

# The Best Kept Secret in the Church

In mid-October my wife Marilyn and I attended our second week-long course on Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body (TOB). Why would a couple married for 36 years, with four adult children, and no academic background in theology spend so much money, time, and energy learning about such an esoteric subject?

Our interest in Theology of the Body began when I read George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II, "Witness to Hope." In this book, Weigel described TOB as a "theological time-bomb set to go off with dramatic consequences ... perhaps in the twenty-first century." If this was true, then we wanted to know more about it.

Off we went last year to a week-long course on Theology of the Body and back we came, radically changed. John Paul II's catechesis was written prior to his papacy and delivered to the church in a series of 129 talks from 1979-1984. At Black Rock Retreat Center in Quarryville, Pa., Christopher West introduced us to Theology of the Body in what he calls a "head and heart immersion course." That week deepened our understanding of what it means to be created man and woman, of what it means to be husband and wife, and of the meaning of human sexuality. Expecting a course on marriage, we found instead a catechesis so encompassing that Pope John Paul II is leading us to rediscover "the meaning of the whole of existence, the meaning of life." (TOB 46:6)

One long week, taught by Christopher West, one of today's foremost teachers of TOB, was not enough for us. I have since read the Pope's original work, and we returned to Black Rock for another glorious week of deeper immersion into the teachings of TOB. Last month's experience was more profound than the first and gave us a glimpse into why George Weigel thought that Theology of the Body is "one of the boldest reconfigurations of Catholic theology in centuries."

We lived through the turmoil in the church during the time of Pope Paul VI's promulgation of *Humanae Vitae*. We lived through the great confusion and pain brought on by the rejection of this teaching. (See Cardinal Stafford's account of the dreadful turmoil of 1968). With God's grace, we read *Humanae Vitae* in 1978 and were able to see the truth and beauty in its teaching, but over the years we longed

for a deeper understanding of why the church felt this was God's plan for human sexuality. "Humanae Vitae" was for us the answer to how to live our married sexuality but it did not meet our desire to know why we should live this teaching. At last, the church has provided this understanding in the incredibly beautiful teachings of Theology of the Body.

Theology of the Body is the best kept secret in the church today. Western rationalism didn't get it right. Marxism didn't get it right. The sexual revolution didn't get it right. Those who rejected "Humanae Vitae" didn't get it right. Finally, a Holy Father who lived through the lies of all of these gives us the truth about man, truth that reintegrates man into a body and soul, created male and female in the image of God. Theology of the Body is for everyone.

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