

General Overview of the Four Catechetical Sessions

The below curriculum is dense and intended to be thorough. Individual ministers will decide how much is appropriate for the particular couple being prepared. Further, this may be used to assess a “purchased” marriage-prep program for compliance. In short, every couple is unique and ministers must be flexible and make the appropriate decision without omitting core Church teachings.

Session #1

- This session is intended to be an introduction session for the couples. Information that was not discussed at the initial meeting (pre-nuptial investigation) with the Pastor, or his delegate (trained minister), should be covered at this session. That can include information on FOCCUS, NFP classes, gathering Baptism Certificates, etc.
- The theology of marriage discussed at this session is at a very basic level and that is reflected in the curriculum. Session #2 is designed to be a much deeper look at the theology behind the sacrament of matrimony.
- A very practical aspect of this session is to make sure that the couples are in the right place. Do they understand the road they are heading down and do they want to keep going down that road? This session provides them an “exit ramp” if they decide that this isn’t for them at this time. Remember, they primarily determine their readiness for the sacrament, not us.

Session #2

- This session is intended to be a deeper theological look at the sacrament. Most of this session should be dedicated to the curriculum. Practical announcements can obviously be made, but the main focus is the teaching of the Church on marriage.

Session #3

- After a fairly heavy (for them) look at the theology of marriage in Session #2, we give them a little bit of a break with a discussion about finances and communication. This session is one that can be done many different ways so feel free to significantly modify this to fit the needs of your couples.

Session #4

- This session gets back to a little deeper theology with a look at sexuality. St. Pope John Paul II’s writings on human sexuality and marital love (Theology of the Body, *Familiaris Consortio*) are included in the curriculum along with pertinent Scripture passages and Catechism of the Catholic Church references.
- The curriculum flows into an introduction to Natural Family Planning (NFP). Not a lot is covered in the curriculum concerning NFP because the couples will cover much more on it when they take the NFP class.

- The last section in this session's curriculum moves from the topic of sexuality to the topic of parenting and covers some practical concerns that the couples should discuss. **For some couples, this section could possibly be omitted/reduced because FOCCUS, or their lived experiences (couples with kids returning to the Church – Convalidation), basically covers the same issues.**
- We suggest that the bulk of this session should be spent on the curriculum, but be sure to leave enough time at the end (or the beginning) to cover any loose ends that may need to be addressed. Those topics could include:
 - Catching up on missed sessions
 - Making sure that they are completing their other obligations (FOCCUS, NFP class, retreat?)
 - Scheduling a second meeting with the Pastor, Deacon, or marriage minister to plan the liturgy for their wedding
 - Other items

Note: Please always remember that everything should be tailored to your individual couples and their specific needs. What we have provided is a guide, not a mandate. Feel free to modify the curriculum to fit the needs of your couples. Obviously, the core concepts need to be discussed, but make it your own. If you want to follow what we provide verbatim, great, but you don't have to.

Also, PowerPoint presentations of each of the four sessions are available. You are free to use, and modify, them too.

I. Session #1 – How the Catholic Church understands marriage

A. Initial Theology of Marriage

1. Scripture – covenant, being Christ to one another
2. Permanence, till death do we part
3. Self-sacrifice, self-giving and forgiving (good times, bad times)
4. Open to children and good of the couple/unity
5. Society's context of marriage
6. Role of faith, prayers, and the Church, pray together – stay together

B. Valid Marriage

1. Properly trained, understand what they are offering, intend it, are free to offer it, witnessed by priest or deacon, in a Catholic Church.
2. A valid Catholic marriage results from four elements:
 - a) The spouses are free to marry
 - b) They freely exchange their consent
 - c) In consenting to marry, they have the intention to marry for life, to be faithful to one another and be open to children
 - d) Their consent is given in the presence of two witnesses and before a properly authorized Church minister. Exceptions to the last requirement must be approved by church authority.

C. Sacramental Marriage

1. What is grace?
 - a) Grace is a participation in the life of God. (CCC 1997)
 - b) Types of grace.
 - c) Receive grace through the sacraments.
2. What is a sacrament?
 - a) “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.” (CCC 1131)
 - b) *The Church is the dispenser of the sacraments.*
3. Sacramental marriage is all the above under “Valid Marriage” *plus* both spouses are validly baptized.
4. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage between two baptized persons is a sacrament.
5. The sacraments make Christ present in our midst.

6. Like the other sacraments, marriage is not just for the good of individuals, or the couple, but for the community as a whole.
7. The Old Testament prophets saw the marriage of a man and woman as a symbol of the covenant relationship between God and his people.
8. The permanent and exclusive union between husband and wife mirrors the mutual commitment between God and his people.
9. The Letter to the Ephesians says that this union is a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

D. Freedom to Marry

1. Every adult Catholic has the right to seek the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony in his or her church.
2. For the sacrament to take place there must be a freedom from previous bonds (other marriages) and certain impediments.
3. To determine this freedom, a Pre-Nuptial Questionnaire is completed as part of the initial marriage preparation process.

II. Session #2 – Marriage as the original sacrament

A. Marriage as the original sacrament

1. Although marriage was not made a proper sacrament of the New Covenant until Christ, it has been an image of God from the beginning.
2. A sacrament is a visible sign that points to, and in a way makes present, a greater invisible reality.
3. All creation is a “sacrament” of the Creator; its beauty, order, and goodness all reveal his beauty and goodness.
4. The human body as male or female is also a “sacrament” because it reveals God.
5. The capacity for personal communion written into human flesh precisely as male or female reveals the inner life of the Trinity as an external communion of persons and the invitation to man and woman to share in this exchange of love. (CCC 221)
6. The one-flesh union of man and wife in marriage, and the new life it bears, is the most perfect created image of the communion of Divine Persons (TOB, 12/30/81)
7. Scripture begins and ends with a marriage (Gen 1:26-27; Rev 19:7).
8. Nuptial imagery is the interpretive key, not just to Scripture, but to the whole meaning of human existence and God’s interaction with man.
9. Marriage is the key to interpreting reality!
10. Saint Pope John Paul II therefore calls marriage the “primordial,” or original sacrament:

“The sacrament, as a visible sign, is constituted by man inasmuch as he is a “body,” through his visible masculinity and femininity. The body, in fact, and only it, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be its sign.” (TOB, 2/20/80)

a) Fertility as an image of the Trinity

- (1) The blessing of fruitfulness is part of the divine image in man.
- (2) Man and woman in *their fruitful communion* reveal God more perfectly than anything else in creation. (Gen 1:27-28)
- (3) Sexual love is an icon of the Trinity precisely because it generates new life.
- (4) Trinity: union of two persons in one loving communion from which proceeds a third person who is the fruit and symbol of their unity.
- (5) By the sincere gift man and woman make to each other, they establish a communion of persons not only between the two, but with the third, who proceeds from them both.
- (6) So the third (at least openness to the third) is *essential* for a marriage to be a true marriage and for sex to truly be a marital act.

(7) To give life is to imitate God! Love is essentially fruitful.

b) *An image of God's love for man*

- (1) The mutual love between man and woman becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. (CCC 1604)
- (2) This is why God used nuptial imagery to describe his love for his people throughout the Old Testament (CCC 1611; cf. Hos 1-3; Is 54,62; Jer 2-3, 31; Ezek 16, 23; Mal 2:13-17).
- (3) He prepared his people for a deeper understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage. (CCC 1611)
- (4) This is why marriage was elevated by Christ to a Sacrament of the New Covenant.
- (5) He was going to restore the *power* of marriage to symbolize his Father's love for man by enabling spouses to live the truth of their unbreakable one-flesh union.
- (6) Christ made marriage an *effective* sign of God's unfailing love through the grace of matrimony.

c) *An image of Christ's love for the Church*

- (1) This is why St. Paul compares human marriage to the mystical marriage of Christ with his bride, the Church (Eph 5:21-33).
- (2) Christ has united himself with the Church by giving up his body for her on the cross.
- (3) By this gift, he gives the Church (humanity) a new identity as his bride.
- (4) This total gift of self (including the body!) forms a union that is unbreakable.
- (5) Hence, the indissoluble bond of marriage between a husband and wife in Christian marriage is the visible sign of the mystical union between the bridegroom (Christ) and the bride (Church).
- (6) Earthly marriage is a foretaste and foreshadowing of the heavenly marriage.
- (7) St. Paul says, "This is a great mystery. And I mean in respect to Christ and the Church." (Eph 5:33)

B. Institution of marriage as a sacrament

1. As discussed in the previous class, marriage was created by God from the beginning to be an image of His love for man.
2. The nuptial covenant between God and Israel prepared the way for a new and everlasting covenant. (CCC 1612)
3. Christ fulfills the Old Covenant by becoming a man and laying down His life for us, thus joining divinity to humanity in an eternal bond.

4. Through His sacrifice, Christ fulfills the original “sacramentality” of the union between man and woman making marriage a sign of His own life-giving union with His Bride, the Church.
 - a) Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11)
 - b) The Great Sacrament (Ephesians 5:21-33)

C. Principle effects of the sacrament

1. An Indissoluble Bond

“By matrimony, therefore, the souls of the contracting parties are joined and knit together more directly and more intimately than are their bodies, and that not by any passing affection of sense of spirit, but by a deliberate and firm act of the will; and from this union of souls by God's decree, a sacred and inviolable bond arises.” (*Casti Connubii* 7, Vatican edition)

- a) The primary effect of the sacrament of matrimony is the bond (sacramentum) formed between the spouses. (CCC 1638)
- b) This bond is perpetual: it endures as long as the spouses live.
- c) This bond is exclusive: it exists only between these two and forbids that a third enters in.
- d) Although only the mutual, free consent of the spouses causes them to be married, it is God who seals the bond between to make it irrevocable. (CCC 1639)
- e) In every marriage two wills are involved: the human will, for each individual marriage only arises by the free consent of the spouses, and the divine will, for the nature of marriage itself as a permanent union. Once a couple has contracted marriage, they are subject to its essential laws and properties. In other words, it is the freedom of the couple which actually makes them be married, but it is beyond the power of their freedom to “unmarry” themselves while both spouses live.
- f) “God is the Author of the perpetual stability of the marriage bond, its unity and its firmness.” (CC 5, cf. Council of Trent, session 24)
- g) “A Christian marriage which is valid and has been consummated...by the will of God [has] the greatest firmness and indissolubility, which may not be destroyed by any human authority.” (CC 34)

(1) Consummation

- (a) A marriage concluded and consummated can never be dissolved. (CCC 1640)
- (b) As the New Covenant is everlasting because Christ gave up His Body once and for all, so “giving up” the body in a consummated marriage seals its indissolubility.

- (c) “Giving up” the body completes marriage as a true image of Christ’s union with His Church, effected through His Body given up on the Cross. (CC 34)

(2) Divorce

- (a) Divorce is not only not an option for Christians, it is not a reality. Divorce does not exist.
- (b) Divorce is a purely human and civil invention that does not have the power to dissolve that perpetual bond instituted and guaranteed by God Himself.
- (c) Although the couples promise fidelity, it is God’s own faithfulness that guarantees the covenant between them. (CCC 1640)
- (d) Even when Israel was unfaithful to God, He never forsook them and always sought reconciliation. Likewise, Jesus will never “take back” His sacrifice on the cross which united Him forever with the Church.
- (e) “The Church...living with Christ who lives forever, may never be divorced from Him.” (St. Augustine, *De nupt. et concup.*, lib. I, cap. 10)
- (f) Therefore, no Christian marriage, which is the image of Christ and His Church, can be dissolved while both spouses are alive.
- (g) Even if one spouse breaks the vows of marriage, the marriage bond itself is not broken. Violation of the covenant does not break the covenant. It simply brings punishment.
- (h) As a matter of fact, indissolubility (along with the other essential properties of marriage) is so contained in the marriage pact itself that to express or intend anything contrary in the consent would invalidate the marriage. (CC 6, cf. St. Thomas, ST III, sup. 9, 49 art. 3)

(3) Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18

- (a) Jesus Himself taught the original indissoluble unity of the spouses.
- (b) In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5) and when answering a specific question by the Pharisees (Mt 19; Mk 10) He abrogated the concession of the Mosaic Law which allowed a husband to put away his wife (Deut 24:1-4).
- (c) He reminded them that “in the beginning it was not so”—that God willed marriage as an unbreakable union of two lives—therefore, “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” (Mt 19:6)
- (d) To divorce one’s wife (or husband) and marry another or to marry a divorced person is adultery.
- (e) The reaction of His apostles (Mt 19:10) is perhaps the modern reaction as well: it seems better not even to begin the apparently impossible task of lifelong fidelity to one person.

- (f) But God does not ask the impossible. Christ Himself gives the strength to live marriage in its “new dimension” (as a true Sacrament).

2. Grace

- a) The second immediate effect of the sacrament is marital grace. (CCC 1641)
- b) “Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the new covenant.” (CCC 1617)
- c) Marriage increases sanctifying grace in spouses (who place no obstacle to it). (CC 39)
- d) Spouses also receive a special “grace of state,” unique to the married state. (CCC 2004)
- e) This grace strengthens the unity between the couple, perfects their love, helps them to be holy, to execute the duties of their state, and to lovingly welcome and educate children.
- f) Unless the spouses consciously cooperate with this grace, however, “it will remain for the most part an unused talent hidden in the field.” (CC 40)
- g) If spouses do all that lies in their power and cooperate diligently, “they will be able with ease to bear the burdens of their state and fulfill their duties.” (CC 40)
- h) Spouses should strive with all their might to make their marriage, not only through its own sacramental power, but through their own spirit of living it, be “always the living image of that most fruitful union of Christ with the Church.” (CC 41)
- i) Divine life is poured into the world through Christian marriage, which makes God’s love for man visible to all humanity.
- j) Divine life is also poured into the Church, as the Body of Christ is edified, strengthened, and increased by holy marriages and the children who come from them.
- k) Christ Himself is the source of the grace of matrimony and remains with the couple throughout their lives.

“Just as God once encountered his people in a covenant of love and trust, so now as the Savior of the world and the Spouse of the Church, he encounters faithful spouses in the sacrament of Christian marriage. Moreover he remains with them; just as he loved the Church and gave himself up for it, so do married partners, by a mutual surrender, love each other with a lasting fidelity.” (GS 48)

3. Natural Marriages

- a) Every true (free consent without impediment) marriage between two baptized people is a sacrament, whether they intend it or not. (CCC 1601, 2360, GS 48)
Baptized persons are not capable of contracting “natural marriages.” Because Catholics are bound by canonical form they must be married in the Church in order to contract a valid (true) marriage. Catholics who attempt to contract marriage outside the Church (civil marriage) will always fail to do so. Therefore, they are not married at all. But non-Catholic Christians are not bound by canon law and are therefore sacramentally married if they are married at all. Therefore, Protestants married civilly are considered to be sacramentally married by the Catholic Church. Catholics married civilly are considered not married at all by the Catholic Church. Mixed marriages and disparity of cult are addressed in CCC 1633-1637.
- b) Every true marriage is indissoluble, even when it is not a sacrament, since indissolubility is a fundamental property of marriage itself. (Casti Connubii 34)
- c) “Marriage even in the state of nature - long before it was raised to the dignity of a sacrament - carr[ied] with it a perpetual and indissoluble bond.” (Pope Pius VI as quoted in Casti Connubii 34)
- d) Only in Christian marriage is the indissoluble bond between a man and a woman elevated and made holy to be an effective sign of divine life.
- e) This is by virtue of baptism, which unites spouses to God and renders them capable of receiving divine life (sanctifying grace).

III. Session #3 – Finances and Communication

A. Finance

1. Money a cause of divorce?
2. What does God say about money?
3. Stewardship, what is it? How do you do it?
4. Financial planning
5. Banking and insurance changes

B. Communication

1. Effective communication

- a) Acknowledging language
 - (1) Active listening
 - (2) Body language
- b) Corporate language
 - (1) Would you say that to your boss?
 - (2) It is ok to find effective communication styles in marriage.

2. Conflict resolution

- a) Learning to put the other first – self sacrifice
- b) Four elements of conflict resolution
- c) Saying “I’m sorry” and meaning it!
- d) Sacrament of Reconciliation

3. Decision making

- a) Corporate approach
- b) You should never feel like you need to know all of the answers. Seek good counseling from experts before making critical decisions.
- c) Lovers should not be at odds. Seek out and discuss more options.
- d) Couples should find a method that works and use it

IV. Session #4 – Sexuality: God’s Plan for the Body, Sex and Marriage

A. Introduction: Human Vocation to Love

“Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.”
(John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10)

1. God made the human person in His own image.
2. God is love (1 Jn 4:8).
3. Therefore, the essence of human nature is “the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 11)
4. Love is the essence and the vocation of every human person.
5. Man is called to love with his whole being, both body and soul.
6. This vocation to love is revealed in the very flesh of the human person as male or female.
7. Marriage and virginity are the two states of life in which the whole person, body and soul, promises to love exclusively.
“Christian revelation recognizes two specific ways of realizing the vocation of the human person, in its entirety, to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy.” (FC, 11)
8. By examining the first three chapters of Scripture, marriage and sexual love are revealed as the original way in which the vocation to love is lived out.
9. John Paul II illuminates God’s original plan for the body, sex, and marriage in his “theology of the body”: how the human body as male and female reveals God.

B. “Male and female he created them.”

1. Original Unity

- a) Original unity is the fact that from the beginning, there were two distinct and equal ways of being in the image of God: male and female.
- b) Man and woman are perfectly equal in their dignity as persons. (CCC 369)
- c) They perfectly complement each other in their masculinity and femininity.
- d) Genesis reveals that man and woman were willed together and for each other (Gen 2:18-20).
- e) God created man as male and female so that they could enter into a unique relationship that makes them “two in one flesh.” (Gen 2:24)
- f) Human sexuality from the beginning is therefore an invitation to communion inscribed in our very flesh as male or female.
- g) Femininity and masculinity together are a more perfect image of God than either one standing alone (although man and woman are always both fully human).
- h) Human sexuality and the acts proper to marriage are therefore part of the image of God in man.
- i) They are ordered to the fulfillment of the human person in a communion of love with one another and Creator.
- j) Communion: a union of love between two or more persons
- k) Communion is essentially personal; it possesses the characteristics of the person: free and conscious.
- l) This is the “nuptial meaning of the body”, as JP II says.

(1) The Nuptial Meaning of the Body

“The human body, with its sex, and its masculinity and femininity...is not only a source of fruitfulness and procreation, as in the whole natural order. It includes right from the beginning *the nuptial attribute*, that is, the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift and—by means of this gift—fulfills the meaning of his being and existence.” (1/16/80; italics added)

- (a) Nuptial (marital, spousal) love is a particular kind of love: it is the love of total and exclusive self-donation.
- (b) Nuptial love is particular to marriage (and virginity) precisely because it includes the gift of the body.
- (c) The nuptial meaning of the body is rooted in the fact that the human person is willed for his/her own sake by God who created us out of gratuitous love.

2. Person as Gift

- a) The human ability to give and receive each other as gifts affirms the unique and unrepeatable gift that each person is from the beginning, “someone chosen by eternal love.” (1/16/80)
- b) This is what John Paul II means when he says, “Become what you are.”
- c) Vatican II affirmed that “man cannot fulfill himself except by a sincere gift of self.” (GS 24)
- d) Freely making a gift of self is the only way the human person “fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence” (TOB, 1/16/80).
- e) The vocation to marriage gives spouses this opportunity to live their identity as gifts in and through their bodily communion.
- f) Since human bodies always belong to human persons, bodily union is more than biological. It is personal.
- g) Humans don’t mate. We love.

(1) Ordered to Life

- (a) The one-flesh union of man and woman in marriage is ordered to the transmission of human life. (CCC 372)
- (b) Man and woman together participate in God’s work of creation. They cooperate with His providence to build up and govern His creation. (CCC 373)
- (c) Marriage is therefore not merely a private reality.
- (d) It is inherently ordered to the building up of a civilization of love (society).

3. Original Nakedness

- a) In the beginning, the naked human body fully revealed the person, the Creator, and the call to a loving communion of persons for which man was made “male and female.”
- b) Man and woman discovered the “nuptial meaning” of their naked bodies in their very first encounter. (Gen 2:23-25)
- c) They saw with the “purity of the inner gaze” that their bodies, as male and female, were capable of expressing love.
- d) Through their sexual difference, they realized that they are meant to be gifts to each other. Hence they were “naked and unashamed (Gen 2:25).”
- e) Their nakedness was not a cause for shame, rather rejoicing, since each recognized in the other another person like himself and at the same time different in just such a way that permitted their full communion as body-persons.
- f) Fatherhood and Motherhood
 - (1) In their conjugal knowledge of each other, man and woman come to know themselves as father and mother.
 - (2) Fatherhood and motherhood reveals the full meaning of masculinity and femininity. (3/12/80)

4. Original Sin

- a) The harmonious relationship between man and woman, characterized by the purity of the inner gaze, was broken by original sin.
- b) Lust entered the heart of man and continually threatens love and the dignity and fulfillment of the human person who is called to divine love.
- c) Rather than receiving the other as a gift and making a reciprocal gift of oneself, there was a temptation to appropriate the other for self-gratification.
- d) There is now a permanent temptation to view the other as an “object of use” rather than a “subject of love” whose sexuality is for communion. (6/4/80)
- e) Shame therefore became necessary to protect the inner dignity of the person from a “gaze of lust” that would reduce the person to merely his/her sexual value.
- f) Hence, Adam and Eve clothed themselves each other’s gaze and hid from God.
- g) From here on, the “heart has become a battlefield between love and lust. The more lust dominates the heart, the less the heart experiences the nuptial meaning of the body. It becomes less sensitive to the gift of the person.” (7/23/80)
- h) Man’s identity as “willed for his own sake” is obscured and his capacity to “fully discover himself only through a sincere gift of himself” is endangered.

“Lust . . . attacks this ‘sincere giving.’ It deprives man of the dignity of giving, which is expressed in his body through femininity and masculinity. In a way it depersonalizes man, making him an object ‘for the other.’ Instead of being ‘together with the other’—a subject in unity, in the sacramental unity of the body—man becomes an object for man, the female for the male and vice versa....The subjectivity of the person gives way to the objectivity of the body.”
(TOB 7/23/80)

C. The Redemption of the Body

1. The good news is that Jesus Christ came to restore the purity of the human heart.
2. He came to restore marriage to its full dignity as the original communion of persons and a true means of human fulfillment by enabling man and woman to love.
3. He calls man to task for his “hardness of heart” and warns of sins of the heart. (Mt 5:28; 19:8).
4. Christ calls us again, as we were called at creation, to love as He loves → “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12)
5. How did Christ love? → “Greater love has no man than this . . .” (Jn 15:13)
6. He laid down His life → “This is my Body, given for you.” (Lk 22:19)
7. Christ’s Body on the Cross is the source of all grace, of all the sacraments
8. Through His gift of self, Christ elevated marriage to a sacrament and gives His grace to spouses to enable them to live out the reality of their marriage as a communion of total, self-donating love.

D. The Value of Children

1. Procreation

“By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown.” (*Gaudium et spes*, 48)

a) Earth: propagation and preservation of the human race on earth

- (1) By the conjugal act: marital relations are directly ordered to the procreation of children

b) Heaven: propagation of children “who are to become members of the Church of Christ, to raise up fellow citizens of the Saints and members of God’s household” (Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 13)

- (1) **By catechesis:** by teaching their children the true faith and proper moral living in virtue, parents form their children in the truth and equip them to fulfill their potential as human persons
- (2) **By Baptism:** offering their children to Holy Mother Church through whom they receive second birth and become members of Christ’s Body (and through which they can enter into the Family of God)
- (3) **Talent:** “Both husband and wife, however, receiving these children with joy and gratitude from the hand of God, will regard them as a talent committed to their charge by God, not only to be employed for their own advantage or for that of an earthly commonwealth, but to be restored to God with interest on the day of reckoning.” (Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 15)
 - (a) Must remember that our children are not our own
 - (i) Since our own selves are not our own, then another is definitely not our own
 - (b) God entrusts them to parents that they might cooperate in Providence in bringing them to beatitude and ultimate fulfillment in union with God

2. Education: duty of the parents on account of the indissolubility of marriage

“Graced with the dignity and office of fatherhood and motherhood, parents will energetically acquit themselves of a duty which devolves primarily on them, namely education and especially religious education.” (*Gaudium et spes*, 48)

- a) The good of offspring in marriage not only means their procreation, but always entails their education as well
- b) The family is meant to be the foundation of a child’s education (this is how God set it up)
 - (1) Parents as the primary educators have the responsibility to see to this education

- (2) This is a blessing for the child (and the family in general) and a grave duty for the parents

Parents are “forbidden to leave unfinished this work and so expose it to certain ruin” (Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, 16)

- c) Right: which no other level of society can take away
 - (1) To take this right from the family is gravely evil (just as to fail in one’s duty)
 - (2) ...unless subsidiarity requires it

E. Natural Family Planning (NFP) introduction

1. Introduction

a) Natural Family Planning (NFP)

- (1) “If, then, there are serious motives to space out births, which derive from the physical or psychological conditions of the husband and wife, or from external conditions, the Church teaches that it is then licit to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions, for the use of marriage in the infecund periods only, and in this way to regulate birth without offending the moral principles which have been recalled earlier.” (*Humanae Vitae* 16)
 - (a) Physical: would die if pregnant
 - (b) Psychological: mother and/or father could not care for children adequately
 - (c) External: could not possibly afford to feed another child with money now have...
- (2) BUT REMEMBER, it must be a SERIOUS MOTIVE...you just cannot use NFP whenever you want to (you don’t like the way you look when you are pregnant, you get a little sick when pregnant, kids take up a lot of time and you want time to hang out with friends, need a new Jacuzzi in back yard, want a bigger house, always wanted to travel to the Far East, have been dreaming of getting a corvette)
 - (a) If using NFP, the decision must be made in dialogue between the spouses and, above all, prayer...every month the decision must be completely renewed and reexamined to determine if it is morally legitimate to use NFP (AGAIN it is possible to use NFP illicitly and evilly, incurring sin)...
 - (b) “But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church’s teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel.” (GS 50)

b) Prophetic Consequences (HV 17)

- (1) Wide and easy road...of conjugal infidelity and general lowering of morality...
- (2) Lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment and no longer as his respected and beloved companion...
- (3) Who will stop rulers from favoring, from even imposing upon their peoples...the method of contraception which they judge to be most efficacious (UN and China)
“In such a way men, wishing to avoid individual, family or social difficulties encountered in the observance of the divine law, would reach the point of placing at the mercy of the intervention of public authorities the most personal and most reserved sector of conjugal intimacy.”
- (4) Must recognize limits “to the possibility of man’s dominion over his own body and its functions”

F. Parenting

1. Two income families
 - a) Will both of you retain jobs?
 - b) How do you decide who stays home with children and who goes to work?
2. Practical sacrifice
 - a) How many children would you like?
 - b) Are both of you willing to sacrifice personal and monetary goals to have children?
3. Practical discipline
 - a) Who will discipline your children?
 - b) How will you discipline them?

Credit:

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