



A single twenty-something intimately and honestly shares with Catholic Link her personal thoughts on dating, chastity, and the single life. We invite you to enter into the heart and mind of a young woman who is patiently waiting for God's plan to unfold in her life:

I want to know that it's worth it.

Of course, any long-term struggle is worth it in the end. But it would be nice to know, from some youngish married couples, that the struggle of chastity and waiting is worth it in the long run. When you live a chaste single life, you do so partly because you know that marriage is not something to be taken lightly. You know that marriage is not a fairy tale, that it is incredibly hard work and you also know that a husband will not solve all your problems or fulfil your every desire (because only God can do that).

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All of this can sometimes lead you to feeling that marriage is just one long vale of tears after the honeymoon phase wears off! I'd love to hear from some Catholic married couples (not to be ageist, but it would be nice if they were young so that they understand the struggles of the modern world) who could share their experience of marriage, NFP (because I feel like this is discussed before marriage, but it would be nice to hear that hopefully it's working out for others once they are married!) and generally that waiting was worth it, not in a superficial, 'isn't life great' way, but that their chastity in their single state was worth it in preparing them for a joyful marriage.

I'd like to know that I'm not the only one

Praise be to God that I feel like I'm past the white-knuckling just-got-to-do-this-because-it's-morally-right stage of my late teens. I have found that it is true that "when you resolve firmly to lead a clean life, chastity will not be a burden for you: it will be a triumphal crown." (St. Josemaria Escriva.) Chastity is now an integrated part of my life and while I'd struggle to talk about it with non-Catholic friends, I am definitely not ashamed of it anymore and I have realized it is part of me, and that feels wonderful. Having said that, while the older I get, the less I care what others think, it still can feel weird. It would be nice to know that there are others around (and I know they are, they just feel few and far between) who are also living this way of life, and who are also not just teens, but in their 20s and 30s.

I'd like people to know (especially older generations in the Church) the cost of chastity

While it is true that I feel genuinely happy and very fulfilled living a chaste life, it has come at a high price. Everyone is called to pay that price in some kind of way, so I don't want this to sound like a whine. There are worse things that could happen!

However, when chastity became an issue of actual reality for me, aged 16 (I'd just left home for the first time) I knew that it would either be the sword on which my faith fell, or by which it survived. I knew I had to make a choice and that if my chastity went out the window, so would my faith. I couldn't have one without the other. So I choose chastity, but it's not just the case of 'being a good girl' anymore. Making that choice meant a huge sacrifice. It meant being gossiped about, laughed at, it meant endless arguments in relationships, it meant boyfriends pushing the boundaries, it meant an awful lot of rejection, which if not handled properly (and I couldn't handle it properly, in my late teens) leads to a lot of damage. I felt very alone at that time, because the older generation (i.e., my parents or maybe people I'd have contact with in church) couldn't understand, because it was never like that in their day. Lifeteen's website, just then in it's early days, saved me.

It also means- and this might seem really obvious to some, but it's surprisingly less obvious to others, especially to well meaning friends and parishioners- I can only date Catholic guys. This should have been obvious from the start, but when you don't actually know any Catholic guys (I know many more now!) it's not. A lot of people (myself as a late teen, my non-Catholic friends now, some family members, older Church people etc) think you can just meet a nice guy (non-Catholic or atheist or whatever), fall in love, get him to 'wait' (ie, not have sex with you), get married (maybe convert him on the way, yay!) then you're married now, so the sex thing won't be a problem anymore! Seems simple, and people honestly cannot understand why this would not be a problem. So let me address them:

From dating, being in relationships (and falling in love with one of them and considering marriage with him) I have realised this is absolutely not the case. For starters, our world is so saturated with sex that, without being able to understand the reasoning behind chastity (faith, God, belief in right and wrong, belief in the sacredness of sex) your average guy, no matter how lovely, sweet, caring, or willing he may be, will struggle enormously not to have sex. It will be impossible, and it is impossible without God, because chastity requires the grace of God, and it is a gift.

Not to mention the widespread use of pornography, which I was vaguely aware was in the background of a few of my boyfriend's past/current lives and is these days, tragically, generally considered completely normal.

You can't be in a relationship that sets out to convert someone. I do understand that there are relationships that involve a conversion and the couple ending up on the same page. I do know that for some, the other person is so worth it that they will seek to understand the Church's teaching on sex, marriage and contraception and will completely support their Catholic spouse in this. But, I don't think a relationship can survive with one person thinking "I'll just convert the other and it will all be fine." It means that someone has to compromise. God's grace is always available, but it has to work with the free will of the other person. It has to work within the other person's own timing. I would feel that I was compromising my own integrity and the integrity of the other person if I came into a relationship with the 'convert-him' mindset.

"But once you're married, it would be fine!"- no! No, because chastity doesn't stop when you're married, it continues (thank God!) and, because of NFP, and because I

would want to raise my children in a household that is built on faith, and where mum and dad believe the same things and share that common goal. So what I'm saying is, Church, it's tough out there, and it would be nice just to be heard.

However, being single is great- and also, worth all the struggles!

I haven't had a relationship for nearly five years now and once upon a time, that would have bothered me so much. It doesn't any more, I'm in a place of peace about it. I love all the things I can do as a single person, and I have a really fulfilling life. I've been blessed with so much. I can 100% say that the struggle in the single life is totally, totally worth it. God has given back to me so generously. And in being single I have discovered much more about who I am and who He is and who we are in relation to each other. Though I once could never have believed it, the positives of being single do outweigh the negatives. I have freedom to pursue my interests, to be spontaneous, to spend time with friends and go travelling. I have the full scope of a wide range of opportunities. I can help and volunteer for good causes with more flexibility than someone married with children.

I'd like people to know that not having sex doesn't mean I'm boring/weird/a freak/ a prude/*insert insult here*

Ideally, I'd like to live in a world where sex wasn't a topic in casual conversation, so that my lifestyle in this matter wasn't up for discussion. But I think we're beyond that, and I do know that sharing my experience of chastity with my non-Catholic friends does mean that I can evangelise, and they get to see another path in this situation that doesn't involve taking a lot of pills, worrying about pregnancy, STDs, heartbreak etc. But also, I want people to know that this does not mean I'm looking down in judgement at them. Because I'm not. There but for the grace of God go I. I can see both sides, and living in this culture does mean that I do understand them when they think I'm weird. I do understand the insults I sometimes get. I do understand it- I understand how weird it is to them. But that doesn't mean that I want to sit and listen to every gory detail of their own sex life. And I think they respect that.

Finally, a word on vocation

The Church has done so much good in recent years to help young people discern a call to religious life (and I know first hand, as I spent two of those single years discerning that call). There are plenty of weekend retreats on the subject, lots of monasteries and convents opening their doors for 'come and see' days, festival weekends for those just discerning a general call to religious life. But this is lacking in the same way for discerning a call to the married life! I don't mean huge Catholic dating weekends, but weekend retreats, led by married couples as well as priests/religious would be great. Maybe they do exist, but I'm not seeing loads of options. Weekends on The Theology Of The Body also (again, I know they exist, would be great to see more of them). Unfortunately, cost is involved too! It costs next to nothing to try out your vocation with some sisters, but a weekend exploring what marriage means and learning more about its beauty can be really expensive. Just a point worth mentioning! Strong, Catholic marriages are needed more than ever before and large Catholic families are also fertile ground for great vocations!