

The Gospel of Life
(Life Issues including Humanae Vitae)
(5/16/06 TOPIC OF DISCUSSION)
PRESENTED BY Michael Fetsko

OPENING PRAYER BY FR. ED.

There was a deviation from the scheduled topic for today (The Church as Body of Christ) and instead Michael gave his talk on Life Issues, beginning with a discussion on the encyclical by Pope Paul VI **HUMANAE VITAE which means Human Life.**

Tracing back to the Old Testament the consistent teaching of the Church has been respect for the dignity of human life no matter the quality, degree of dependence or inconvenience. Life is God-given, God-initiated. Given the current cultural climate these values need to be emphasized. The global acceptance of contraception, abortion-on-demand, euthanasia, infanticide and now same sex marriage makes the role of the Church vital as a beacon of truth in a darkened world. Catholic Christians have the teachings of the church to form and inform their consciences.

Marriage in the Catholic understanding is a sacramental union to be entered into freely by one man and one woman. There is a deposit of grace in this sacrament which can be drawn upon throughout the couple's life to sustain, strengthen, encourage and secure them throughout the trials tribulations joys sorrows and tragedies of their lives together. This grace is tangible and real.

During the tumultuous era of the 1960's and the onset of the sexual revolution, there was serious discussion about the impact of these newly demanded freedoms on the Catholic community. This was spurred on by the introduction of contraception into society. Men and women now had the means for intimacy without the "burden" and responsibility of parenthood. Pressure was put on the Catholic Church to approve of contraception. Pope Paul VI commissioned clergy and laity from all disciplines and walks of life to consider the matter and present him with their conclusions. Both Church leaders and the faithful were surprised by the unexpected response from the Holy Father. While many Protestant Churches succumbed to the pressures

of their congregations, Pope Paul VI after much consideration of all the opinions offered to him on the subject, no doubt, carefully and prayerfully presented his conclusions in an important encyclical entitled HUMANAE VITAE – On The Regulation of Birth. Our Holy Father, by divine insight, saw and rejected the slippery slope the world was headed down. With benevolent authority the Church still stands strong and firm on those issues paving the slippery slope such as abortion, euthanasia, infanticide and same sex unions. There is also a pastoral compassion extended towards those who fall short of the ideal. While the infallible teachings of the church, by definition, are dogmatic, ex cathedra pronouncements, an encyclical, such as this one, carries the weight of carefully thought out serious teaching. Addressed to the leaders of the Catholic Church, the laity and all people of good will, the Holy Father makes his case with the following opening words: “The transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator. It has always been a source of great joy to them, even though it sometimes entails many difficulties and hardships.”

“The fulfillment of this duty has always posed problems to the conscience of married people, but the recent course of human society and the concomitant changes have provoked new questions. The Church cannot ignore these questions, for they concern matters intimately connected with the life and happiness of human beings.”

While acknowledging concerns raised by those who feared that the world population would grow beyond our capacity to sustain it with available resources, Pope Paul VI reminds us of the danger of assuming total control of our destinies including the transmission of life. He reminds us that God instituted marriage so that a man and woman can celebrate not only the mutual gift of themselves which is exclusive and perfecting but also will in cooperation with God generate new life. He likens this union to the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church.

Married love therefore, is elevated by means of the Sacrament to something higher than mere natural instinct or emotional drive. The two become one flesh. “The reason is that the fundamental nature of the marriage act, while uniting husband and wife in the closest intimacy, also renders them capable of generating new life..... if each

of these essential qualities, the unitive (emotional, intimate, fulfilling) and the procreative (God's command to be fruitful and multiply), is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called." The Sacrament enables the two to give of themselves unselfishly, to be open to life because "Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents' welfare." There is also a call to responsible parenthood which entails chastity and self control.

This encyclical also speaks about Gods gift of intimacy between the husband and wife, and His profound wisdom which naturally regulates life. Built into the system are tools that can enable the natural spacing of children without resorting to artificial means. Natural Family Planning is an example. In order to promote responsible parenthood, the rhythm of the woman's body can be monitored with specific techniques based on good scientific research to indicate the times of fertility and no fertility. The Church accepts this means of spacing children.

At stake today is the very definition of Christian marriage which has always been the freely chosen union of one man and one woman – TOTAL, without reservation, FREE, not coerced in any way, FAITHFUL, exclusive and FRUITFUL, open to life. We are so inundated with sexual imagery that society has become desensitized to it. "Does a fish in the water know that it's wet?" This is dramatic way of illustrating our accommodation to prevalent societal norms. Artificial birth control has always been with us. In the past herbs and potions were used along with barrier means. In the Old Testament the story of Onan stands out. This was a man who refused to observe the custom of impregnating the wife of his brother's widow so that the family line could continue. Infanticide was also widely practiced in some "progressive" societies.

Again the slippery slope takes the logic of contraception and extends it to the logic of abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, homosexuality, solitary practice, polygamy and who knows what else. With this mindset, just about anything goes. Something else to consider: with contraception being so globally accepted some governments have extended what was a privilege to a mandate, so that in countries such

as China a one-child policy is the norm. Since male children are preferred there is a disproportionate ratio of men to women and this will compound. The contraceptive mentality has also resulted in an unprecedented divorce rate of greater than 50%.

There was much discussion about the Church's teachings on contraception especially in regard to the control of AIDS with the use of condoms. The response is that the use of something intrinsically evil cannot be used to justify a good outcome.

In conclusion, we are all called to chastity. This can be observed in marriage and it involves self sacrifice and self control; in ordained and consecrated life where Christ and the Church is the spouse, or in single life. We are all sinners and fall short of the ideal. There is an opportunity for reconciliation through the Sacrament of Penance. Christian life is not easy; scripture talks about the gate being narrow and the way hard that leads to life. However, with faithful prayer, a willingness to be obedient and a spirit of humility, God will take our imperfect intentions and redeem them. He will create in us both the desire and ability to do His Perfect Will.

**Submitted by
Cecilia Cordeiro
Documentor**