

The Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 29, 2021
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #33)

*“On July 25, 1968, shortly after the close of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI promulgated a much-anticipated encyclical entitled Humanae Vitae. Historically, it was a time of much confusion: the sexual revolution was in full swing, the Pill was being hailed as the long-awaited perfect contraceptive to cure the social ills related to overpopulation, and even Catholic clergy advised the pope to reconcile the Church with the times in response to the report of the commission established by Pope John XXIII.” (Kimberly Hahn, *Life-Giving Love*, p. 21)*

In our reflection last weekend, I asked you to consider the topic of non-medical artificial contraception and its affect upon our society. Particular to this thought would be the question: does our acceptance, both denominational and societal, of this means actually strengthen our bonds as a society and family? Or, has our acceptance of this means actually done the opposite and “de-humanized” our fellow brothers and sisters? Through this “de-humanization,” we now view individuals as tools toward an object of want (i.e., spokes in the wheel), rather than who they truly are, each possessing dignity, value, and worth. I concluded our reflection last weekend with the historical fact that ALL Christian denominations held the belief that non-medical artificial contraception was opposed to our Christian faith (its ideals, morals, and traditions) until 1930. It was in 1930 when the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican denomination in England became the very first officially recognized Christian denomination to recognize and approve the use contraceptive means in the family for the most severe of cases.

Were I to begin this reflection reciting paragraph #2370 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, stating every purposeful act (means or end) which seeks to render procreation impossible is understood to be intrinsically evil which thereby constitutes a grave sin, I truly believe I would accomplish very little. I also believe if I were to systematically dismantle the “benefits of the Pill” once proposed in the 1960’s (fewer unwed pregnancies, fewer abortions, control overpopulation, and better marriages—meaning you now have the freedom to cohabitate and “test” the relationship before marrying), then again, what would I accomplish? As true as either of these two “means” are, I think they only misdirect our attention from the “end” or purpose of our initial reflection which was to consider the importance as to why our Lord Jesus chose to come to His children through the natural process of being born and raised as a child.

Let us return to the Garden of Eden for it was in the Garden that we can see the beginnings of the problem we address now. As we recall when God created the cosmos and all it would contain, He said three important words: “It is good.” Now, when He created man, Adam, in His own image and likeness, God added another word: “It is very good.” Now, something quite interesting occurs in chapter 2. God said that it was “*not good* for the man to be alone.” God would choose to make man a suitable partner—woman, Eve. God would give man and woman to each other in a covenant relationship. Please remember, we defined a covenant relationship as more than a contract. It is when one member gives themselves over to the other as a gift for the mutual good and well-being of the other. Only later would we understand this covenant relationship to become a marriage. It is within this marriage covenant that God tells them: “Now since you are created in My image, then go out and do what I did for you—Be

fruitful and multiply.” Did this command to go become co-creators in His image change once Adam and Eve were deposited outside Eden? No, it did not. We have already reviewed how this covenant relationship would be passed on through their descendants, even after the great flood.

If I may, this is, in my opinion, where we failed. By using non-medical artificial means to prevent conception, we forgot that we were called to give ourselves to the other as a gift. Likewise, we failed to see our partners as gifts given to us. Naturally, we would no longer see children as gifts as well. If a person is no longer a highly valued gift, then what are they? They become just “the next thing.” They are the next thing I want to provide for my pleasure. They are the next thing to fill the need we have at work. They are the next “spoke in the wheel” of our lives. And, sadly, if someone or something is “next,” then that means that the person or thing I possess now becomes expendable. They are no longer valued. By placing something artificial into our lives, we have forgotten how naturally good it is to share ourselves with the one person we truly love as our other self—your spouse. I think when we forgot that and started accepting something else; we opened ourselves up to what we have seen over these last 60 odd years. My only prayer is that we continue to hold fast to our faith during these days of intellectual, cultural, and religious darkness. Remember it is always darkest before the dawn.