

From the Pastor

Reflections on the Holiness of Marriage

“And the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” — Mark 10:8-9

I would like to begin a series of several bulletin articles so that we may reflect on the beauty of human sexuality. I invite you to give due attention to each article in the series because each article will provide a foundation for the next topic. This series will approach many underexamined and difficult topics that many Catholics struggle to understand. These articles will cover issues like contraception, same-sex attraction, and sexual fidelity. These later topics, if read in isolation apart from the first of the series, may be difficult to understand. It is necessary to read the first several articles in order to understand the more difficult concepts that will be covered in later articles.

Although we live in a culture that is often over-sexualized and filled with constant false or distorted images of love, we seldom hear about the true beauty of human sexuality as God created it—especially as it is lived out in the sacrament of marriage between a man and a woman.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, point 1601, tells us the following:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

As a starting point, let us reflect on the beauty of human love—particularly as it is revealed in the intimate and faithful union of husband and wife. Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians, calls marriage a “great mystery” and says that it refers to Christ and the Church. In this mystical image, the marital bond between husband and wife becomes a living reflection of the bond between Christ and his Bride, the Church.

As Christ loves his Church, so a husband is called to love his wife; and as the Church loves Christ, so a wife is called to love her husband. This is a profound and sacred vocation. In their daily fidelity and tenderness, married couples reveal to the world the infinite love of Christ for his Church—and in return, they mirror the devoted love of the Church for Christ.

If Jesus’ love for the Church is the image of married love, then we must ask: “What kind of love did Christ show for his Bride, the Church?” His love was a love that led him to the Cross. It was total, self-giving, and sacrificial—a love “unto death.” In this way, every Christian marriage is meant to witness that same sacrificial love on earth. The vocation of marriage is not merely a human arrangement; it is a divine call to love as Christ loves, even when that love requires great sacrifice. Because this kind of love exceeds human strength, every marriage depends on God’s grace to be lived faithfully and joyfully. In the midst of daily struggles and shortcomings, a married couple must learn to forgive and to seek forgiveness. Our personal brokenness makes us rely more and more on the strength of heaven so that we can authentically live the beautiful call to marriage.

In addition to being sacrificial, the love of marriage is also exclusive. “It demands...faithfulness in definitive mutual giving” (CCC 1643). The union of husband and wife in the sacrament of marriage is singular and complete. Their love, expressed most intimately in the marital act, admits no third party. This exclusivity is obviously not only physical—it extends to the heart and soul. “Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of a person enter” (CCC 1643). No friendship or attachment should ever take precedence over the sacred friendship of marriage. Fidelity means that one’s spouse remains the first and most important person in one’s life; second only to God himself. If another relationship—whether with a friend, a coworker, or even a family member—takes the

primary place of one's spouse, then something of marital fidelity is lost. The love of husband and wife must remain unique, guarded, and cherished above all other human bonds.

Further, the love of marriage is procreative—that is, open to new life. “By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring, and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory” (CCC 1652). The complementarity of the bodies as male and female is a sign of the union of marriage. Scripture tells us that the two become one. This is most aptly symbolized in the marital embrace, where through the sexual act the male and female bodies are made one. This body-union is a form of physical complementarity that is found in no other human relationship. This unity is so complete that the love—expressed through sex between a man and a woman—has the capacity to generate new life.

In this union, the love of the couple is literally incarnated into flesh in the life of a new human person. In a world that often separates love from life, the Church continues to teach that the gift of children is the crowning glory of married love. Artificial contraception, which deliberately closes the marital act to life, stands in contradiction to God's plan for love and fruitfulness. The Church teaches that each child is a sacred gift, co-created with God, and that to welcome children lovingly from him is to participate in the ongoing miracle of creation and the redemption of the world.

The sexual complementarity of a man and a woman teaches us something of the poverty of other unions which fall short of the generative complementarity of a man and a woman who are able to co-create in love. It is for this reason that artificial contraception is a grave moral issue. If a couple knowingly uses artificial contraception with the full consent of the will, they fall into mortal sin, which is normally forgiven only in the sacrament of confession. There are no circumstances where artificial contraception can become a part of a sacramental, Christian marriage. It is always and in every circumstance a grave act, which translates to mortal sin when the couple willingly uses artificial means of contraception to prevent the conception of new life.

The Church honors and praises parents who are open to new life because children are not merely blessings for this life—they are souls destined for eternity. Everything else we possess—our homes, our goods, even our earthly honors—will one day pass away. But our children, with their immortal souls, will endure forever in God's presence. What greater joy could there be than to hope that one day we will share the joy of heaven with them?

The goal of marital love is the kingdom of heaven. When a couple is united in holy matrimony, they receive a vocation to help their spouse get to heaven. The first vocation of a husband is to help his wife get to heaven, and the first vocation of a wife is to help her husband get to heaven. Marriage is given by God to the human family to help us on our way to heaven. You may ask yourself if you see your marriage as a path to heaven. Do you realize that you are called to save your spouse through your life of virtue? Do you see that the acceptance of children is a powerful means of sanctifying the human heart? A couple cannot continue long in any form of selfishness if they are parents of many children. Though the life of marriage may at times involve the weight of the cross, it is a cross that sanctifies through love.

I hope that this reflection on the beauty of marital love between one man and one woman will lay a firm foundation for further reflection on the mystery of creation and the power and sanctity of the sexual covenant between a man and a woman. May this reflection remind us of the sacred beauty of marriage: a love that is sacrificial, exclusive, and open to life—a love that reflects the very heart of Christ for his Church.

(Please be aware that next week's article is not intended for children.)

In Christ,
Rev. David Kime