

Homily for the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today our Scripture readings show us the importance of patience. You know, they say, “patience is a virtue”. And unfortunately, virtues are only cultivated with lots of practice – meaning in order to be patient lots of things have to test it!

And patience is so important in the spiritual life. For example, in our Gospel we heard Jesus teaching His disciples by a story in which a friend comes over to another friend’s house at midnight and wakes him up for some bread to feed a late-arriving guest. And Jesus tells them, if that friend “does not get up to give the visitor the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence.” In other words, he’s not going anywhere until he gets what he needs. Similarly, Jesus teaches the disciples “ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” Now I’m sorry to tell you, if you think you’re only going to ask God for something once and that’s it, or you’re going to seek to change a bad habit one time and it’ll just happen; think again! You need patience and perseverance.

And then in our first reading, we see God’s patience kind of put to the test by Abraham, who likes to ask so many questions. Perhaps some of our children here like to ask their parents lots of questions. I know when I was a kid I would ask questions all the time! Well, any of us who have been pestered by another’s incessant questioning knows that we quickly reach a limit. However, in God’s loving kindness He continues patiently listening to Abraham, who is kind of testing the waters to see

how patient God really is. Pope Benedict XVI reminded us, “We need God’s patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man.”

Well, obviously patience is not just important when it comes to growing as disciples of Jesus. Patience is also important when it comes to marriage and family life. Really, Father? Now, there’s a lot I could say here – or maybe a lot I shouldn’t say here! But, I want to talk about one thing that requires lots of patience – Natural Family Planning. What’s that? Well, NFP is a natural means of enhancing the possibility of conceiving children, as well as with the proper intentions, avoiding conception. But despite being the only method of family planning approved by the Catholic Church, it’s a gift largely unknown or even misunderstood by most people. As a result, many couples are inclined to say, “It’s just too complicated or time-consuming or unsuccessful” without really knowing the facts. In other words, many couples are impatient. Well, to help with knowing the facts, on Friday, August 19th from 6:30 to 8pm in our social hall, Dr. Luis Garcia, a Catholic MD from Wellspan in York trained in NFP, will be coming to our parish to give a great presentation on what NFP is, it’s benefits, and how it can be successfully used in marriage.

So to encourage our married couples to attend this presentation on August 19th, I’d like to leave you with the witness of one real life married couple, Jennifer and Frank.

Jennifer writes, “Frank and I met in our work place soon after college. Our first date was at a Chinese restaurant. After dinner, my fortune cookie read, “Stop searching forever, happiness is just next to you.” Frank thought it was the coolest thing ever – I wondered if it was a setup! From that unexpected beginning, we married and had five children almost immediately. Because of our family size, people often assumed that we were “good Catholics,” thinking that we had always accepted the Church’s teaching prohibiting contraception. In our case that assumption would be wrong. We had used contraception despite the fact that we knew the Church teachings, and only stopped using it to have our children.

Around the time our third child was born, Frank and I became involved in youth ministry. This prompted me to question our own contraceptive behavior. If we had to explain the Church’s teachings on chastity, I thought, we should follow them ourselves! I quickly ordered Natural Family Planning books and even signed up for the local diocesan class.

However, having five babies within six years was extremely overwhelming. Without hesitation, I forgot about NFP and got a prescription for birth control pills instead. But then something quite unexpected happened. During these years of using contraception, I began losing my desire for my husband. Our intimate time became one more thing I had to do for somebody. In addition, Frank and I began to fight about our relations.

The turning point for me happened after a conversation about sterilization. One of our friends had been sterilized and asked me when Frank would “get snipped.” Without missing a beat, I said, “Maybe for my birthday.” The fact that I so easily thought of sterilization got me thinking – how could I think about something so major without talking about it and praying?

Soon after this realization, I wondered why we were not open to having another child. I found myself offering simple prayers asking God to help us. From that simple step, God began to send signs through neighbors, family and friends. Meanwhile, Frank and I re-signed up for the NFP class. It may sound like an exaggeration, but from the first day we began using NFP everything immediately felt different. I felt so taken care of. I felt a tenderness that I hadn’t felt in a long time. I liked that Frank was learning about me. And it was helpful that he knew where I was, and when my more difficult days would be.

As we lived the NFP lifestyle, we began to realize that all of our reasons for avoiding pregnancy were “earthly” – we would need a new car, a bigger house, and more money for everything. Frank and I have learned that our intimate union should be focused on giving rather than getting. NFP provided the environment to live this out. Our marital union is our marriage vows made flesh, and every time together is a renewal of these vows. And only a union centered on God and His will in our lives will truly satisfy the desires of our hearts!” God bless you.