

PREACHING *HUMANAE VITAE*

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Human Life International

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year A

Sunday, July 20th, 2008

(In anticipation of the 40th anniversary of *Humanae vitae* on the following Friday)

First Reading: Wisdom 12: 13, 16-19 (Those who are just must be kind)

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 86 (Lord, you are good and forgiving)

Second Reading: Romans 8:26-27 (The spirit comes to the aid of our weakness)

Gospel: Mt 13: 24-43 (The Parable of the Sower) [Long Version]

OPTION 1: Focus on the message of the Gospel (The Parable of the Sower)

(Note: this message is directed mainly to married couples in their childbearing years but could also help those younger people who might be thinking about that vocation. It can apply to the elderly too as a reaffirmation of the core values of their generation.)

Opener:

- This week the Church celebrates the 40th anniversary of the papal encyclical on contraception
- This has been a truly counter-cultural teaching from the beginning because—if we are truly honest about it—contraception has become an immoral institution of modern society and many people have built their whole lives on it
- The challenge of the Gospel is to live in a society with the weeds of the culture of death all around us and yet not succumb to them

The Gospel image of the devil sowing seed is stark but realistic:

- The devil has sown the seeds of the present cultural breakdown by sowing contraception in our society
- Here's the bad news:
 - The Pill has severed marital intimacy from childbearing (the unitive and procreative dimensions of marriage)
 - By so doing, contraception has led to a phenomenal increase in promiscuity, adultery and out of wedlock births
 - It has been the direct cause of the increased divorce rate, and
 - Abortion followed from contraception like rotten fruit from bad seed—
“When you sow contraception, you reap abortion.” (Fr. Paul Marx)
- Without pointing any fingers, every one of us and our families have been affected by the rotten fruit of the culture of death
- If contraception was supposed to make marriages better, the evidence is not there
- If contraception was supposed to make us happier, the evidence is just not there

- It all began with that one astute tactic of the devil who got us to detach marital intimacy from the idea of having kids
- After that, he could lead us down a path of personal, relational and social chaos
- Well the chaos is here, and we have to do something about it.

Should we accommodate the culture?

- But the parable seems to tell us not to uproot the weeds lest we damage the good things that are all around us
- Should we just accept contraception then and try to find some good in it?
- QUITE THE CONTRARY!
- In other places, Jesus tells us to uproot all immorality from our personal lives as dangerous to our souls, and this certainly applies to contraception:
 - “If your right eye is your problem, gouge it out ...” (Mt 5:29)
 - “Better to enter heaven blind than to enter Gehenna with both eyes...”
- Contraception is undoubtedly something that has to be uprooted from our lives and our marriages:
 - The *Catechism* calls contraception and sterilization “intrinsically immoral” acts (*Compendium*, 498); [*HV* calls it “intrinsically disordered” and “intrinsically dishonest” (*HV*, 13)]
 - Contraception remains a grave sin against marriage (*Catechism*, 2368; cf. *HV*, 13-14) because it makes couples the arbiters [judges] of God’s plan for life rather than the servants of that plan
 - All chemical means of contraception cause chemical abortions in a certain percentage of the cycles and simply cannot be used morally by anyone
- Those who use contraception have a decision to make, in all honesty—to either accommodate the culture (and place themselves outside of Communion with God and the Church) or purify our lives and marriages of contraception and follow the way of the Gospel that leads to freedom
- What freedom?
 - Freedom from putting toxic chemicals in the body
 - Freedom from that divisive influence in our marriages
 - Freedom from sin, and
 - Freedom of conscience, in knowing that we are doing the right thing.
- Have the courage, dear friends, to uproot these weeds from your lives—God’s grace will never fail you when you choose to do what is right.

How to reverse the damage:

- But be aware that the Catholic message of marriage and family life is more relevant than ever
- We are witnesses of the good seed and the value of the wheat
- What our society thinks is totally crazy is not only possible but beneficial!
- Here’s the good news:
 - Study after study proves that stable marriages make men and women happier and more productive than the alternatives
 - Couples who are open and generous in having children enjoy a higher level of purpose in their lives than those without children

- Children who live in intact families achieve more, perform better in school, and have better social skills than their counterparts
- Marriage still remains the single greatest predictor of health and wellbeing for men and women in America, and indeed, in *all* societies
- [Source: www.familyfacts.org]
- Statistics tell us in a scientific way what church documents tell us in a theoretical way, but the Truth about marriage remains the same, namely
 - That married couples are co-creators of new life with God when they have children
 - That marriage and family life are actually part of our happiness
 - That children are a gift, not a burden; and
 - That natural means to regulate births are healthy, moral and lead to a much lower incidence of marital breakdown than contraception.

The spiritual challenge:

- The Gospel story contrasts the weeds and the wheat—my friends, we are the wheat!
- We have something of substance to offer our society in contrast to the empty promises that were sown in our culture by the devil when he sold us contraception
- To conclude, I want to issue two challenges to you married couples that I'm sure will transform your lives (you are up to the challenge!)
- My first *Humanae vitae* challenge to you is
 - Be generous with life and have another child (if you are in your childbearing years)
 - What a gift you will be giving to the world and to the Lord!
 - Think of benefit of the child—not the cost!
 - No one on his death bed ever said, “Gee, it’s too bad I have all these children and grandchildren here supporting and comforting me.”
- Here’s my second *Humanae vitae* challenge:
 - Improve your marriage by learning the natural methods of fertility regulation [or natural family planning], if needed for serious reasons
 - If you want to reduce your chances of divorce, improve your communication and free yourself from the slavery to chemicals, you will find in these methods an answer to your deepest needs.

Closer:

At the end of the parable, Jesus said that “the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

In a society that has been so darkened by the culture of death, YOU be that shining light!

OPTION 2: Focus on the message of Romans (“The spirit comes to the aid of our weakness”)

(Note: this message is directed mainly to married couples in their childbearing years but could also help those younger people who might be thinking about that vocation. It can apply to the elderly too as a reaffirmation of the core values of their generation.)

Opener:

- This coming Friday the Church celebrates the 40th anniversary of the papal encyclical on contraception
- This teaching has been reviled and rejected because it has touched upon one of the greatest weaknesses of our age, namely, the belief that we can nullify our reproductive function without consequence
- Thankfully, St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans says that “the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness” and helps us to see the truth about marriage and childbearing so that we can live in true freedom

Why is the Church so focused on childbearing [sexuality] issues?

- Well, to start, these are issues that affect every member of the human race!
- Human reproduction is also something that the Church happens to consider in its sacred dimension; not just its medical dimension
- When something is sacred, it is part of God’s plan for man’s happiness in this life and in the life to come
- The encyclical of Pope Paul VI said that in so many ways:
 - Marriage is a divine institution, not just a natural state
 - Men and women are stewards of the great gift of human reproduction; they co-create with God every beautiful little life that comes into the world
 - Children are not only a natural fruit of reproduction but are also part of the divine plan for our spiritual health and wellbeing
 - Someone once said that “children are given to parents to make them saints, and parents are given to children to make them saints”! (Fr. Paul Marx)
- THAT is the transcendent dimension of the marital act, and that is why the Church is concerned about it

“The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness”

- You can’t be married today without being tempted to see children as burdens and economic liabilities—that is the default mentality of our age
- A 1998 *US News and World Report* issue absurdly estimated that raising a child to the age of 18 would cost the average family more than \$1.4 million—these are pure scare tactics of the culture of death, but they are indicative of our society’s cynicism toward childbearing
- As parents, you are immersed in a social setting that punishes you for having more kids and calls you irresponsible for wanting a large family
 - First of all, remember the words of the Lord, “Blessed are you when men revile you and hate you because of me...” (Lk 6:22)

- Then, turn the tables on those who criticize your large family and *tell them to stop interfering in your “reproductive choices” (!)*
- This “logic” works both ways
- This is also where we truly need the help of the Holy Spirit:
 - Catholics are called to stand up in the face of all those cultural negativities and proclaim a truth that is unpopular but one that our society desperately needs to hear
 - Namely, that God blesses those who are generous with life!
- This is undoubtedly an attitude that comes from faith because secular society doesn't see the blessings of large families
- We know it because we see it all over God's creation and revelation:
 - You will not find one negative thing about a child in the Bible; they are always blessings and never burdens in God's Word
 - The Scriptures exclusively, and consistently, hold out fertility as something that is blessed, not cursed
 - Indeed, “Be fruitful and multiply!” was the first command that God gave to mankind, and
 - Family is the one reality that most reflects the inner life of the Trinity
- Over against the cynicism of our age is the love of Jesus for the children who He laid hands on and blessed.

The Church's idea of Married Love

- If people would just take the time to listen to what the Church actually says about married love, we would be overwhelmed at the beauty of this vision
- Here is how much respect the Church has for marital love—[*HV*, n. 9]
- “This love is first of all fully human, that is to say, of the senses and of the spirit at the same time. It is ...intended to endure and to grow by means of the joys and sorrows of daily life, in such a way that husband and wife become one heart and one soul, and together attain their human perfection.
- “Then, this love is *total*, that is to say, it is a very special form of personal friendship, in which husband and wife generously share everything, without undue reservations of selfish calculations. Whoever truly loves his marriage partner loves not only for what he receives, but for the partner's self, rejoicing that he can enrich his partner with the gift of himself.
- “Again, this love is faithful and exclusive until death. Thus in fact do bride and groom conceive it to be on the day when they freely and in full awareness assume the duty of the marriage bond. A fidelity...which can sometimes be difficult, but is always possible, always noble and meritorious, as no one can deny.... it is a source of profound and lasting happiness.
- “And finally this love is [fruitful] for it is not exhausted by the communion between husband and wife, but is destined to continue, raising up new lives. Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents.”
- I challenge any other church or secular organization to give a better definition of married love than the Catholic one!

Generosity—a human and spiritual virtue

- The Holy Spirit teaches us generosity at a time when having a large family is considered irresponsible
- St. Paul says that “He intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will” which means that the Holy Spirits helps us in everything, especially the most important things like marriage and family
- We just have to believe that
- As I read the Bible, it seems to me that God promises you will always get back more than you give
- Let’s look at some of the rewards of generosity in having children:
 - Children give parents a reason to live
 - Children help parents to transform their love from romantic love into parental love—which is much deeper and richer
 - All things being equal, more children mean more love in the home and more human and economic resources for the family and society
 - Parents give their children great gifts when they provide them with brothers and sisters
 - Children provide for their parents in their old age and pray them into heaven when God calls them home
- We just have to remind ourselves that we cannot outdo God in generosity—your children are God’s children too!

To conclude

- Our Lord has promised that He would never leave us or abandon us, especially in the most important work of marriage and family
- Let us place our trust in Him, “in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health” and He will never disappoint us
- Let us follow the lead of the Generous Spirit of God and trust that when we give God the full generosity of our fertile years, He will pay us back in abundance!

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