

“LIVE THE TRUTH AND BEAUTY OF GOD’S PLAN FOR MARRIED LOVE!”

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

It’s about love. It’s about life. It’s about freedom. It’s about gift.

National Natural Family Planning Awareness Week July 19-25, 2020

The sacrament of marriage symbolizes Christ’s relationship with His Church. What is this relationship but one of generous, self-sacrificing, passion-filled, and fruitful love! When married couples live their vocation according to Church teachings, especially regarding the transmission of life, many benefits can be reaped. Indeed, married couples who use Natural Family Planning (NFP) report that the benefits include growth in: understanding and appreciation of their fertility; emotional maturity—especially in their spousal communication; holiness; and respect for God’s gifts for married love.

The following are meant to aid the priest or deacon in planning his homily during NFP Awareness Week. The homily is not the place where details of NFP methodology are provided. The homily should include the core of the Church’s teachings that support NFP use in marriage with possibly some basic NFP information added.

Pastors should have NFP resources available in the church vestibule (contact your diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life Ministry or nfp@uscgb.org). It would also be helpful to ask NFP teachers to staff information tables after Mass. For free resources, download short articles and two-page bulletin inserts for your parish, see uscgb.org/nfp/natural-family-planning/awareness-week/media-kit.cfm. If you have a parish e-mail list, consider inserting NFP Week information with a link to the USCCB resources (uscgb.org/nfp/awareness-week/index.cfm) and your diocese’s website (uscgb.org/nfp/find-an-nfp-class.cfm).

NOTE: Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the umbrella title for those methods of family planning that are based in fertility education (sometimes NFP is referred to as “Fertility Awareness Based Methods” or FABMs). NFP methods can be used to either attempt or postpone conception. When avoiding conception, the NFP means is periodic sexual abstinence. No devices or drugs are used to harm God’s design for married love. NFP methods require husband and wife to learn, understand, and apply the information in their conjugal life. NFP methods are the only methods of family planning that support the married couple’s relationship and the child who may come from them. NFP methods respect God’s design for married love. Read more at uscgb.org/nfp/what-is-nfp/index.cfm.

SUNDAY HOMILY NOTES

July 19, 2020 - Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time

The Truth and Beauty of God's Plan for Married Love

Overview

When God created Adam and Eve, He made them “in His image” and, despite His one command to not eat of the fruit of the tree of life, God gave our first parents the freedom—free will—to decide how to live. The point of that freedom, however, is not just to be able to choose, but to make the right choice. As St. John Paul II once said, freedom “consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought” (Address, Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Baltimore, MD, October 8, 1995). Being free to “do what we ought” allows a person to be his authentic self—an image of God!

Human freedom is an awesome gift from God! Freedom is linked to the good that is willed by God. It is rooted in responsibility, respect, and love for the Lord God and His design for creation and humanity. Regarding human sexuality, marriage, and procreation, authentic freedom can help us see the truth and beauty of God's laws and inspire us to embrace them.

Our faith tells us that God created the human person in His image and as a relational being. God gave men and women the capacity to love like Him. The human ability to love is a reflection of God's nature as Trinity—the loving Communion of Persons that gives and receives love and life. For love to be authentic, it must be freely given.

God is love and, although God is outside of creation, He brought all of life into being because of His love—and He finds it "very good!" In the created world, God made men and women in His image as its crown. God gave men and women stewardship over other creatures. In marriage, God has given husband and wife sacred stewardship over His powers of love and life.

God designed marriage to be the best place where a new life is conceived and nurtured. The family, which is created by the husband and wife, is the first school of love (see *Familiaris consortio*, no. 21). From the family, the love of the spouses passes to their children and to the broader world.

It is important to remember that when sin entered the world, all the above good relationships became distorted—humanity to creation and creation to society, men and women to each other, and, most importantly, humanity's relationship to God. The entire story of salvation from the Jews is the Lord God's love letter to His people calling them back as sounded in Jesus' cry over Jerusalem, "how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling!" (Lk 13: 34)

Through Christ, God offers men and women salvation. Now is the time to learn, reflect, repent, and embrace the Lord God and His truths! The teachings of the Catholic Church express God's truths. Regarding marriage, it is not “the effect of chance or the product of the evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His

design of love” (*Humanae vitae*, no. 8). Marriage is the total, faithful, and fruitful union of one man and one woman for the whole of life (see *Humanae vitae*, no. 9).

God designed marriage to bring a man and a woman together in the one-flesh union that Scripture so eloquently teaches (Gen. 2:24). The conjugal act is “noble and worthy” (see *Gaudium et spes*, no. 49). By its very nature it is meant for spousal union and procreation. This sacred space where man and woman give themselves to each other in union with the Lord is the proper place where new life should be conceived. Spouses are called to cherish and protect their sexual union and do nothing to harm it (e.g., commit adultery, use contraception, become intentionally sterilized, use pornography, etc.).

The practice of Natural Family Planning (NFP) can support God’s plan for husband and wife. NFP respects the conjugal act because it does nothing to harm it or the God-given fertility of husband and wife. The methods of NFP teach spouses about their fertility. NFP education provides useful information on the woman’s fertility cycle as designed by God. Nothing is done to harm God’s design.

NFP helps a husband and wife determine whether their lovemaking may result in bringing a new life into the world or not. The practice of daily charting the wife’s signs of fertility can spark deep conversation about God’s plan for their marriage. The practice of NFP can promote mutual growth in self-mastery, foster emotional and spiritual maturity, and lead to a more authentic life lived in the freedom of God’s design. Below, these thoughts and more are offered per reading.

[Wisdom 12: 13, 16–19](#)

"But though you are master of might, you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern us."

- God cares for all of creation; He is the Lord of everything! Men and women are wonderfully made by the works of His hands. The story of God’s relationship with the Israelites is the story of His patient pursuit of His Chosen People. God so loves His people that He is consistently willing to rebuild His relationship with them despite their periodic failures.
- This is how the Lord God pursues each man and woman. The Lord’s love is constant, gently calling us to Himself. He is always there, with open arms, ready to receive His prodigal children.

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- As we hold up Church teaching on God’s gifts of married love and life during NFP Awareness Week, I ask you to take time as husband and wife to consider whether God is Lord over your marriage—is He? Do you invite Him into your marital relationship? Do you respect His laws of love in your conjugal lives?
- Remember, Scripture is packed with reminders that to love God is to walk *with* Him. In the words of the prophet Micah, “You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly

with your God.” Walking with God means that you accept, embrace, and cherish God’s laws which include His design for sex and marriage.

- Consider looking into why the Church teaches that the conjugal embrace must be honored in its wholeness. Look into why Natural Family Planning respects God’s design for married love and contraception does not. Remember that God loves you and wants you and your marriage to flourish!

Learn about God’s plan for married love and NFP, visit the USCCB’s website at usccb.org/nfp.

Responsorial Psalm 86: 5–6, 9–10, 15–16

You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and fidelity. Turn toward me and have pity on me; give your strength to your servant.

R. (Lk 8:8) **The seed that falls on good ground will yield a fruitful harvest.**

- The Psalm echoes the first reading in speaking about God’s merciful love. David sinned terribly against God and His plan for marriage, yet Scripture describes him as a man after God’s own heart. He is deserving of that title because he was humble; he realized his wrongdoing and returned to God. A life lived in harmony with the Lord God will yield a fruitful harvest!

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- It is essential to keep an openness to God’s plan for your marriage. The Lord God can supply you with strength in challenging times. Consider how to express your love of God through your marriage more faithfully. Live the truth and beauty of God’s plan for married love!

Rm 8: 26–27

The Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.

- We do not always know the best path to take in our lives. The world can be so loud, with so many options, colors, and shiny things that look so appealing. It can be hard to cancel out the noise to hear the quiet, loving whisper of the Lord.
- We have to pause and remember that the Holy Spirit helps us intentionally. We must strive to be attentive to His promptings!

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- The siren call of modern culture says that people are in control. It cries that no restrictions should be put on sexual feelings, that pregnancy is a “choice,” and that private decisions only affect the decision-maker—no one gets hurt. These messages are not only false but destructive. They distort God’s gifts and trick people into behaviors that have broken their hearts and led them into sin. St. Paul tells us, however, that the Holy Spirit is there to assist us!

- If we can open our hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we will see that God’s plan for married love is about love and life. When a couple then chooses to practice NFP and lives with God’s gift of fertility, they acknowledge that God is the Lord of life. They remember that they are not “masters” but the “ministers” over these precious gifts which God entrusted to them (see *Humanae vitae*, no. 13).

Mt 13: 24–43 or 13: 24–30

‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’

- Our Lord presents us with three parables that are full of surprises: the enemy sow weeds in carefully planted fields, a tiny mustard seed becomes the largest bush, and a small amount of leaven makes the dough rise.
- Likewise, and keeping St. Paul’s insights in mind, if we listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we will be like the mustard seed of faith and flourish and not allow the weeds to stifle God’s gifts in our lives!

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- On the surface, NFP and contraception can seem remarkably similar (i.e., ways to “regulate” births), like the indistinguishable seeds and sprouts of wheat and weeds. But NFP and contraception are vastly different. NFP works with God’s design while contraception harms it. The evil one however, is a master of subtlety. Temptation can make it difficult to discern what is ultimately good and what is not.
 - As the two seeds grow and begin to bear fruit in peoples’ lives, it becomes easier to see the differences between NFP and contraception. Contraception does not bear good fruit. For example, contraception: facilitates promiscuous behavior; opens people up to sexually transmitted diseases because it imparts a false sense of “safety”; harms a person’s ability to bond for life; and leads to abortion as “back up” when it “fails,” etc.
 - The methods of NFP respect God’s design for married love. NFP honors God’s creativity, fosters communication between spouses, protects women’s health, and respects the gift of self, which is needed in the marital embrace.
 - Married couples that practice NFP are free because they understand how a woman’s fertility works and how it relates to the man’s fertility. NFP couples know how to live within God’s design. They also learn how to communicate more openly with one another because of the daily requirements of charting the wife’s fertility. The discipline of NFP emphasizes a couple’s generous self-gift to each other and God.
 - Husbands and wives who embrace God’s plan for married love contribute to building a culture of life. And, every marriage has the potential to do likewise! Let us listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as He calls spouses to love each other, embrace God’s gifts, raise their families, contribute to the world, and build up the Church by living God’s plan for married love!
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Monday of The Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time, July 20, 2020

Reading 1 Mi 6: 1–4, 6–8

Only to do the right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Responsorial Psalm 50: 5–6, 8–9, 16BC–17, 21 and 23

He that offers praise as a sacrifice glorifies me

R. (23b) **To the upright, I will show the saving power of God.**

Gospel Mt 12: 38–42

She came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; there is something greater than Solomon here.

- The reading from Micah considers the good the Lord God has done for His Chosen People and the truth of what they can offer in return—*a life in step with the Lord God*.
- In the Gospel, Jesus reminds the people that the Queen of Sheba traveled from the ends of the earth just to hear the wisdom of Solomon—and one greater than Solomon was in their midst, yet the people could not see—they wanted more signs. How easy it is to miss God’s truth!
- Today, the world is overwhelmed with too much information. Some may ask, “Where is the truth?” or “Does truth even exist?” As people of faith, we know that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14: 6). God is the source of truth!

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- As applied to marriage, remember the truth that God created humanity as the masterpiece of His divine love—“in the image of God, He created them; male and female, He created them” (Gen 1: 27).
 - Marriage is the gift that God made for the wellbeing of men and women. Marriage reflects the love of God—permanent, faithful, and fruitful. And, with the coming of our salvation in Jesus, marriage reflects the love of Christ for His Church.
 - During NFP Awareness Week, let us remember God’s plan for married love. Read and reflect upon how God designed marriage. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your hearts and minds to accept God’s truth that human sexuality finds its fullness only in marriage. Look into the methods of NFP since they are an ethical way to cooperate with God to attempt or space conception in marriage (see usccb.org/nfp).
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Tuesday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time, July 21, 2020

Reading 1 MI 7:14–15, 18–20

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock of your inheritance...

Responsorial Psalm 85: 2–4, 5–6, 7–8

Lord, show us your mercy and love.

R. (8a) **Lord, show us your mercy and love.**

Gospel Mt 12: 46–50

For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.

- Those who do the will of God are Christ’s family. When we do not do the will of God, we are the sheep who wander off, get lost in the darkness, and sin. But God is all-merciful and aches to take us back into His arms!
- In the Gospel, Jesus states that His disciples are those who follow the will of His heavenly Father. However, Jesus also knows that even His disciples whom He chose are weak. He knows who will betray, abandon, and deny Him. The failures of the disciples closest to Jesus reveal the depth of God’s mercy. Despite their failings, He would still work with them. God has a plan. God stands with His arms open wide to welcome His people back to Him.

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- Choosing to follow the will of God is not always easy. Even when we know what is right, often we can only see the challenge in front of us. At the same time, a glance at the lives of Jesus’ disciples (and the saints who would come after them), reveals the incredible things that God can do through people who choose to follow Him. Faith is a decision to continuously strive to do God’s will no matter our individual weaknesses.
- This is especially important to consider when married. Life’s daily grind as well as unspoken hurts can cause conflict between husband and wife. Remember that there is a “third person” in your marriage—the Lord God! He is there to help you! As the Angel Gabriel proclaimed to our Blessed Mother, “for nothing will be impossible for God” (Luke 1: 37).
- Regarding the conjugal embrace and spacing births in the family, “responsible parenthood,” as designed by God, can be difficult. Modern people are not knowledgeable about the unitive and procreative nature of sex as being sacred. They mistakenly think it can and should be manipulated by contraception. With prayer and study, couples can see that their conjugal intimacy is actually a type of “body prayer.” God is with them forming them into a little communion of persons, a family. It is critical to pray together as spouses to ask God when He wants them to be open to conceiving new life.
- Using NFP in marriage requires effort. A couple must learn, understand, and change their behavior. Think, however, what the Lord can do if you invite Him into your marriage. Freely ask God to help you live His truth and beauty of conjugal love. NFP provides a

practical way for married couples to honor God's plans and strive to be open to His guidance in their marriages.

Wednesday Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time, July 22, 2020

Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene

1 SGS 3:1–4B

The bride says: On my bed, at night, I sought him whom my heart loves.

or

2 Cor 5:14-17

So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.

Responsorial Psalm PS 63:2, 3–4, 5–6, 8–9

For you, my flesh pines and my soul thirsts like the earth, parched, lifeless, and without water.

R. (2) My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

Gospel Jn 20:1–2, 11–18

"Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him."

- The readings provide a glimpse into the intense love that God has for His people and how the human soul aches for God.
- Mary Magdalene seeks Jesus as the bride seeks her bridegroom in the Song of Songs. In the Gospel of John, Mary weeps, because the body of the Lord has been taken away. What honor and love she shows for what she thinks is still the Lord's lifeless body! She reflects the best in the human sense of respect for the dead!
- Throughout human history, people have created traditions and rituals associated with honoring the dead. It not only points to the bonds and love of the living for the person who has died, but it speaks to the dignity of the human body, even after life is over.
- And, with the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus, Christians know that death is not the end of life but represents a new beginning. Christ is the Lord of life! All who are baptized in the body of Christ are, in the words of St. Paul, a new creation. Christ's work of salvation has powerful implications for creation, men, and women.

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- Among the things lost before the Fall, in the words of St. John Paul II, was the "original innocence" of the relationship between men and women. This includes the nuptial meaning of the human body which had been made for marriage.
- After the Fall, all became distorted. With Christ's work of salvation, all is redeemed and made new. The very nature and function of the human body speak about the truth of God's plan for married love.
- Within God's plan, the virtue of chastity protects His gifts of life and love. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, "The chaste person maintains the integrity of

the powers of life and love placed in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behavior that would impair it” (no. 2338).

- God calls every person, including the married, to live chastely—to honor themselves and their bodies, to protect the powers of love and life. During NFP Awareness Week, let us reflect upon the importance of the virtue of chastity as that which enables every man and woman to love rightly. To read about God’s gifts for married love, visit usccb.org/nfp.

Thursday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time, July 23, 2020

Reading 1 Jer 2: 1–3, 7–8, 12–13

They have forsaken me, the source of living waters; They have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water.

Responsorial Psalm 36: 6–7AB, 8–9, 10–11

For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light, we see light.

R. (10a) **With you is the fountain of life, O Lord.**

Gospel Mt 13: 10–17

"But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears, because they hear.

- How often are we blind to the truth and beauty of God’s plans for us. Jeremiah describes the Israelites as a bride who loved her spouse but then abandoned him. The prophet laments that God’s people had His gifts and ignored or trampled them. They now live without the life-giving water of the Lord.
- The Psalm sings a hopeful song about life in the Lord. God is merciful. When we turn to the Lord, we live in His loving shelter—we are refreshed in His fountain of life. The God of love yearns for His people.
- In the Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples that they are blessed because they see and hear Him—the very word of God. He contrasts their openness to Him with those who look but do not see.

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- Marriage is a natural reality. Since marriage is rooted in the human experience, it is easy to fail to see its true nature. When we put on the eyes of faith, we can see that the first human relationship created was that of marriage—“This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2: 23). The two give themselves to each other to become one.
- Giving of one’s self to the other is a hallmark of marriage—there is no “I” in marriage, but “We.” It is part of God’s plan for the good of humanity. That is because marriage reflects the love of God—permanent, faithful, and fruitful. And, with the coming of our salvation in Jesus, marriage reflects the love of Christ for His Church.

- Given the nature of marriage, the conjugal embrace is holy. It is where man, woman, and God meet. Its nature is for the strengthening of the spousal communion of persons and the procreation of children.
- The two-fold nature of conjugal relations as “unitive” and “procreative” should be respected. Husband and wife should therefore rejoice and cherish this gift from God. When they seek to discern God’s will for their family, they should use NFP to uphold and protect these holy gifts.

Friday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time, July 24, 2020

Reading 1 Jer 3: 14–17

There all nations will be gathered together to honor the name of the Lord at Jerusalem.

Responsorial Psalm Jer 31: 10, 11–12ABCD, 13

The Lord will guard us as a shepherd guards his flock.

R. (see 10d) **The Lord will guard us as a shepherd guards his flock.**

Gospel Mt 13: 18–23

But the seed sown on rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit.

- God is faithful. He consistently seeks the Israelites when they repeatedly turn away from Him. The Lord God is like a shepherd who searches for his lost sheep. God scatters the seed of truth on all kinds of ground—rocky and fertile. The difference lies in the type of soil—is it hard or soft?
- The soil is the human heart. What kind of soil is in your heart?

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- In thinking about National NFP Awareness Week, some people may become initially excited to finally learn about the truth and beauty of God’s plan for married love; however, the idea of taking action and changing one’s behavior may seem daunting.
 - Like the rocky soil, the seed of truth may not be able to take root and may die. If that happens, it is important to remember that the Lord God is ready to help. Like the good shepherd who cares for his sheep, husband and wife should call upon the Lord! The Lord will help them as they strive to live His plan for married love!
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Saturday of the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time, July 25, 2020

Feast of Saint James the Apostle

(Anniversary of the Papal Encyclical, *Humanae vitae*)

Reading 1 2 Cor 4: 7–15

We hold this treasure in earthen vessels,

Responsorial Psalm 126: 1BC–2AB, 2CD–3, 4–5, 6

"The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad indeed."

R. (5) **Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing.**

Gospel Mt 20: 20–28

Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant

- St. Paul provides the job description of every Christian—it is not us, but Christ who works in us. And, in the Gospel, Jesus teaches that the disciples must become servants if they wish to be great, for He came not to “be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many.”
- The characteristics of generosity, mindfulness of the needs of our neighbors, and selflessness comprise the faithful follower of Christ. Or, in the words of an oft said verse, every Christian should live JOY—Jesus, Others, and You!

Marriage and NFP Reflection

- Living Christian JOY can make a good marriage great!
- Among the sacraments, Matrimony and Holy Orders are the only ones categorized as Sacraments at the Service of Communion—those who receive these sacraments place themselves in service to others as a lifelong commitment. A priest gives himself totally to God as he becomes another Christ to the People of God. Married couples give themselves totally to each other in service of life. God calls both vocations to be fruitful.
- In marriage, fruitfulness takes on a unique meaning. God has established husband and wife to bear the personal responsibility to co-create with Him. It is why the Church can say that married couples receive “a kind of consecration” in their marital duties (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 48). Sharing in the creation of a new human being is an awesome gift!
- In marriage, husband and wife deepen their love for one another through celebrating the truth of their sexual union. The marital embrace is a spousal gift with a two-fold purpose; to draw the spouses closer together, to be unitive, and to be procreative, to be life-giving.
- Marriage is the foundation to build families—children are “the supreme gift of marriage” (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 50). Sometimes a couple is unable to have children through no fault of their own. Their challenge then is to offer their marital love as a blessing in the community in service to others.

- NFP methods support God’s gift of procreation because they value new life. Unlike contraception, which exists to deny human fertility, NFP respects natural fertility. NFP education enables husband and wife to understand their window of fertility—when they are most likely to become pregnant—and, therefore, can also be used to help them achieve a pregnancy, not just postpone one. NFP respects God’s power of life. Contraception cannot do that!
- As National NFP Awareness Week ends today, please consider taking the time to learn about God’s amazing gifts of human sexuality, marriage, the virtue of chastity, and the gift of children. Learn about the ethical methods of NFP, which support married couples to live God’s plan for their marriages.

For more information, see usccb.org/nfp.

To read *Humanae vitae* see http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

For *Humanae vitae* resources see usccb.org/nfp/resources/humanae-vitae.cfm



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