

“Theology of the Body” for Couples

Talk 9: He Gave them the Law of Life as Their Inheritance: Reflections on “*Humanae Vitae*”

Part 2: The Gift of Chaste Love

“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” (Mat. 5:8)

In Summary

In this talk, we continued our look at the last section of Theology of the Body, which focuses on the whole reason the catecheses were delivered by St. John Paul II: The teachings of *Humanae Vitae* on the gift of human life received within the marital embrace. To understand this more clearly, we focused on the virtue of chastity, which we remember is: integrated love; undivided mind, heart, and body; and sexual purity according to one’s state in life (married or unmarried).

The Catechism describes chastity as “an apprenticeship in self-mastery”. This virtue of integrated love is for *everyone*, and it is lived out in one of two ways: 1) Celibate chastity, which is for *all unmarried* people, is a “no” to the physical/genital expression of sexual desire with another person or with oneself. This one “no” leads to a great *yes* to purity of heart, and to a life of grace. 2) Conjugal chastity, which is for *all married* couples, is the virtue which allows a couple to be open to life each time they make love, putting no barriers against the “I do” of their marital life.

So, does that mean that a couple must have as many children as possible? Not necessarily. Conjugal chastity has a “what” and a “how” component built into the couple’s family life: The “what” is called “Responsible parenthood”. And the “how” is called “Natural Family Planning” (“NFP”). Responsible parenthood—the “what”—component—calls a couple toward a 4-factor discernment when asking themselves if they are ready for their next child: i. Physical, ii. economic, iii. psychological, and iv. social factors all have a bearing on the discernment of new life. Sex is an important part of married life. It is both unitive and procreative (“*fidelity and fruitfulness*”, or “*bonding and babies*”), and so all things being equal, new life would be desirable. However, for serious reasons, a couple may wish not to have children at a given season in their lives.

This is where “Natural Family Planning” comes in. It is the *how* of responsible parenthood. A woman’s body is what the Song of Songs calls “a garden enclosed”, and it will tell her and her husband everything they need to know about her readiness to conceive at any point in her cycle. A couple not wishing to conceive right now may need to abstain from sexual intercourse for a short period of time, and NFP will let them know when that time would be. NFP (like anything worthwhile) has its challenges, but its benefits are enormous: Growth in love, a constant healing of the marital bond, a perpetually renewed honeymoon period, a practically non-existent divorce rate, financial benefit, and continuous growth in communication, knowledge, maturity, strength, and true intimacy.

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TOB/JPII & Related Quotes

“Chastity means living in the order of the heart” (TOB 131:1)

“Love is the fundamental spiritual power of [the] conjugal covenant... [and] love is not able to realize itself...except through [self]-mastery”. (TOB 127:4)

“Inasmuch as [man] is master over himself he can ‘give himself to another. (TOB 123:5)

“In the conjugal act...*in this moment, so rich in meaning, it is...important that the “language of the body” be [spoken] in the truth*”. (TOB 118:6).

“When the conjugal act is *deprived of its inner truth* because it is deprived artificially of its procreative capacity, it also *ceases to be an act of love*” (TOB 123:6).

“The natural regulation of fertility is morally right; contraception is not morally right...[for it] turns [the person] into an object of manipulation” (TOB 122:2, 123:1).

“In its original and deepest meaning, ‘communication’ was and is...based on... ‘common union’. (TOB 12:4)

“A couple’s maturation into a communion of persons involves sexual expression and sexual abstinence, ecstasy and asceticism”.
(Pope St. John Paul II’s biographer George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 342)

“The teaching of the Church on the regulation of birth...would be impossible to observe without the help of God... Yet...such efforts *ennoble man*” (TOB 120:4 // HV 20)

“The mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood” (TOB 21:2)

TOB Terms

Self-Mastery: The key to love as “self-gift”, because I can only give myself to another if I first have *possession* of myself.

Celibate Chastity: The call to sexual purity for all who are unmarried. A small “no” to sexual activity of any kind in favor of a great “yes” to purity of heart, mind, and body.

Conjugal Chastity: The call to sexual purity for all who are married. A “yes” to a sexual gift of self with one’s spouse that is free, full, faithful, and fruitful, *holding nothing back*, including the gift of one’s fertility.

Natural Family Planning (or “NFP”): Those methods of birth regulation that are in keeping with God’s plan for marital love and fertility. This is *not* the “rhythm method” (i.e. it has nothing to do with “counting days”), but rather refers to multiple methods (which are practically free and have no side effects) that are 98%-99% effective *even if* a woman’s cycle is “irregular”.

Responsible Parenthood: The discernment of family size by praying about and carefully weighing physical, economic, psychological, and social factors. Once children are born, responsible parenthood is the raising of children according to God’s plan for life and love.