

ON MARITAL CHASTITY

Published March 2, 2006 in *The Catholic Sun* as *Humanly Possible* column

Making good sexual choices in our lives (part 1) by Monica Hidalgo Breaux, PhD, MSW

Once upon a time there was a young man who felt called to the priesthood. He struggled against the same temptations to sexual sin that every young man must face in spiritual combat. With the help of grace, he lived in holiness. He prayed, volunteered in the church and served God lovingly in his work. He entered the seminary, but within a few years he left because he fell in love and married a young woman. They were virgins on their wedding day and remained faithful to each other, just as they had promised in their marriage vows.

The man believed that impure thoughts were sinful, so when he was tempted to indulge in sexual fantasy, he distracted himself with prayerful service to his family and church. He maintained "custody of the eyes" as he had been taught, which means he simply looked away from things that caused sexual arousal. He prayed with his wife each day for God's grace to avoid sin by resisting temptations. Their marriage did not include contraception, abortion, pornography, masturbation, adultery, or fantasy affairs with other people. His wife felt desirable and well loved by him.

They accepted their fertility as a good gift from God, so they practiced Natural Family Planning. Their lovemaking was always open to God's will and they welcomed each child He sent. When they discerned in prayer to abstain from sex during fertile times to space their children, they returned to the joys of courtship that they had known prior to marriage. Having a monthly courtship (by abstaining from sex) and honeymoon period (by returning to sexual loving) kept their romance alive and well. They had children and grandchildren and recently she died. Her last words were, "Honey, I love you much." He responded, "Sweetie, you were my only girl." The man's name is Vernon Broussard and he is well known in Louisiana where he serves God lovingly. Sexual expression faithful to God's design is humanly possible.

God invites us into a life of sexual purity that allows us to love fully and naturally and also satisfies the deepest longing of our hearts to be truly loved as we are. When we reject the purpose of our maleness or our femaleness, we reject God's plan. When we reject our fertility or any aspect of our bodies, we reject God's gift. Why do we insult God who designed human beings and human sexual desires? Will we eventually choose one flower in the world as the best one, fixate ourselves on it, and then try to make them all look like that? Until we thank God for the design of our own body, we will never feel loved and accepted by another person.

Every day we make sexual choices. Before we make behavior choices, we first make choices in our minds that shape our own desires. When a thought pops in our head, we have free will to distract ourselves with other thoughts or behaviors. Choosing our thoughts is how we form our habits of desire. Our sexual appetite can be formed to desire any person or thing. Indulging in sexual fantasy connects our sexual appetite to unreal people and unreal situations. Sexual fantasy interferes with our ability to enjoy real life people and situations and it can lead to addiction.

In the Alcoholics Anonymous program, people learn to call another person (sponsor), go to a meeting, or use slogans or reading materials to distract themselves from destructive ideas that lead to loss of self-control. Repeating new ideas helps to alter our brain and helps to form new habits. Changing the brain by changing what we think about, in order to change what we desire and what we do, is the basis of therapy. We are not victims of our sexual appetite.