

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT (2022 - C)

As I have mentioned throughout this season of Lent, we live in a time of rapid and significant change, and in times like these, we need a place of stability and order where we can support each other in living out our Catholic faith, a place where truth and goodness and beauty are preserved and where God is praised. We need a parish ark that will be for us an island of light in a dark world, a beacon of hope, and place of shelter from the storms that rage around us.

I will talk more about my ideas on how we can build a parish ark later, but for now, I want to continue talking about something positive concerning our Catholic faith, and also something practical that will help us grow in God's love as we live in a society which is becoming more and more hostile to religion in general and to Catholicism in particular.

So here is the positive. Our Catholic faith teaches the truth about the goodness of God's plan for marriage and for married love. That means husbands and wives can know how God is calling them to live and why. They can also know that God has promised to help them and that He will give them the sacramental graces they need to keep their marriage vows.

In our holy gospel today, we hear about a woman who had committed adultery. She had broken her marriage vows. Her infidelity is symbolic of our present times when nearly everyone is confused about God's plan for married love. So for the record, let me restate what Catholics believe with regard to marriage.

First, God is the one who has designed marriage, and how He has designed it cannot be changed. The Book of Genesis tells us that it is not good for the man to be alone. For that reason, God created the woman to be a partner to the man. In that way, both could give and receive love equally. Notice too that both the man and the woman would be equally invested in the success of their partnership. This life-long relationship would be the place where their love for each other could be nourished and grow.

The Book of Genesis also says that the man and woman are commanded to be fertile and multiply. From this we see that marriage is also about the procreation and education of children. In marriage, God invites the husband and wife to join with Him in bringing new life into the world. So marriage is not just about love but is also about life.

Now for marriage to be successful, there must be a life-long commitment to faithfulness. When someone gives themselves to another, when someone trusts his or her life to another, there must be the confidence that the other will not leave them for someone else. That is why the man and woman promise to each other before the altar of God that they will remain faithful to each other until death parts them, until one or the other is called home to God.

God's teachings about true marriage are summed up in the Catholic Church's definition of marriage. This definition can be found in the Code of Canon Law. It reads as follows:

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized (Can. 1055 §1).”

Ok, that’s the positive. Now for the practical. Previously, I said that we must have a great love for the truth because the truth is what corresponds to reality, to what really is. Even more important is the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ came **“to testify to the truth (Jn 18:37)”** and furthermore, that He is **“the way, and the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6).”**

For these reasons, we must always have a great love for the truth, and we must hold tight to it and never let go of it. In fact, you might say that when we are holding on to the truth, we are holding on to Jesus Himself.

That said, we are surrounded today by dishonesty and lies, and perhaps the greatest of these lies concerns marriage and the proper place and purpose for sexual intimacy. So today, just like in our holy Gospel, there are some married people who commit adultery. However, many more people simply live together without marriage. Also, men live with men and women with women. In addition, many others who are married have no intention of having children. Finally, there is pornography everywhere.

Let’s try to sort through some of this so that we can have a better understanding of how to live out God’s plan for marriage and of what God expects from married couples.

To understand God’s plan, we must begin with this fact. Human beings are creatures composed of soul and body. We have a spiritual part to us which is our soul, and we have a physical part to us which is our body. At death, our bodies and souls will be separated, but this separation is only for a time. At the end of the world, when our Lord comes again to judge the living and the dead, our bodies will be restored to us, and we will once again be body and soul.

Now I need to say more about the body. Our bodies are not simply some kind of container for the soul. They are not like a can which holds chicken noodle soup or a box holding something you just bought on Amazon.

Rather, our bodies are part of us. As evidence of this, just consider that when we are hungry we do not say, “My body’s stomach is hungry.” We say, “I am hungry.” When we go to the barber shop or the beauty shop, we do not say, “The hair on my body’s head is being cut.” We say, “I am getting a haircut.” These examples clearly show that our bodies are part of us, and so, what we do with them makes a difference because it is we who are doing it.

Now something else about the body is this. We have a limited ability to change our bodies. You can dye your hair, but left alone, it will grow back to its natural color. You can get a tan, but in the winter, the tan will fade. When injured, your body will heal from superficial cuts and your skin will gradually return to what it was like before the injury.

The fact is that most things about our bodies cannot be changed. We cannot change the biological class to which we belong. For example, we cannot change from mammals to reptiles. So, if I identify as a talking gecko like on Geiko commercials, that doesn't make me a Gecko.

We cannot change our age. So, if I believe myself to be an 18-year-old, that won't make me any younger, and my doctor isn't going to treat me as if I was 18-year-old no matter how much I insist that I identify as an 18-year-old.

Furthermore, we cannot change our sex. We are either male or female, and we have been that way since we were conceived and our body was composed of only one cell. Even the very small number of people who were born with sexual birth defects are still male or female, and their sex can be determined by genetic testing. So to say that people can change their sex by medications or by surgically altering their bodies is a lie.

Our bodies also determine who we can marry. Men and women go together. Men and men do not nor do women and women. So to call same-sex relationships marriage is another lie.

It's also a fact that we express ourselves through out bodies. We smile when we are happy and frown when we are not. In a similar way, the union of bodies in sexual intimacy symbolizes the union of hearts. This union begins with the public declaration of one's marriage vows. Because there is no promise to be faithful for life and no openness to children, sex before or outside of marriage is also a lie.

Finally, our bodies are also designed to be life-giving and so to reject that life-giving power either temporarily through contraceptive drugs or permanently by sterilization is one more lie.

In the face of all these lies about marriage, what should we do?

First, we need to know what we believe and why about marriage and sexual intimacy. So we must study our faith. We need to understand the goodness of God's plan and not give in to the temptations to live like the pagans do.

Second, we must speak the truth with love. There are many people today who have done things they regret because they did not know about God's plan. They may have rejected newly conceived life, or rejected their power to have children, or lived together without marriage or lived in same-sex relationships or simply been promiscuous. We need to speak about God's mercy with them.

Finally, do not fall for one last lie, the lie that we must affirm people when they feel bad and tell them what they are doing is OK. We do people no favors when we lie to them. Telling people who are dying they will get better doesn't help them. Telling students who got the wrong answer on a test that it was a good guess doesn't help them learn. In a similar way, telling people they are not defined by their bodies or that they can transcend their bodies does not help them either.

Today, many very smart people have bought in to this nonsense. We see examples of this in the government, education, business, health care and the entertainment industry. Sadly, those in positions of authority are using their authority to compel their employees to embrace these lies. Why they are doing so is part of the mystery of iniquity.

Here I might add that those of you in positions of authority, in business, health care, education and elsewhere have a moral obligation to resist these lies and to speak the truth even when your colleagues do not. You need to protect those who work for you and do what you can to uphold the truth when these issues come up.

These are hard times for those who love the truth. It may be that when you are asked to lie or to do things which are immoral as part of your job, you will have to find employment elsewhere or in a different field. In those cases, the cross will become very real.

It can be very confusing today because there are so many lies out there about God's plan for marriage. If you have fallen for one of them, do not loose heart. Instead, embrace the truth, and remember what Jesus said to the woman in today's holy gospel, **"Go, and from now on do not sin any more."** Amen.