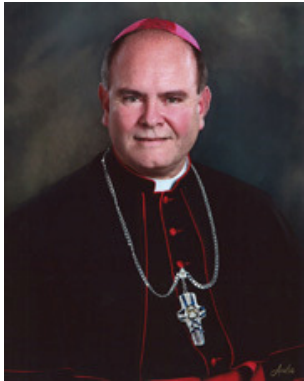


## The Culture of Life in the Dignity of the Human Body

[| Print |](#)



***By Bishop Fernando Isern, D.D.***

In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, God tells us that we are created in His image and likeness. By our very nature, then, we tend toward God and yearn for God. Genesis 3:7 tells us that after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, “they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.”

This Original Sin, which created a primordial break in our relationship with God, results in a critical break in our relationship with ourselves and one another. Nakedness in the Adam and Eve story, our hiding our bodies by covering them, serves as the great symbol of this break with ourselves and

with one another.

Before the Fall it was different. Then Adam looked upon the body of Eve and saw her whole person created in God’s image and likeness. He saw her dignity, her solitude, her origin in God; he saw the spousal meaning of her existence, created as gift for another. Eve, of course, saw just the same as she looked upon Adam. Before eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve lived together in complete transparency: their bodies revealed their whole selves to each other, the full dignity and meaning of their whole person.

When relationship with God and self breaks in Eden, the meaning of the body becomes ambiguous. Doubt is cast on the gift of creation in itself and the gift of one human offering him/herself transparently to another. So we hide our bodies from sight. Our gaze no longer participates in the vision of God, looking upon all things as “good.” Instead, our gaze becomes a look of desire in which we assess the “other” as an object for our use. In a game of hide and seek, our bodies all of a sudden become opaque. Transparency, though, remains something for which we all yearn.

In times past it was perhaps sufficient for us humans to be marked by virtues. People noted when someone had a kindly spirit, a generous spirit, a courageous spirit. These qualities distinguished people from one another. Today, we live in a much depersonalized world. Very often we lose our sense of person and the value of person – for ourselves and for others. We feel so often isolated, alone, unknown and unseen. We feel terribly invisible.

Tattoos appear to be seen in our time as a possible solution to this anonymity. They seem to mark us in a way that helps us feel we are not an anonymous face in a crowd. Tattoos might very well be seen as a window on the body into the person’s interior. Perhaps the tattoo expresses the person’s need to be seen, to be read, to be understood. Perhaps it promises that something vital about me is being communicated and known. Johnny Depp, for instance, recently told Larry King that his growing number of tattoos mark major milestones in his life and so tell his life’s story. Tattoos, then appear to be a cry for transparency, a yearning for self-revelation: “When you see this symbol on my body, you see me!”

The great Church Doctor St. Augustine reminds us that, “our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord” (Confessions, Book I, Chapter I). God creates us for himself! We human beings cannot run away from whom God has created us to be. By our nature we tend toward God.

Our longing to be known emerges from the depths of our being, from our very nature. This yearning

reflects foremost our need to be utterly transparent to God. If we courageously present ourselves before our God, with our sins and our virtues, as we are, and let God's tender mercy embrace us, let God's infinite love affirm our dignity, then we will have the courage to be transparent with one another. That is how Eden is restored in us.

This transparency before God ignites our experience of God's love, and this love ignites our transparency toward one another. Only in Christ will we be transfigured, transformed, glorified. Only in Christ will we find the transparent love and beauty that will truly satisfy.