



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

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Christopher West and Mike Mangione launch new series at St. Therese Institute of Faith and Mission with one day retreat introducing the Theology of the Body

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

The universal longing that God places in the heart of every human being for the good, the true and the beautiful was explored through art, music, video and reflections at a one-day retreat April 3, 2011 at St. Therese Institute of Faith and Mission in Bruno.

Featuring well-known Theology of the Body speaker Christopher West, along with singer-songwriter Mike Mangione and his band the Union, the one-day event served as an introduction to a “Springtime of Faith” series of week-long conferences being offered at the Catholic faith formation school and healing centre located at a former Ursuline convent some 90 km east of Saskatoon.

The new series constitutes the final trimester of a nine-month live-in faith formation program at St. Therese Institute, with each weeklong session also open to the public. Some 200 participants –religious, ordained, and laity of all ages – attended the introductory retreat April 3.

West described John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, which was articulated by the late pontiff in 129 talks between 1979 and 1984, exploring the meaning of our creation as male and female, what it means to be human, and how to live life in a way that brings true happiness.

West invited participants to reflect on a time in life when they were “pierced by beauty.” Pointing to the words of the overwhelmed narrator of a well-known YouTube video about the appearance of a double rainbow, West asserted that we must then ask: “what does it mean?”

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Jim Anderson, director of St. Therese Catholic faith formation program, (left) with members of the Union band behind him.



Christopher West spoke to some 200 attending the opening retreat.



Christopher West

This is a universal longing that God has placed in our heart. “The saints are those who allow themselves ... to be overwhelmed by that yearning for the true, the good and the beautiful,” he said. “It’s a longing for something, it’s an ache, a hunger.”

This fundamental human experience is part of a “Divinity Code” that God has implanted into the human heart, said West.

Bursting forth with snippets of popular songs, West identified how the culture recognizes and expresses this hunger, and in response offers a “junk food diet” of so-called sexual freedom.

“We have to ask ourselves: why can’t Mick Jagger get no satisfaction?” West said. “In our culture, there is plenty of sex, we’re sated with sex, but we remain starved for love.”

On the other hand, religion has too-often offered a “starvation diet” obsessed with rules, that says desire is bad and needs to be repressed, ignored, denied and annihilated, West described. “We all have this hunger called *Eros*, and if the only two choices are starvation or greasy chicken

nuggets, I don’t know about you, but I’m going for the nuggets,” he said of the attraction of the culture’s “junk food” as an answer to the hunger in the human heart.

But, in fact, Christianity offers a “banquet” to answer this profound longing – something which John Paul II’s Theology of the Body is helping many to rediscover, he said. “This is authentic Christianity in a nutshell: there is a banquet that corresponds to the hunger of the heart.”

Too often we have been wounded by our upbringing, or misled by the “junk food” or “starvation” messages that offer twisted or disordered images of human sexuality.

“How many of you would say that in your upbringing there was open, honest, normal, healthy conversation about God’s glorious, beautiful, wonderful plan for making us male and female, and that you learned growing up how the intimate embrace of husband and wife in one flesh is a great mystery that foreshadows the eternal ecstasy and bliss that awaits us in heaven?” West asked, with only one or two in the crowd identifying with the statement.

The body is not just biological, it is also theological, West said. The Theology of the Body reveals that “only the body is capable of making visible what is invisible, the spiritual and the divine.”

The body, in its masculinity and femininity has become a sign or icon of God’s own mystery, he related, describing the marriage imagery that permeates the scriptures as a description of God’s relationship to his people. “Human sexuality, properly understood, offers a glimmer of the Mystery” of God’s love, he said.

“God is singing this love song to us, and we need to learn how to hear the music, how to feel the music, and learn how to dance,” West said.

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Through the music of the retreat, the visuals created by a sand artist, and references to popular music and culture, he encouraged those assembled to hear God's song of love echoing.

"We have to listen to where our hearts are moved and why," he said. "Nowhere are we so afraid (to do this) as with our sexuality – when it comes to reading the Divinity Code in our own bodies."

Man and woman, naked without shame, in original glory, is the most beautiful thing in all creation, West asserted. "This is an icon, a religious icon, a window to heaven" that was twisted and distorted in the fall, and which must be reclaimed and transformed by a new purity of heart, West said.

"The good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful is all mixed up together," he said, stressing that rather than "cleaning house" on our own, we must invite Jesus in and put the clean up into the hands of the saviour.

"Bridegroom/bride, union/life" is the "pattern of the universe," said West, exploring the theology of Jesus as the Bridegroom and the Church as his bride. "It's the mystery of the eternal God made visible."

"It tells us something profoundly theological. This is love: not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us first," West said. "It means God is the initiator of the gift, and it is the bridegroom who initiates the gift."

Jesus' words: "this is my body" and the love he shows "with his body, given up for us" resonate with this marriage imagery, West described. "It is a call to holy communion that brings life to the world."

Authentic love is not about control, or manipulating someone to get what one wants, West told the gathering. It is about loving the unrepeatable mystery of the other person, completely and sacrificially, as Jesus loved the Church. "This call to love is literally chiseled by God into our bodies... we are destined to be a gift to one another."

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