

25th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last week we spoke about the Family as Light in a Dark World. In particular, I spoke about how 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 denounces anything that stands in contrast to this truth for the sake of protecting the family. When it comes to such teachings on sexuality and family life, sometimes I feel like the world looks at the Catholic Church as the person in our first reading from the Book of Wisdom today: “Let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law... with revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test...” And such a devious, malicious way of thinking is further explained by the second reading from the Letter of James today, where the apostle writes, “Beloved, where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.”

As I spoke about last week through the examples of contraception and pornography, selfishness leads to disorder in the realm of sexuality and family life. And these harmful realities are so prevalent in our society. But, to borrow words from our Lord, “it was not so in the beginning.” In fact, in the very first book of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, we hear in the story of creation, that after each thing God creates “He saw that it was good.”

Isn't that Good News? Despite the wounded hearts so many people carry because of sin, despite the brokenness in many families, despite the abuse of the environment, all of physical creation is good! God made it out of love, and He wants us also to "see that it is good" and to enjoy its goodness. To this end, the Catholic tradition is so rich in its appreciation of creation. For example, our public worship, or liturgy, includes the sacraments. Have you ever thought about those "creatures" used in the sacraments: things like water, oil, touching, bread, and wine? Our sacraments are thoroughly physical, and through these ordinary physical elements and happenings, the most extraordinary graces of God come to us! Case in point, through the pouring of water in baptism, the Holy Spirit washes away all our sins!

At the high point of creation, though, is the creation of man as male and female, united as one in marriage. The reason for saying this is that we humans are uniquely created in God's image and likeness; and God Himself is a communion of three Persons. Therefore, the marital union man and woman is meant to be an expressive analogy of the love and communion in the Holy Trinity. For, as a Trinity, God the Father and God the Son love each other so completely and intimately, that the love between them proceeds forth as a life-giving spirit, the Holy Spirit. Similarly, in marriage, husband and wife are called to love each other so completely and intimately, that the love between them proceeds for as a new person, a baby. Even Jesus action in the Gospel today, where He takes a little child, and putting His arms around him or her, said to the people, "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me...and the One who sent me."

All of the above means that there is a deep meaning to our bodies. As stated in the *Theology of the Body* by Pope John Paul II, “The human body, with its masculinity and femininity...is not only a source of fruitfulness and procreation, as in the whole natural order, but contains “from the beginning” the “spousal” attribute, that is, the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.” Translation? We were created for love! We were created to be a gift of love for others, and to receive the gift of love offered by others. That is what the gift of sexuality in marriage, in a particular way, is meant to convey. And it’s what the role of family is meant to cultivate in a general way. Love is the reason for our existence! Such love is the narrow way of the culture of life. And selfishness and using others, including treating them like objects in one way or another, is the broad way of the culture of death!

To some, I know this must sound old-fashioned or Pollyanna-ish. “Such a Goody Two-Shoes mentality! Well, the world doesn’t work this way.” Exactly, the *world* doesn’t work this way, but God’s plan does! My friends, order is the way to true and lasting peace. Whether it is legal order in the world, unselfish order in our families, or moral order with regard to sexuality, this is the only way to true peace. Otherwise, like James says in our second reading, when things are out of order, like our passions or desires, like with greed and jealousy, then there exists war and disorder. The happiness talked about by the Church with regards to sexuality and family life can be fulfilled, but only if we choose to abide by the moral teachings of the Church. Have hope! God bless you.