

Experience has taught me that when it comes to choosing the shortest line in a grocery store, at the State Fair, or the correct lane freeway on ramp, I have an uncanny ability choose the wrong one every single time. While in the end it only amounts to a little extra waiting, in other ways our choices have lasting effects- ones that do count. One example is the Church’s theology that invites engaged couples to choose the right part, the better part, the virtuous path. Preparing couples for this step is key.

Within marriage, there is an essential link between how married couples daily welcome each other into their lives and how they welcome children. Essential to married love is the gift of hospitality. Abraham and Sarah were promised the blessing of a new child by three men acting as angels of the Lord. They welcomed this news, for the starting point was in seeing children as a blessing and gift, not a right.

And our Gospel centers upon the familiar story of Martha and Mary. I am 100% a Martha! She is very concerned with details of hospitality and may be seen as the typical pragmatic American, while Mary gives her full attention to the Lord on His visit. She puts all aside to concentrate on the presence of Jesus. She was rewarded for choosing the better part.

If we see children as a right to which we have some claim, then both the gift and mystery of new life, as well as marital fidelity and fruitfulness has been lost. Pope Paul VI wrote a prophetic encyclical in 1968 entitled *Humanae Vitae*, in which he laid out the essential rationale behind the Church’s truthful teaching about marriage. He noted that “... not every conjugal act is followed by a new life. God has wisely disposed natural laws and rhythms” which provide for “the succession of births.”¹ Couples take this into account in their own prayerful planning of their family. Couples are invited to ensure that their desire is “not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to

¹ Pope Paul VI, encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, 25 July 1968, paragraph #11

responsible parenthood.”² It is critical for us priests to offer formation in the virtue of Christian chastity for our engaged couples, by means of a robust marriage prep program. It is among my most important duties.

We must share this good news about the stability of couples’ marriages who have chosen Natural Family Planning. Even if not always be the easiest route, the communication it fosters in being open to God’s plan helps couples grow in charity and self-sacrificial love.

The Church stands ready to help all couples– married and engaged– to see the fullness of the truths of marital love and intimacy, even as we acknowledge that these truths are “sometimes accompanied by not a few difficulties and by distress.”³ Abraham and Sarah had great challenges in their marriage, but they responded to God’s call with faith and trust.

Their faith was tested severely, as is the faith of not a few of our families here. Please know of my profound respect for your desire to live the fullness of marriage. Your fidelity will be rewarded. And our young people must hear of my profound respect for your parents who have loved and welcomed new life into this world, including you.

From their sacrifice, you will learn that the pursuit of virtue requires work. Marriage is not an extension of dating, but a life-long commitment that brings tremendous joys, even as it carries its own struggles.

Thank your parents for their openness to life and reach out to assist them regarding your younger brothers and sisters. May God’s deepest blessings come upon all of our families as we seek to grow in appreciation of God’s truth in the beautiful Sacrament of Matrimony.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2368

³ Pope Paul VI, encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae*, 25 July 1968, paragraph #1