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## Theology of the Body I

Theology of the Body is a title that was given to perhaps the greatest theological contribution of St. John Paul II. This title refers to the fact that since we are incarnate beings with a body and a soul, we operate in both the physical and spiritual realms of Creation at the same time. In fact, what we do in one effects what we do (or happens) in the other. Therefore, there is inherent spiritual (and therefore eternal) meaning to our physical actions and physical effects to our spiritual ones.

This idea is at the very heart of our 'Sacramental System'. We pray with water, oil, bread and wine, candles, robes, etc. All of these things represent a reality that is thicker than something that is merely material *or* spiritual. When used in this sacramental way, they (as we, humans) are *both* material and spiritual. The water, oil, etc. are material symbols that represent something spiritual, but as material things they are also realities that have meaning in and of themselves. Lost yet?

Water is used in Baptism. It represents Life. Grace *is* Divine Life. Grace is frequently represented in Scripture as water. For a culture living in a semi-arid environment, water *is* life because having it is the difference between living and dying. For example, think of the primordial waters and then the rivers in Genesis; the river Ezekiel saw flowing out of the Temple in his vision/dream; the water that flowed out of Christ's pierced side and lanced open Heart, to site just a few.

Drawing on this, we can see how important it is to drink water in order to live, but we also clean with it. Remember the flood of Noah. Baptism draws on all of this imagery of water (and more) in order to communicate to us the reality of God's cleansing us of the 'stain of original sin' and then filling us with His Divine Life. However, the water is not merely an arbitrary and abstract symbol like a variable we would use in algebra or calculus, etc. It has a reality and meaning on its own because it is a real thing that is *not* arbitrary.

If we can say this about something material that is inanimate like water, imagine the significance when we turn to something that is not only alive, but natively inhabiting both the material and spiritual realms like we do as humans. We have a body (material) and a soul (spiritual) but these two realities are inextricably linked. If you separate each from the other the person dies. We require both for life.

This is precisely why we can have Sacraments and sacramentals. Inhabiting both realms, what we do in one effects what happens in the other. Therefore, there is a meaning to our actions and our very bodies themselves that cannot be redefined or extracted. They are bound together by a reality of which we are not the author.

*Fr. Michael*