

Understanding fidelity by examining what it is not

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Last November, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral letter on marriage titled "Love and Life in the Divine Plan" (<http://uscgb.org/laity/loveandlife/>).

The letter contains valuable insights for married and engaged couples as well as those involved in marriage preparation.

Over six parts, Christian Meert, co-director of the diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life, will examine the bishops' pastoral letter and how it relates to practical realities of married life.]

I was once working with an engaged couple — we'll call them "Josh" and "Sarah" — who were looking forward to getting married. Josh attended a bachelor party at a strip club in Las Vegas, and during the party he was offered a lap dance. When Sarah found about it, she was extremely upset. Josh, however, insisted that he had not been unfaithful. This anecdote illustrates how many engaged couples do not have a clear understanding of fidelity, which is one of the three critical requirements for the sacrament of matrimony.

In talking about fidelity, it is helpful to define what is meant by infidelity. Many people would say that infidelity is cheating — having sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse. However, there are many other ways of being unfaithful, including masturbation, pornography and lust. These problems are not new or unique to modern society. In fact, Jesus told his disciples, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery!' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery

FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

With Christian Meert

with her in his heart." (Mt 5:27-30).

There is a big difference between lust and desire. Lust is for self-gratification. Holy desire in marriage is for shared joy, for bonding — each wanting the other to be fulfilled and happy. In one of his talks on the "theology of the body," Pope John Paul II said that a man can commit adultery in his heart if he sees his wife only as an object for his satisfaction (Pope John Paul II, General Audience, Oct. 8, 1980).

If a man or woman is addicted to sex or pornography at the time of marriage, the sacrament is not valid, because living fidelity in that context is impossible. In our work with engaged couples, my wife Christine and I insist that anyone with a sexual addiction enter rehabilitation before getting married in the church.

Couples preparing for marriage sometimes ask us, "Why can't we decide for ourselves what is good or bad for us?"

Again, Pope John Paul II provides an answer: "The power to decide what is good and what is evil does not belong to man but to God alone. Man possesses an extremely far-reaching freedom since he can eat of every tree of the garden. But his freedom is not unlimited: it must halt before the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for he is called to accept the moral law given by God" (*Veritatis Splendor*, 35).

For those who are already married, it is a good idea to think about any ways in which we might be robbing our spouses and families of our time and attention. Sometimes infidelity takes a very subtle form, such as overly intimate workplace relationships, e-mail exchanges and flirtatious behavior at parties or other social situations. New forms of social networking, such as Facebook, can pose a threat



(Photo from USCCB.org)

by luring people into "online affairs" with ex-boyfriends and ex-girlfriends. Without being sexual, these are also forms of

infidelity. In the next article, we will look at ways of fighting against any form of infidelity.

Vatican: No embryonic stem-cell tests on humans

VATICAN CITY (CNS). The Vatican condemned the recent decision by U.S. regulators to begin using embryonic stem cells in clinical tests on human patients.

The destruction of human embryos involved in such research amounts to "the sacrifice of human beings" and is to be condemned, said the president emeritus of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Bishop Elio Sgreccia.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration gave final approval for a clinical trial of embryonic stem cells as a treatment for patients with spinal-cord injuries, making the United States the first country to allow the testing of such cells on human beings.

Geron Corp., the U.S. company which won the FDA approval, plans to perform tests on a small group of patients paralyzed by a spinal cord injury.

The company had won FDA approval early last year, but after mice treated with the cells developed spinal cysts, the government put the clinical trials on hold amid concerns over the safety of the procedure. The new government-approved trials aim to test the therapy's safety on humans as well as its effectiveness.

In a July 31 interview with Vatican Radio, Bishop Sgreccia said science itself recognizes the human embryo "is a human being in the making."

Destroying embryos "receives a completely negative judgment" from an ethical point of view, no matter what justifications are given for their use, he said.

The Italian bishop said embryonic stem cells are "totipotent," that is, they tend to reproduce a whole organism or individual, but not specialized cells.

However, even if there were positive results from the use of such cells, "morally it would still be a crime," he said.

The church supports research and therapies that utilize adult stem cells and stem cells derived from umbilical cord blood.