

“GENERATIONS OF LOVE”

HUMANAE VITAE (1968-2018)

Celebrate God’s gift of married love and life!

National Natural Family Planning Awareness Week

July 22-28, 2018

Most Rev. Peter Sartain, Archbishop of Seattle

16th Sunday in Ordinary Time - July 22, 2018

Shepherds have always been important in cultures which depend on land and livestock for sustenance. In the days of Jeremiah and the Lord Jesus, shepherds were usually heads of families assisted in the fields by their children. They searched out nourishing pastures and refreshing watering holes, and defended their flocks from wild animals and thieves on the prowl. It was a significant event, then, for God to reveal Himself to the people of Israel as a *shepherd*, since up to that point most cultures had thought of God in terms of wind, fire and storm. The God of Israel was different: He showed Himself to be in the midst of His people and desired a true, intimate relationship with them.

Eventually the image of shepherd was also used to describe the leaders God set over His beloved people—leaders who were to guide and guard and treat God’s people just as He would, with compassion, tenderness and direction. Jeremiah lived at a time when the leaders God had appointed over his people let God down, misleading and scattering the flock. The Lord thus spoke through Jeremiah and proclaimed that He would personally take in hand this disastrous situation: He would gather the sheep from all the lands to which they had scattered and appoint new shepherds who would shepherd them as He desires, guard them from the dangers of the wild, and keep them safe and free of fear.

The Lord Jesus revealed Himself as the Good Shepherd, who would fulfill the will of His Heavenly Father completely by laying down His life for us. He healed and forgave; He challenged and turned conventional thinking upside down with the wisdom of His parables; He sought the lost and gathered the flock back together.

And he taught. Today St. Mark recounts the occasion when Jesus and the apostles had sought out a quiet place to rest but found that people were so irresistibly drawn to Jesus that they could not help but seek Him out. St. Mark pens a beautiful phrase that reveals another aspect of Jesus’ mission: “When ... he saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.”

Teaching has always been a crucial element in shepherding the Church, from the days of St. Peter down to the pontificate of Pope Francis. Teaching was an element of his ministry that Blessed Paul VI took very seriously, because he recognized that the years of the Second Vatican Council and those immediately following were critical times of ferment and change not just for the Church but for the entire world. He knew the Lord was calling him to *shepherd his people rightly*.

Humanae vitae remains to this day the prophetic words of a shepherd. In a world that can easily abide on the surface of things, Blessed Paul VI teaches us to look deeply into human life, our origin, our fulfilment, and our destiny. In a world that prizes expediency and consumerism (what Pope Francis calls our “throw-away culture”) Blessed Paul VI challenges us to cherish the gift of human life. In a world whose religion is science and that gives blind adherence to the principle that “what is possible is therefore good,” Blessed Paul VI reminds us that at the core of a truly fulfilled human life is the act of opening our minds and hearts to the wisdom of God, who created the world and all that is in it, and who knows and loves us more than we can fathom. In a culture where the human body and human life itself are exploited for entertainment and shameful profit, Blessed Paul VI begs us not to forget that the human body has beautiful, God-given worth and wisdom all its own, wisdom that is to be plumbed for its richness and lived with humility and joy. And, in a world that increasingly eschews any form of Christian shepherding, Blessed Paul VI stands as the prophet who proclaims God’s blessed way to the world, the way that leads to peace, hope, holiness, and justice for all.

Humanae vitae speaks to the deepest hungers of the human heart. The crowds who flocked determinedly and irresistibly around the lake to listen to Jesus were treated to lessons of life, of love, and of fulfilment in this world and the next. The Church gratefully celebrates this 50th anniversary of *Humanae vitae* and invites us to see through the powerful prejudices of our culture to the ageless wisdom of Jesus, His Father’s gift of married love, and the fullness of life He offers to all. This timeless encyclical speaks to us ever more poignantly as time goes by, for it is God Himself shepherding us, His beloved flock.