to think about**

Activity B is intended to help the catechist guide the children to realize the basic truth that each person is wonderfully important! This activity may be enhanced by having the students answer the questions working in pairs, trios, or small groups. The catechist may wish the students to record their answers on paper to share with the whole class. The catechist may want to designate a leader for each small group to report back to the whole class with either verbal or written answers. For expediency’s sake, groups could be instructed to share only their best answer, or each subsequent group after the first might be instructed to report only on something that has not already been mentioned. Such an approach may draw out a wider variety of positive responses than one whole-class discussion. Posted, written responses create a visual pool of practical things students can do to encourage others or themselves when they feel unloved. When we find people who are sad, and have unhappy lives, we have a duty to exercise the love for one another that Christ taught. Everyone must know that they are important, loved, and that other people think highly of them.

## **3. Sexuality is important**

Different ideas need to be drawn out of this part of the lesson. A) Sexuality is something God made. It is not at all suspicious or bad, even though it can be treated badly, as all good things can. B) God made sexuality very important. It is as boys and girls, as women and men, that we “Images of God.” C) Sex was made for specific, important purposes. Some of these purposes are to draw us away from loneliness and isolation, to be caring to one another, and to have many kinds of friendships that are enriched by the variety of charms and fascinating things that are involved in our being different in many ways, not the least of which is that we are boys or girls. And specifically, sexuality was made to attract people to an especially generous kind of love, the kind of love that can

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— if they work at it — make two people love each other so deeply that they gladly give their lives to each other, learning generosity and greatness of heart from each other in marriage. D) Sexuality was made so that we could be like God in calling new persons into existence, to have children who would be the center of our lives forever, and to be the source of gladness and confidence in the future that life always needs.

Sexuality has many delightful things about it. God made important, good things to be sources of great pleasure too — but the art of living is to put the more important things in perspective, so that the pleasures will last longer and the heart will be satisfied. It is never fully satisfied with passing pleasures.

#### **4. DISCUSSION: Think and act intelligently to understand sexuality**

This discussion aims at leading the students to realize that what is said in class is meant for ordinary life, not just for class talk. Several sorts of ideas are taught in this discussion, and catechists should seek to be sure that the students get a good grasp of them.

A) God made sexuality, and it is really very good; but sometimes it seems bad, because it is often used selfishly and badly. B) We should pay attention to the teachers who are most likely to teach us about sexuality in a way that makes sense, and is true and good. Surely we should listen to what the Lord teaches about sexuality, and to those who love us the most (especially to people like our parents). It may take some effort to let them know how we feel and what we expect to hear from them about this. C) We are Christians, but much of the talk and many of the attitudes shown about sexuality on TV, the internet and in movies are from people who have not found Christ, and who have not made much sense of sexuality for their own lives. They see only a small piece of it: its fascination and its power to give pleasure. We have to have sense not to let our minds be filled with images of sexuality that are contrary to what God teaches. D) When sex is treated shabbily, as it often is on TV, the internet and in movies, it can be depressing; it can incline us to share rather bad and depressing ideas about something that is really good. What sort TV programs have you seen that treat sexuality rather badly? Should our minds and imaginations be filled with things like that? Due to the importance of conveying the points listed above, this discussion might best be handled as a whole class discussion led by the catechist.

#### **Tying things together**

At the end of this lesson, it could be very useful to bring together the various parts of the lesson, as listed on the student's sheet.

For further reference and background, the catechist should consult the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 355-373; 2331-2336; 2354.