

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity
October 4, 2015
Homily for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
of
St. Thomas More Catholic Parish
celebrated at
St. Joseph Catholic Church
Scranton, PA
Mark 10:2-16

When Pope Francis went to Manila earlier this year, he said that families must be sanctuaries for life. The Holy Father said this in the context of his praise for Blessed Paul VI, who famously wrote the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which upheld the Church's constant teaching on the immorality of contraception. Pope Francis said that his predecessor, in writing this encyclical had taken a stand for life, that he had defended life. The Church's teaching on contraception, in other words, is pro-life.

Well, today is Respect Life Sunday, observed in the Catholic Church every year on the first Sunday in October. And we have been given these lessons on the indissolubility of marriage and Jesus' firm teaching that children are a blessing from God. Therefore, I'd like to talk today about the relationship between a contraceptive mentality and divorce, the threat posed to marriage by contraception, which prevents our families from being sanctuaries for life.

Jesus teaches in today's Gospel that marriage from the beginning is a lifelong and exclusive union between one man and one woman. One of the consequences Blessed Paul VI predicted would occur if contraceptive use became widespread was the increase in infidelity. He saw contraception as a means to evade observance of the moral law, and his prediction has proved prescient. That is, it is indisputable that the last forty-seven years have seen an increase in the incidence of adultery and its deleterious effect upon marriage. The divorce rate in this country is fifty per cent, and of all the reasons that married couples split, infidelity stands statistically at number one.

Besides destroying marriages, contraception has also ruined our nation's birth rate. Jesus said in the Gospel today, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belong the Kingdom of God." We don't let enough children come to Jesus, having seen our nation's birth rate drop by half since the F.D.A. approved distribution of the pill in 1960, while at the same time suffering fifty-eight million abortions. A quarter of the women who get abortions are married. Those families fail in their duty to be sanctuaries of life because contraception has taught them not to sacrifice, but to use. Blessed Paul VI said in *Humanae Vitae* that widespread contraceptive use would lead men to see women as mere objects for their gratification, rather than as beloved companions and vessels of life. We see in America today that the objectification of women is endemic; that pornography is the internet's number one industry; and that after men have been trained to use women, they are not interested in sacrificing for the children conceived through their unions. Contraception teaches men to be selfish, and selfish men don't make good husbands.

Jesus was honest with the Pharisees in today's Gospel. He told them that it was their hardness of heart that led Moses to allow certificates of divorce. Such certificates often left women destitute, while the man moved on to another woman. Jesus' honesty extended to calling such subsequent unions what they were: adultery. In truth, they were still married, yet contraception trains us to be dishonest and, more than that, to be dishonest with the person to whom we have pledged our lives. To be clear, the marital embrace says by its very nature, "I give myself to you completely," and at the same time, "I receive all of you." Contraception's dishonesty comes in withholding one's fertility, the refusal to give one hundred percent away or receive one hundred percent from one's spouse. The marital act becomes a

lie not spoken, but that is told nevertheless with one's body. This dishonesty, this holding back, introduces distrust into the relationship as the spouses treat each other competitively, as potential threats, rather than as the intimate and complementary partners they are. If we cannot be truthful in our most intimate relationship, it will be very easy for us to begin treating our beloved superficially, not as one we serve, but as one we appease, if only to get what we ourselves really want.

What we see is that such dishonesty has a corrosive effect upon true intimacy, so corrosive that we lie even to ourselves. The Pharisees who questioned Jesus imagined they were righteous, since they had obeyed the letter of the law, while disregarding its spirit. The truth about marriage, however, had been written on their hearts, and as their consciences afflicted them, they came to Jesus for answers. We can expect that our contracepting neighbors will come to us for answers, as well, since this truth about marriage is one we can all apprehend: our beloved needs to tell us the truth in every circumstance, even when not using words.

This breakdown in trust extends beyond our relationship with our spouse. Indeed, before we ever lie to our spouse in this way, we must first doubt God. Jesus said in the Gospel for today, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." Receiving the Kingdom in this way means confessing our utter dependence upon the Lord. To be like a child is simultaneously to recognize that all we need comes to us without our striving and to trust that even so we will get it—to be like a child is to know we're dependent and know also we'll be provided for. Contraception teaches us to distrust in God's providence and take matters into our own hands. Or we have that orientation already, and contraception gives us the means to manifest that distrust.

Our tendency, sadly, once we have lost our trust in God, is to misplace that trust in the state. We see in our nation that the state has grown as religious faith among the populace has decreased. Blessed Paul VI said that the widespread use of contraception would lead secular authorities to impose contraception on their populations, and we see this—most obviously in China, but also even here. Last year the Philippines adopted a law that mandates the government to give out contraceptives to the entire populace at taxpayer expense. Now we understand why Pope Francis went to Manila and sang the praises of Blessed Paul VI to the Philippine people.

We also understand why contraception works against the principle articulated by Pope Francis, that the family must be the sanctuary of life. If in our families we find selfish users who lie, cheat, and distrust, even as they look to a capricious government for providence, the vulnerable truly have nowhere to turn. If that's the sort of family you want, then contracept. But if we trust in the Lord's providence, sacrificing for each other as He sacrificed Himself for us, welcoming the fruit of our exclusive and lifelong unions, we will find that the vulnerable will be at ease in our midst. We will become the sanctuary we are called to be because our marriages are strong, built upon the rock of God's eternal truth.