



LESSON TWENTY-SEVEN

The Culture of Life: Protecting the Most Vulnerable

Opening Prayer

*Lord, you formed my inward parts.
You knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works!
Through Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

(Adapted from Psalm 139:13–14.)



Lesson Objectives:

- ❖ Review the Catholic understanding of the human person as body and soul: that every person is created in the image of God and so possesses intrinsic dignity and deserves to be treated with reverence and care.
- ❖ Identify threats to human life and dignity, such as abortion, euthanasia, reproductive technologies such as IVF, and distorted views of sexuality, and understand the theological reasoning behind the Church's teaching on each.
- ❖ Understand the meaning of authentic human sexuality and chastity as a gift ordered toward love and life within marriage.

BURNING QUESTIONS

- ❖ Why does the Church care what people do with their own bodies? Isn't that a personal choice?
What does it mean that we have been made in the image of God? Why do you think the Church speaks about these topics?
- ❖ If the Church values life, why does it oppose certain fertility treatments that create life and certain end-of-life procedures that relieve suffering?
What do you think makes natural conception and natural death more aligned with human dignity than medically controlled alternatives?

St. Gianna Beretta Molla

Feast Day: April 28

Lived: October 4, 1922 – April 28, 1962 · Magenta, Italy · Patron of Mothers, Physicians, Unborn children

Gianna Molla, one of thirteen children from a devout Italian family, became a physician at twenty-seven, specializing in pediatric care at a time when only about six percent of Italian physicians were women. She married Pietro Molla and had four living children after two miscarriages. When two months pregnant with her fourth child, she was diagnosed with a tumor in her uterus. Doctors recommended a hysterectomy, which would have killed her unborn child. Gianna refused, choosing instead to have only the tumor removed, entrusting the rest of her pregnancy to God. She gave birth safely but died days later from complications, having chosen her daughter's life over her own.



“If you must decide between me and the child, do not hesitate: choose the child.”

St. Gianna Beretta Molla

The Culture of Life

The Gospel vs. the World

God grants each of us intrinsic dignity by creating us in his image. Our worth does not depend on age, abilities, past mistakes, or usefulness—it comes from God, who created us in love. St. John Paul II warned that when freedom is divorced from truth, it turns against the human person, and that a culture which treats the vulnerable as a burden becomes, in his words, “a kind of conspiracy against life.”¹



Church Teaching on Threats to Human Life

God alone is the author of life. The *Catechism* teaches that he is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end, and that no one can claim the right to destroy an innocent human being. God breathes the spiritual soul into each person immediately; it is not passed on by the parents. This is why each life is sacred from the moment of conception. Church teachings on respect for human life are based on this principle and on the Fifth Commandment (“You shall not kill”).

“Human life is sacred *because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God.*”

CCC 2258, quoting *Donum Vitae*

1. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, The Gospel of Life, encyclical (March 25, 1995), 12, vatican.va.

Abortion, Euthanasia, and the Beginning of Life

Abortion, Assisted Suicide, and Euthanasia

The Church teaches that life must be protected from the moment of conception and that abortion is a grave evil (see CCC 2271). Deliberately ending someone's life, even to end suffering, is morally wrong; "those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect" (CCC 2276). True compassion means staying close to those who suffer, providing comfort rather than eliminating them.



In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) and Embryonic Stem Cell Research

IVF separates a child's beginnings from the marriage act and makes conception dependent on third parties; it also creates many "excess" embryos, some frozen indefinitely, others destroyed or used in research. Obtaining embryonic stem cells likewise means creating and destroying embryos, which is gravely immoral (see CCC 2275).

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."

Jeremiah 1:5

Church Teaching on Human Sexuality

Chastity: The Gift of Self-Mastery

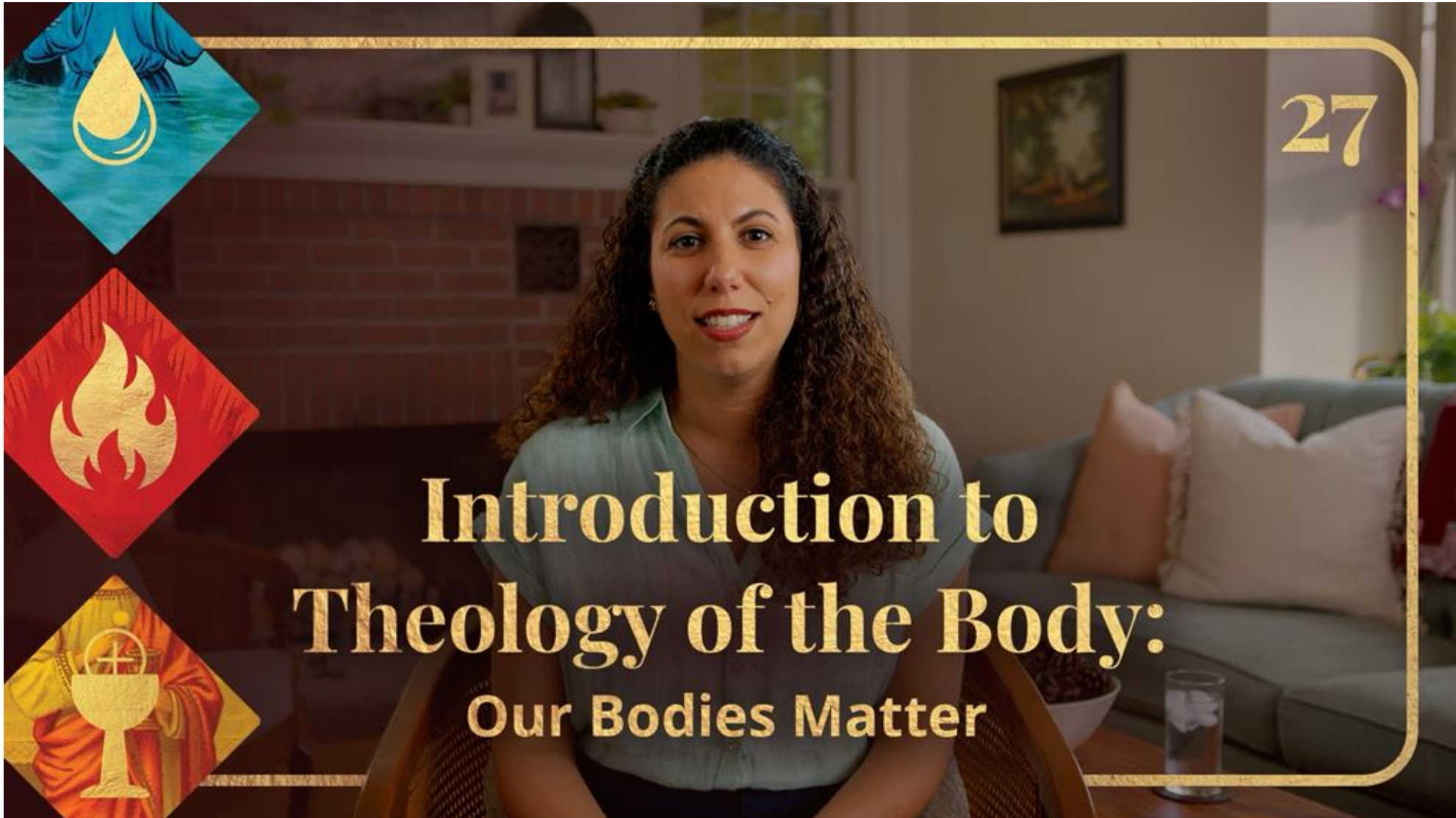
Sexuality is ordered to the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage. When sexual pleasure is sought as an end in itself or outside of marriage, it becomes disordered. Chastity shapes and protects our sexuality. It should not be confused with mere abstinence, but “the successful integration of sexuality within the person”—our inner unity in body and spirit (CCC 2337). We develop it over a lifetime through self-discipline, becoming free to make a genuine gift of ourselves to others rather than being ruled by our passions.

Contraception and Natural Family Planning

The Church rejects contraception because it separates the unitive and procreative purposes of the marital act (see CCC 2351, 2369). Natural Family Planning respects a woman’s natural cycles, allowing a couple to plan their family responsibly while remaining open to life; it is not “Catholic birth control” but a way of cooperating with God’s design.

“Either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy.”

CCC 2339



Introduction to Theology of the Body: Our Bodies Matter

INVITED

Discussion Questions

- ❖ We understand that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. How does this challenge how we think, talk about ourselves, and treat others? How does it affect what we do with our bodies?
- ❖ How challenging do you think it is to live chastely in today's world? How can understanding that sexuality is "so sacred that it belongs in the context of marriage" provide motivation and clarity to overcome those challenges?
- ❖ What role can the Sacrament of Reconciliation play as one grows in chastity and self-respect?

Faith and Fun

What document by St. John Paul II addresses the dignity and vocation of women?

a. *Mulieris Dignitatem*

b. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*

c. *Salvifici Doloris*

d. *Dies Domini*

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St. John Paul II's 1988 apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* ("On the Dignity and Vocation of Women") is a profound affirmation of the unique and essential role of women in salvation history and in the Church today.

The Tabernacle Veil

Biblical Foundations: Veiling the Dwelling Place of God

In the Old Testament, God gave Moses precise instructions for the Tabernacle, and integral to its design was a veil separating the Holy of Holies, where God's glory dwelled above the Ark of the Covenant. The veil signified that what was most holy was not to be approached casually but was set apart to be revered.

Catholic Tradition: The Veil in the Church

It is customary, though not strictly required, for the tabernacle to be veiled, often in the color of the liturgical season. The veil is a visual cue that the real presence of Christ dwells within, expressing the same reverence the biblical tradition gave to what is holy.



Living It Out:

Choose one way to promote a culture of life this week:

- Reach out to someone isolated.
- Volunteer at an elderly care facility.
- Pray for anyone contemplating abortion.

Closing Prayer

God of all life, Help us to appreciate the great gift that is human life formed in your image, a reflection of your holiness. Help us to recognize you in all whom you have created: children not yet born, families affected by poverty and war, people of different abilities, people from other lands, and all who are victims of hatred and racism. Help us to bear witness to the dignity of all whom you have created, regardless of stage of life, or wealth, or

ability, or color, or creed, for every person is fully equal in your loving eyes. Share with us your holy knowledge that we are all your children, each bestowed with inherent dignity. May your justice reign forever!

Amen.¹

1. USCCB, Life and Dignity of the Human Person Prayer, [usccb.org](https://www.usccb.org).

Announcements / Reminders — add notes here