

Second Sunday after Christmas (ABC)

'The Word was made Flesh and lived among us and we saw his glory'. By becoming Man Jesus signified that our bodies are sacred as well as our souls.

There is an old heresy which sees our bodies in opposition to our spirits. This heresy can be traced back to the French philosopher Descartes in the 17th century who saw the body as 'mere matter'. If we view our bodies as 'mere matter' then they can be regarded simply as objects for manipulation or exploitation.

Because of this, many Catholics, for instance, continue to reject *Humanae Vitae*, that timely, albeit disputed, encyclical of Pope Paul VI in 1968 on the rights and wrongs of birth regulation. They reject it on the basis that our bodies are private things we 'possess' and can be used as we see fit, leading to the common refrain that "the Church should stay out of the bedroom". How many people are familiar with the refrain: 'I can do what I like with my own body'.

By separating body and spirit man ceases to be a person and a subject. He becomes merely an object. To treat someone's body or your own as an object, is doing a great injustice to yourself or others as persons. Descartes had embraced the views of the English scientist Frances Bacon who believed that the goal of all human knowledge is man's mastery over nature. Hence those who succumbed to this view saw the prohibitions in *Humanae Vitae* as preventing man from fulfilling that dream. The same applies to other experiments which see the body as mere matter. The body can never be reduced in such a way. The 'invisible' spiritual side of man and woman is expressed through the visible. To put it simply 'I am my Body'. Hence when someone is ill we don't say, 'you are a sick body' but 'you are a sick person'.

The upheavals of the 1960's have changed people's attitude towards the purpose of their bodies. One of the trail-blazers of the women's liberation movement in the sixties said that "no woman is free who does not own and control her own body" and this thinking has influenced even many within the Church. Pro-abortionists are influenced by this thinking. Well, if the body is 'mere matter' as Descartes believed, then you ARE free to do what you like with it.

However, that seems to contradict what St Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians. He writes 'you don't own your own body, you are not your own property – you've been bought and paid for'. As a temple of the Holy Spirit my body belongs to the Lord and if we're not using it in line with His will, then we've strayed from the path of truth.

Pope St John Paul 11 wrote – 'If there is an enemy who wants to separate us from God that which is most sacred is what He will most violently attack. The battle for man's soul is fought over the truth of his body'. Knowing that truth and living by it, will shield us from this error and keep us on the path which leads to the Resurrection of our bodies at the end of time.