

# Basics of Human Dignity and Sexuality in Classes and Families

Kathleen Cory - Ruah Woods Institute

CCC 1691 “Christian, recognize your dignity.” Now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning....Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God.”

## What is dignity?

Ontological dignity

Moral Dignity

Social dignity

Existential dignity

4-fold distinction (Dignitas Infinitas (DI) 7-8)

**Ontological Dignity** – simply because he or she exists and is willed, created, and loved by God. Can never be annulled.

“Every human person possesses an infinite dignity, inalienably grounded in his or her very being, which prevails in and beyond every circumstance, state, or situation the person may ever encounter.” Dignitas Humanitas 1

**Moral Dignity** - how people exercise their freedom

“when exercising their freedom against the law of love revealed by the Gospel the human person can commit inestimably profound acts of evil against others. Those who act this way seem to have lost any trace of humanity and dignity.” Dignitas Infinita 7

**Social dignity** – “The quality of a person’s living conditions...living in an “undignified manner”. This expression does not imply a judgment on the person by highlights how the situation in which they are forced to live contradicts their inalienable dignity.” Dignitas Infinitas 8

**Existential dignity** – “dignity implied in the ever-increasing discussion about a ‘dignified’ life and one that is ‘not dignified.’ People may appear to lack nothing essential for life, they may still struggle to live with peace, joy and hope.

### **What is the origin of our dignity as human persons?**

CCC 1700 “The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God.”

CCC 27 “The dignity of the human person is rooted in his creation in the image and likeness of God; it is fulfilled in his vocation”

### **Is the human person set apart from the rest of creation?**

“It is not sufficient to speak of man as an individual of the species Homo sapiens. The word “person” has been coined in order to stress that man cannot be reduced wholly to what is contained in the concept of a “specimen of the species,” but has in himself something more, some particular fullness and perfection of being.” Love and Responsibility (LR) pg. 4

“The most proximate and most proper reason for this is the fact that man possesses reason.” LR pg. 4

“The person as a subject differs from even the most perfect animals by his interiority and a specific life, which is concentrated in it, i.e., an interior life.” LR pg.

“Man has a fundamentally different nature from animals. His nature includes the power of self-determination based on reflection and manifested in the fact that, while acting, man chooses what he wants to do.” This power is called free will.” L&R pg. 6

### **Is our dignity connected to sexuality?**

“The human body shares in the dignity of “the image of God”. CCC 364

“‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God: man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator.” CCC 369

“In their ‘being-man’ and being-woman’ they reflect the Creator’s wisdom and goodness.” CCC 369

### **Do we all share equally in dignity?**

“By creating the human being man and woman, God gives personal dignity equally to the one and the other. Each of them, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity.” CCC 2393

“Man and woman are both with one and the same dignity “in the image of God.” CCC 369

### **How do we communicate this message in our families and classrooms?**

“By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity.” Familiaris Consortio (FC) 43

**Steps to living the life of dignity we are called to – and sharing this in your classroom and family:**

**1. LOVE**

- a. “Charity is the form of all the virtues” CCC 2346
- b. “If I speak in human and angelic tongues[b] but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. 2 And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.” 1 Cor 13:1-3
- c. “by loving him with the same love with which he has loved them, they may perform works in keeping with their dignity.” CCC 1698
- d. “Children must be enriched not only with a sense of true justice, which alone leads to respect for the personal dignity of each individual, but also and more powerfully by a sense of true love...The family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow.” FC 37

**2. TEACH**

- a. “ knowledge of the personal dignity of the human body and of sex must still be drawn from other sources. A particular source is God’s own word, which contains the revelation of the body, the revelation that goes back to the beginning.” Fratelli Tutti (FT) 274.
- b. “when..there is an attempt to remove God from a society.. dignity is trampled and ...rights violated. You know well how much suffering is caused by the denial of freedom of conscience and of religious freedom, and how that wound leaves a humanity which is impoverished.” Fratelli Tutti (FT) 274

**3. The Popes Speak**

- a. “Pope St. Paul VI affirmed that “no anthropology equals that of the Church regarding the human person – particularly concerning the person’s originality, dignity, the intangibility and richness of the person’s fundamental rights, sacredness, capacity for education, aspiration to a complete development and immortality.” Dignitas Infinitas 3-4

- b. “Pope St. Paul VI affirmed that “no anthropology equals that of the Church regarding the human person – particularly concerning the person’s originality, dignity, the intangibility and richness of the person’s fundamental rights, sacredness, capacity for education, aspiration to a complete development and immortality.” Dignitas Infinitas 3-6
- c. “Pope St. John Paul II affirmed that human dignity is “a Gospel value that cannot be despised without greatly offending the Creator. This dignity is infringed on the individual level when due regard is not had for values such as freedom, the right to profess one’s religion, physical and mental integrity, the right to essential goods, to life.” Dignitas Infinitas 3-6
- d. “Dear friends, this descent of Christ does not relate only to the past, but touches the life of every one of us. The underworld is not only the condition of the dead, but also of those who live death as a result of evil and sin. It is also the daily hell of loneliness, shame, abandonment, and the struggle of life. Christ enters into all these dark realities to bear witness to the love of the Father. Not to judge, but to set free. Not to blame, but to save. He does so quietly, on tiptoe, like one who enters a hospital room to offer comfort and help.” Pope Leo XIV General Audience 24 Sept 2025
- e. “Pope Benedict XVI declared that human dignity is “a fundamental principle which faith in the Crucified and Risen Jesus Christ has always defended, especially when, in respect of the simplest and most defenseless people, it is disregarded.” And “The economy and finance do not exist for their own sake, they are only an instrument or means. Their sole end is the human person and his or her total fulfillment in dignity. This is their only capital, and it is right to safeguard it.” Dignitas Infinitas 3-6

#### **4. Witness**

- a. “What Christ demands ..clearly belongs to that interior space in which man – precisely the one who listens – must rediscover the fullness of his humanity and want to regain it.” TOB 43:7
- b. “The Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God.”
- c. “Dialogue in the pursuit of wisdom can become a deeply ennobling approach to education and to life itself. Dialogue, as an approach to education, has also been used both in antiquity and by some of the greatest teachers of the Church: consider the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas. It is

fundamentally a dialogue between different views on a given subject, in pursuit of the truth about that subject.” Dr. George Harne, president of Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts

#### **5. Lead**

- a. “God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own action.” CCC 1730
- b. “The dignity of the human person implies and requires uprightness of moral conscience.” CCC 1780
- c. “So-called moral permissiveness rests on an erroneous conception of human freedom.” CCC 2526
- d. “Work is part and parcel of man's life on earth. It is a manifestation of his dignity; it is an opportunity to develop his personality.” —St. Josemaría Escrivá, Friends of God, no. 57
- e. “helping the poor financially must always be a provisional solution in the face of pressing needs. The broader objective should always be to allow them a dignified life through work”. ..... For “there is no poverty worse than that which takes away work and the dignity of work”. FT 162

#### **6. Speak Truth**

- a. “Man tends by nature toward the truth. He is obliged to honor and bear witness to it.” CCC 2467
- b. “Do not accept anything as the truth if it lacks love. And do not accept anything as love which lacks the truth.” - John Paul II summarizing a tenet of Edith Stein/St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross’ philosophy and way of life.
- c. “It is well known that the means of social communication ..conceal ‘snares and dangers that cannot be ignored.’ They could also become a vehicle....for... attitudes that lack respect for man’s true dignity and destiny.” FC 76

#### **7. Pray**

- a. “The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic church can be achieved only with God’s unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer.” FC 59