

ARTICLE 73

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

Marriage a gift from God

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Marriage! Family Matters

Pope Pius XII – Allocution to Midwives

In the coming weeks I would like to take a look at Pope Pius XII's allocution to Italian midwives from October of 1951. This allocution is very important for those who wish to have a proper understanding of marriage particularly when, as we have seen, a former President of Ireland has joined with a group of dissenting Catholics in calling for the over turning of Blessed Pope Paul VI's encyclical '*Humanae Vitae*', falsely stating that '*Humanae Vitae*' is the foundation for Church teaching on human sexuality.

Humanae Vitae

There is a certain aura that has been created around '*Humanae Vitae*' both by those who accept the encyclical's teachings and by those who reject its teachings. But it is important for Catholics to realise that there was nothing new in '*Humanae Vitae*'. '*Humanae Vitae*' re-iterated the constant teaching of the Catholic church on the immoral and evil nature of contraception and also accurately predicted what some of the outcomes of a rejection of this teaching would be.

Natural Family Planning

'*Humanae Vitae*' also mentions the use of Natural Family Planning and I want to focus on this aspect of Catholic teaching as it is covered by Pope Pius XII. Unfortunately, many well intentioned Catholics are promoting a false and misguided understanding of Natural Family Planning.

The Catholic Church has the fullness of Truth and so she is able to stand tall amidst the societies of men and refute error. The Church through her ministers the bishops, is called on to proclaim and to teach those truths which have been given to her by Jesus Christ. In the Western World, where Catholic teaching is under severe attack and in many cases is ridiculed both by those within the Church as well as by those without, many Catholics are compromising with the world and seeking to find an accommodation. We saw this last year in Ireland where, during the referendum campaign against so called same sex marriage, many Catholics, who were debating the issue in public, refused to condemn legal same sex relationships and even gave their approval and support to such legal recognition. This is contrary to Catholic church teaching because those who engage in such relationships behave in a way that endangers their eternal salvation and the salvation of others. We also see this when Catholics compare the effectiveness of Natural Family Planning with the effectiveness of contraception.

Contraception is against Life

Contraception is against and is opposed to conception. Therefore contraception is against life and against God. It claims to be effective when it prevents life from coming into being. The primary end of marriage is the begetting of children, and therefore contraception is also opposed to marriage in its true sense.

Natural Family Planning on the other hand does not seek to prevent conception rather it seeks to identify the time when conception is not possible because the woman is in the infertile phase of her cycle. The difference is clearly highlighted by the fact that those who use contraception, do so even when the woman is not in her fertile phase that is, they contracept even when conception cannot

occur.

NFP only for Grave Reasons!

Another important distinction to be made is that Catholics are only permitted to use Natural Family Planning when there are grave reasons for doing so and it is this aspect of Catholic teaching on Natural Family Planning which is often ignored in presentations made to Catholics on this subject. So let us look at Pope Pius XII's allocution to midwives and his advice to them as to how they should respond when a couple seeks information on Natural Family Planning. In this situation Pope Pius XII says.

Two Hypotheses

“It is necessary first of all to consider two hypotheses. If the application of Natural Family Planning implies that husband and wife may use their matrimonial right even during the days of natural sterility no objection can be made. In this case they do not hinder or jeopardize in any way the consummation of the natural act and its ulterior natural consequences. It is exactly in this that the application of the theory, of which We are speaking, differs essentially from the abuse already mentioned, which consists in the perversion of the act itself. If, instead, husband and wife go further, that is, limiting the conjugal act exclusively to those periods, then their conduct must be examined more closely.” (Pope Pius XII – Allocution to Midwives)

Once again we have clarity. A couple are free to engage in the acts proper to marriage even when the wife may be naturally infertile. He makes the distinction, which many try to blur today, between what is natural and what is a perversion of the act itself, that is artificial contraception. But he then says that where a husband and wife seek recourse to the sterile period exclusively, this must be examined more closely. The allocution to midwives continues.

Two More Hypotheses

“Here again we are faced with two hypotheses. If, one of the parties contracted marriage with the intention of limiting the matrimonial right itself to the periods of sterility, and not only its use, in such a manner that during the other days the other party would not even have the right to ask for the debt, than this would imply an essential defect in the marriage consent, which would result in the marriage being invalid, because the right deriving from the marriage contract is a permanent, uninterrupted and continuous right of husband and wife with respect to each other.”

“However if the limitation of the act to the periods of natural sterility does not refer to the right itself but only to the use of the right, the validity of the marriage does not come up for discussion. Nonetheless, the moral lawfulness of such conduct of husband and wife should be affirmed or denied according as their intention to observe constantly those periods is or is not based on sufficiently morally sure motives. The mere fact that husband and wife do not offend the nature of the act and are even ready to accept and bring up the child, who, notwithstanding their precautions, might be born, would not be itself sufficient to guarantee the rectitude of their intention and the unobjectionable morality of their motives.”

Being Permanently Closed to Life means that the Marriage is Invalid

The Pope gives us two scenarios. In one scenario, one of the couple never intended to have children even though they sought to avoid them using natural means. This would mean that in fact a marriage never took place. The supposed marriage was invalid due to a defect in the consent essential to marriage which includes being open to life because children are the primary end of marriage.

The use of Natural Family Planning can be Immoral

In the second scenario the couple are open to life but wish to avoid children using natural methods. The important point here is that even though the couple do not offend against the natural order of the marital act, it does not necessarily imply that their actions are moral. There are other considerations which must be taken into account. This shows that there is no comparison between

Natural Family Planning, when properly understood, and contraception. Therefore those who make these false comparisons are in danger of leading Catholics astray.

False Comparisons

Contraception is effective when it prevents conception by perverting the marital act by separating it from its procreative potential and even sometimes causing the death of a newly begotten human being. To compare the effectiveness of Natural Family Planning with contraception is to imply a similarity. Like comparing one brand of washing powder with another. I fully understand that those who do this are trying to 'sell' Natural Family Planning to those who would use or who are using contraception, but I think the comparison is misguided and leads to confusion.

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