

16th Sunday OT Year A
July 19-20, 2014

An enemy has done this.

Readings: Wisdom 12:13, 16-19; Romans 8:26-27; Matt 13: 24-30

For many and varied reasons, people seem to be fascinated with the 1960's. Indeed, it was a decade of tremendous change around the world, and especially in this nation. The summer of 1968 was a summer of political unrest in this nation as well as the quickly changing values of Hollywood. For years, families gathered to watch the Ed Sullivan variety show, an American staple since 1948.

When in 1968 he invited *The Supremes* to debut their hit single "Love Child," one wonders if it even dawned on the 67 year-old host that the title referred to a child born out of wedlock? That night only reinforced the idea that something profound was changing in our nation- and in the Church as well. Forty-six years ago this Friday, Pope Paul VI issued his monumental encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, brief in scope but rich in meaning.

Reading the signs of their own times, both Pope Pius XI (in *Casti connubii* on December 31, 1930) and Pope Paul VI (in *Humanae vitae* on July 25, 1968) addressed the sanctity of marriage and the family, with special emphasis on a principal threat against them in modern times: artificial birth control. Today, we may rightly say that even greater threats include the pain following the effects of divorce and a lessening respect for the institution of marriage as a whole.

To the traditional "goods" of marriage developed in the early centuries, known as fidelity, fruitfulness and permanence,¹ these the Church has also added the "good of the spouses themselves."

¹ Developed by St. Augustine-1) the exclusive **fidelity** (*fides*) of the marital relationship (one man with one woman; the **fruitfulness** (*proles*) of the union (procreativity or the openness to having children); the **permanence** (*sacramentum*) of the relationship- that is, the unbreakable marital bond

Thus the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reads in part that marriage “is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”²

Love is an act of the will, a choice. St. Thomas Aquinas said, “this is to love someone: to wish him or her good.”³ Love is, then, a part of the good of the spouses since each wants the best for the other. So what happened in these past forty-six years? ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?’ Jesus answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’

The weeds crept in to our collective understanding slowly but surely. Once people stopped seeing the unbreakable link between marriage and children, the notion of complete marital fidelity began to break down. Sadly, the sexual revolution had devastating effects amongst clergy, whether through their own dissent on the teaching of marriage or their own infidelity to the promises that they had made.

Couples seeking marriage today were born well after this document was released. They are not motivated by the 1960’s dissent that swept our nation, but they also need to see that the way of truth, while demanding sacrifice, is the true path to happiness and fidelity.

Today, we are best served by urging young people to look at the Church’s teaching on marriage with a fresh set of eyes. I readily acknowledge that our own failures to provide an authentic witness as priests has caused great harm to our message, minimizing its effectiveness, clouding the value of our words.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, (para. #1601)

³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 77, a. 4

Pope Paul VI knew that the use of what is known as Natural Family Planning was difficult and required sacrifice. However, he taught that self-discipline was possible, especially with the help of sacramental grace. He wrote:

“Such discipline bestows upon family life fruits of serenity and peace; and facilitates the solution of other problems; it favors attention for one's partner, helps both parties to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love, and deepens their sense of responsibility.”⁴

Chastity is a virtue to which we are all called, regardless of our state in life. In order to recover a sense of trust amongst God's people, we in the Church must continually look into our own hearts to seek strength from God to live our vocations with integrity and honor, including the promises that we have made to remain celibate for the kingdom of God. This requires self-sacrifice and prayer.

The fervent prayers of the lay faithful for us, so that we might lead lives of faithful chastity enables our vocations to be fruitful. I would like to believe that our prayers on behalf of God's faithful in marriage assist each of you to lead better and more faithful married lives. We can support one another in our chosen vocations, knowing that original sin and its effects is a threat to each of us.

We must all re-commit ourselves to the positive vision of marriage and the life of celibacy espoused by the Church all throughout the centuries. God wants all married couples to experience his love and see their own fruitfulness as a gift and not a burden. Let us be grateful for the prophetic witness of our popes and the presence of the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit both in our lives and in the life of the Church.

⁴ *Humanae Vitae*, # 21.