

**Homily for Mass for the Intention of Natural Family Planning Week
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**The Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)
August 12, 2012**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we sometimes forget that everything we have comes from God. When we awoke this morning, how many of us thanked God for the gift of a new day, with the full realization that we might not have awoken? This example, both simple and yet profound, highlights this reality of human life: everything is a gift, even what we like to think of as ours.

In the first reading today, the prophet Elijah is unwilling to finish the task given him by God because of his great despair. “He prayed for death, saying: ‘This is enough, O LORD! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers’” (I Kings 19:4). But by the gift of food from God, without which he cannot continue, Elijah is strengthened and heartened to continue on his mission.

In the Gospel today, Jesus declares that he is “the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I give is my flesh for the life of the world” (John 6:51). He not only gives us what we need to sustain us on our own missions and tasks received from the Lord, but he himself is the gift. The center of our Eucharistic faith is this: the Christ who feeds us is the Christ who suffered for us, who died for us, and who rose for us from the dead; the Christ who feeds us is the same Christ whom we receive in the Eucharist.

Against this backdrop, Saint Paul says to us, “So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2). We who follow Jesus must also be willing to give of ourselves completely, without reserve and without holding anything back; in imitation of Jesus Christ, the gift of ourselves must be free, total, and life-giving.

While this imitation of Jesus Christ is necessary in every aspect of human life, it is especially necessary in the use of human sexuality. The recent federal mandate of the Department of Health

and Human Services which seeks to force people of faith to violate their consciences by providing contraception, sterilizations, and abortion-inducing drugs has brought the proper use of human sexuality to the forefront. Is human sexuality to be used simply for a person's own enjoyment, or does human sexuality have a deeper meaning?

Forty-four years ago His Holiness Pope Paul VI wrote that "each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life... The reason is that the fundamental nature of the marriage act, while uniting husband and wife in the closest intimacy, also renders them capable of generating new life – and this as a result of laws written into the actual nature of man and of woman."¹

Looking to the future, Pope Paul VI foresaw four consequences if the Church's teaching on artificial contraception were ignored: infidelity and moral decline; a loss of respect for women; abuse of power by government authorities mandating contraception and sterilization; and the misconception that men and women have unlimited dominion over their own bodies. Regrettably, each of

these predictions has now come to pass, and society is no better for it!

While the Church teaches that artificial contraception is morally wrong because it is neither free, total, nor life-giving, it is morally possible to plan the size of one's family with Natural Family Planning, which makes use of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's cycle, without drugs, devices, or surgical procedures. "Natural Family Planning reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of children. By respecting the love-giving and life-giving natures of marriage, Natural Family Planning enriches the bond between husband and wife. In this way, a couple's love is free, total, and life-giving, in imitation of Jesus Christ.

"Contraception, in all its different variants, will always be contrary to human love because it separates the two-fold nature of marriage, which is bonding and babies. Whenever individuals, and therefore cultures, try to have pleasure (bonding) without responsibility (babies), no virtue will be fostered. If virtue is not

fostered in our daily actions, then joy and eventual redemption cannot be experienced either! This is why the Bride of Jesus Christ, Holy Mother Church, has never (and can never) teach her children anything other than how always to maintain the connection between bonding and babies (Natural Family Planning), while going through the tumultuous journey of life.”²

But even as Pope Paul VI foresaw tragic outcomes consequent of the use of artificial contraception, he also foresaw several blessings for couples who imitate the free, total, and life-giving love of Jesus Christ. “The discipline which is proper to the purity of married couples,” he wrote, “far from harming conjugal love, rather confers on it a higher human value. It demands continual effort yet, thanks to its beneficent influence, husband and wife fully develop their personalities, being enriched with spiritual values. Such discipline bestows upon family life fruits of serenity and peace; and facilitates the solution of other problems; it favors attention for one’s partner, helps both parties to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love, and deepens their sense of responsibility.”³

By living in such a manner, by rooting their love in the love of Jesus Christ, husbands and wives will help each other to grow in holiness. By looking ever to the Lord, they will be radiant with joy and their faces will not blush with shame and their homes will become a place where the Lord can be found (cf. Psalm 34:6).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 11-12.

² Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki, "Catholic teaching on NFP promotes, joy, virtue in marriage," *Catholic Times* March 25, 2012.

³ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 21.