During my early days of dating in high school, I asked our school chaplain (and my spiritual director), Fr. Lorenzo Gomez, about the moral limits of intimacy with a girl before marriage.

He responded, “The greatest gift you can give your future wife, Michael, is to tell her you loved her so much, you waited for her.”

These words proved very helpful during my fraternity days at Michigan State University. And with the help of God’s grace, I was able to stay the course, eventually offering the gift of my life to Christ and the church.

Having begun a young professionals group in New York City three years ago, I am acutely aware of the challenges of living this high level of virtue, especially with the age of marriage increasing to around 28 years old. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of positive role models today, and the ones who do take a stand are often ridiculed by the media and the culture at large.

While a group of Georgetown University students were watching the Broncos vs. Steelers playoff game, a few of the guys started making jokes about Tim Tebow’s virginity. One of the young men, who now works in New York City, took a stand and said, “Hey, guys, what are you saying? We should all be admiring the virtue and self-control of Tebow. Think how easy it would be for him not to be a virgin. Personally, I think he is an incredible role model and inspiring example.”

Clearly, the fact that shortly after signing with the New York Mets, his jersey sales ranked third on Major League Baseball’s website — trailing only the jerseys of David Ortiz and Kris Bryant — showed the thirst of our youth today for positive role models.

Fr. Jason Smith, LC, who runs several marriage preparation programs in the Archdiocese of New York, noted, “The couples who have tried their best to be chaste before marriage are really telling each other that they believe in fidelity — and they enter marriage with a high level of trust and confidence. It’s not easy, but as a result they

know they can sacrifice for each other.”

Fr. Walter Schu, LC, national chaplain of the Cana Family Institute and author of the book, “The Splendor of Love,” has written extensively on the importance of virginity in the context of St. John Paul’s Theology of the Body: “The greatest gift spouses make to each other is the gift of their very selves.”

“This gift is made incarnate in the conjugal act. But for the conjugal act to be an authentic act of self-giving love, it must take place within marriage, after the spouses have already gifted their whole lives to one another in the marriage vows. Sex before marriage is inauthentic,” Fr. Schu continued. “It is telling a lie with the body, since the complete gift of self has not yet been vowed. Either he or she could simply walk away after the sexual act, saying, ‘Ciao, baby.’ Marriage vows guarantee the truth of the conjugal act as the gift of one’s whole self in love.”

Living chastely before marriage makes people honest in their sexuality. It’s certainly not an easy task, given today’s oversexed culture, but the rewards of a lasting and happy marriage outweigh any sacrifice.

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