

HOM 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday B 2021 Oct 3

*“The Lord God said: ‘It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.’”*

Bishop Robert Barron refers to these words from our first reading as basic Biblical Anthropology. Anthropology is the study of Man. Barron says that Biblical Anthropology is at odds with today’s secular anthropology because Biblical Anthropology sees Man being complete only in community, while secular anthropology sees Man being complete as individuals. Based on Biblical Anthropology, the late Cardinal Francis George said that Catholic Social teaching – and therefore social justice -- begins with the family, while secular social justice begins with the rights of the individual.

Essential to this community that begins with the family, however, Man needs not just animals and birds (and fish), as we heard in our first reading, but someone like himself. So, God forms a woman from one of Adam’s ribs. *“This one, at last, is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh”*, Adam says. Eve is like Adam...but not identical.

The Man and the woman are co-equals and yet different in a complimentary way. They fit together so to speak. They are made for each other. And that’s why, we are told, *“a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife and the two of them become one flesh.”*

The meaning of this is explained by Jesus in today’s Gospel reading. In response to a question about divorce, He tells his questioners, quoting from the Book of Genesis: *“God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* So, Jesus here defines marriage as an indissoluble bond or covenant between one man and one woman. It was that way from the beginning, He says. It cannot be between two males or two females. That’s not a marriage. Listen to what the Catholic Catechism teaches on this subject:

Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity,<sup>140</sup> tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered."<sup>141</sup> They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved. 2357

It continues:

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition. 2358

I mention here two support groups for people with same-sex attraction. One is called COURAGE and the other DIGNITY. The COURAGE group embraces Church teaching and helps its members to live chaste lives, or to get re-oriented to the opposite sex toward authentic marriage. The DIGNITY group, on the other hand, simply seeks to normalize homosexuality, and it should be avoided.

Nor is divorce OK. Frivolous divorce is also a sin and any divorce without a Church declaration of nullity and followed by remarriage is tantamount to adultery, Jesus adds. This also speaks of the need for absolute fidelity within the marriage covenant by which husband and wife give themselves totally and exclusively to each other.

Nor is contraception OK. This is based on right reason, and it can be inferred even in our Gospel reading. *“Let the children come to me,”* Jesus says, after explaining the other requirements of marriage. None of these requirements is arbitrary. Each one is essential to Man’s true good – Man’s eternal happiness.

The Catechism teaches this:

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...;

In his encyclical letter, *Humanae Vitae (On the Transmission of Human Life)*, Pope Paul VI wrote this in regard to the procreation of life:

The transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator. It has always been a source of great joy to them, even though it sometimes entails many difficulties and hardships.

The fulfillment of this duty has always posed problems to the conscience of married people, but the recent course of human society and the concomitant changes have provoked new questions. The Church cannot ignore these questions, for they concern matters intimately connected with the life and happiness of human beings.

Addressing the question of responsible parenthood, the Pope continues:

...responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time.

The Pope then explains:

The Church...in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law... teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life. (*Every marital act must be open to new life.*)

This particular doctrine, often expounded by the magisterium of the Church, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act.

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. And if each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative, is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called. We believe that our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching is in harmony with human reason.

In sum, the use of contraception is “intrinsically evil”, as the Catechism teaches because it goes against nature. Think of trying to defy the law of gravity and the harmful consequences that result if, for example, a person jumps from the roof of a tall building, and flapping his arms, expects to fly. The same with contraception which defies the law of nature. On the other hand, by working within the laws of nature e.g., aerodynamics, one can attain flight in keeping with the law of gravity. Likewise, by using the body’s natural periods of infertility for marital relations i.e., Natural Family Planning, the spacing of children for serious reason can be done in keeping with the natural law which is also the moral law.

That Man, as male and female is made in the image of God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the Book of Genesis, reveals another dimension to Man’s need for communion. Just as bodily compatibility between male and female reveals an essential communion that is attained in marriage, so the compatibility between Man and God by Man’s creation in God’s likeness reveals the essential communion between us and our Creator.

God takes the initiative in offering Man this vital and fulfilling communion with Himself, even after original Sin, in His Son Jesus. In Jesus, a divine person, divinity and humanity are no longer two. They have become one in His Flesh, yet remain perfectly distinct. Like husband and wife, they are meant to be together. So it is with the Church and Jesus – with us and Jesus. By way of the sacraments – and especially Holy Communion – we are one with Jesus as members of His Mystical Body and yet remain distinct as His Mystical Bride and Spouse to be.

In his letter to the Ephesians (5: 21-33), St. Paul refers to this in his address to husbands and wives, where he writes:

Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of the church, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. So [also] husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. *“For this reason a man shall leave [his] father and [his] mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”* This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church.

So, spouses are to relate to each other as Christ relates to His Bride and Mystical Body, the Church – and vice versa. This, by the way, is how God the Father and God the Son relate to each other. Man’s fulfillment, then, is aided in the Sacrament of Matrimony which is a conjugal and familial communion of life and love and it becomes consummate in the New and Everlasting Covenant of the Holy Eucharist by which we enter into the communion of life, love and divine glory of the Most Holy Trinity in nuptial oneness with Jesus.

We do this especially by way of Eucharistic Self-Offering. Mary shows us this way, and helps us to join in her consent to the Father’s love and will in oneness with Jesus. Her consent is a nuptial consent – deliberate, free, without reservation, and formally expressed with words – just like the matrimonial consent that is necessary for a man and a woman to become husband and wife.

Like Mary, we also prayerfully use words to formally express our deliberate, free, and unreserved reciprocal self-gift to Jesus, and with Him to the Father unto the communion of life, life, and divine glory of the Holy Trinity. Our self-offering is rendered fruitful when we offer ourselves for others, beginning with those we hold dear. First and foremost, then, spouses offer themselves to God for the true good of each other and their children. As Aristotle observed, the communion between friends – including husbands and wives – is brought to fullness when they together fall in love with a transcendent other – and especially, I would add, when they fall in love with God and offer themselves to God FOR their family.

This reciprocal Eucharistic self-offering will then take us with Jesus first to the Cross of loving obedience to God’s will. It is there, by our daily suffering that we, like Jesus in His humanness, are perfected in our love for God and one another and bear fruit for heaven as we communicate the grace of the Holy Spirit to those for whom we offer ourselves.

These are the words of Eucharistic Self-Offering to pray silently and sincerely at Holy Communion if you wish and as often as you like between Masses, particularly when you are suffering or undergoing a trial or temptation, or when you beset by the Devil: I AM ALL YOURS O MOST LOVING JESUS THROUGH MARY, YOUR MOTHER...with the help of St. Joseph.