

Homily for the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

In light of the World Meetings of Families, last week we looked at the Church as a Home for the Wounded Hearts of families, who have been negatively impacted and deeply hurt by all types of sins against family life. These are the hard sayings, the difficult teachings of the Church – things like contraception and pornography. Again, one of the purposes of the upcoming World Meeting of Families, happening in Philadelphia at the end of this month, is to help shine the light of truth on such areas. This week, we're going to talk about the Family as Light in a Dark World.

Did you ever wake up in the middle of the night and want to work your way to the bathroom without turning any lights on? I mean, you think you know well enough your way there. You know the dresser is to the left, the door opens from the right. You got this – that is, except for that little toy your child left out in the middle of the hallway. And pretty soon, you've either: stubbed your toe, harpooned your foot, or nearly broken an arm trying to catch yourself from falling! Well, the same is true for our world today. Without exaggerating in the least, it is shrouded in the darkness and confusion that come from sin and its ripple effects.

Now, many people feel their way around life pretty well – routine is good at helping us do that. Many have the big pillars of life in place: a job, a house, sufficient food – a good life. But, the problem is that the evil one has thrown all these obstacles along the way – all over the hallway floor. And unless we have the light of Christ shining through His Church to even know about, they will trip us up.

As Pope Francis has often said, sin and the devil are real. They are! And we know from our own daily experience that sin is a part of life. In this regard, I want to talk about two big things right now that trip up family life. There's plenty of other topics, but these are two we shy away from. I have to admit, they're not easy things to talk about. But, we have to ask ourselves the question: Whose teaching should we strive to follow: the Church's, which brings us the light of Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, or the world, shrouded by darkness, which obscures the way, muddles the truth, and leads to death?

One of the big things that injures family life right from the start is something we call contraception. Literally, contraception mean "against conception" – "against life". Now, I know this is probably one of the most disregarded teachings of the Catholic Church when it comes to family life – I'm not naive. I know it's prevalently practiced by most couples in our country.

But why does the Church teach that the use of contraception is immoral? Well, it is a disregard for God and His plans for conjugal relations between husband and wife. But even more than that, contraception also damages the love between spouses in the following way: it introduces an element of selfishness into the marriage which gradually chips away at love. It is saying, "I give you my whole self – not really!" Such selfishness stands in contrast to the self-sacrificial love that marriage consists of, and can easily lead to using the one another solely for mutual satisfaction.

Putting this in positive terms: The Church is in favor of love! The family is to be the school of love. And Natural Family Planning, known by its short form as NFP, is not contraception. NFP is reverent and protects the love between husband and wife to help the couple live in tune with God's design. While this takes some effort, it can be a source of peace and happiness because it seeks to remove that selfish element I mentioned above. There are times when spacing children is the responsible decision for a couple to make, and the Church respects this.

Another huge thing that damages family life is pornography, which is absolutely pervasive in our society today. Many people take this issue lightly – at least that's what the world tells us about this little toy lying in the middle of the hallway. But it is anything but a light matter! Statistics show that 64% of Christian men access such sites at least monthly, while around 15% of women do so. At the same time, 71% of teens have done something to hide what they do online from their parents. Also, recently the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers reported the following as one of the most salient factors present in divorce cases: 56% involved one party having “an obsessive interest in pornographic websites.” At the same time, science has proven that pornography has the same effect on people as the traditional forms of addiction, like drugs and alcohol. Sadly, one of those effects is a corrosive and destructive impact on the relationships with those we love.

As as I said above: The Church favors love! But, pornography is not love; it is using others. I'm not saying any of this to condemn anyone here – please know that. I'm just shining light on the darkness and saying, with God, there is mercy and hope. If you feel you may have a problem in this area and want help, please come to talk with me in person or in the confessional. And know there are solid programs run by Catholics that have helped many break these cycles and restore sanity to their lives.

My friends, these are some of the hard sayings and difficult teachings of the Church. And in light of our second reading today from James, we must ask ourselves the question: What good is it for us to say we believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, if we don't live that belief out, for "faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead." And Jesus, in the Gospel, reminds us that if we really are to be His disciples, then we must "deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Him." Again, none of this is a criticism or condemning judgment – it is a desire to bring truth to such areas where so few are willing to talk about them.

At its best, the family is a school of love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, mutual respect, patience and humility in the midst of a world darkened by selfishness and conflict. In these ways, the family is meant to teach us what it means to be truly human, but also what it is to have a relationship with a God who unconditionally loves us just as we are, and always desires to forgive us. Therefore, the Church, for her part, denounces anything that stands in contrast to this truth – whether big or little toys in the hallway – for the sake of protecting the family. God bless you. (Cited: Archdiocese of Philadelphia World Meeting of