

PREACHING FOR MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

National Natural Family Planning Awareness Week

July 22-28, 2012

Rev. Daniel J. Merz, Associate Director, Secretariat of Divine Worship, USCCB

HOMILY NOTES

“FAITHFULLY YOURS” DISCOVER NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

SUGGESTION FOR PASTORAL EDUCATION PLANNING

By Theresa Notare, PhD, Assistant Director, NFP Program, Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, USCCB

This year’s National NFP Awareness Week provides a significant opportunity for dioceses and parishes to promote the wisdom, beauty, and reasonableness of the Church’s teaching on marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood. This is all the more timely due to the federal government’s Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) “contraceptive mandate.”

The HHS mandate is a serious violation of religious liberty, and the promotion and defense of religious liberty remain especially vital and urgent. In addition, discussion on the HHS mandate has moved the subject of contraception to the center of public attention, and the news around the mandate recalls the need to invite the faithful to a fresh consideration of the “inner truth of conjugal love” as the Church teaches (see *Familiaris consortio*, no. 32). It also provides an entry point to discuss the healthiness and beauty of Natural Family Planning. In order to help you plan your homily we offer the following notes as well as additional information to use in your parish educational activities.

Preparation before July 22

Consider scheduling persons who are trained in Natural Family Planning (teachers, users, and even knowledgeable priests!) to be on hand for discussions after Mass. The diocesan office of Marriage and Family Life will be able to assist you. In some cases, you may want to use segments from a DVD to show couples talking about living the Church’s teaching in their marriages. Some dioceses have NFP videos which feature married couples’ witness stories (see for example the trailer of, “Plan Your Family Naturally” from the Diocese of Rockville Centre at http://newcatholicvideo.org/?page_id=108; also available with Hispanic couples’ witness stories at http://newcatholicvideo.org/?page_id=133).

Provide a means for individuals to get NFP class information so that they can follow up more privately since they may not have the time or may be embarrassed to talk to NFP teachers after Mass (besides local classes, the USCCB has information on home study, some of which is available via the Internet. See: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/nfp-home-study.cfm>).

Include educational resources in the vestibule of your church and put inserts in the Sunday bulletin. For Sunday July 22, 2012, a specific one-page bulletin insert explaining the “why” of the Church’s teaching on contraception will be available (by mid-June) as part of a nationwide bulletin series defending religious liberty (see: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/conscience-protection/resources-on-conscience-protection.cfm#bulletininserts>; also available at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/what-is-nfp/theology-of-nfp.cfm>).

The USCCB has many resources on line that can be downloaded at no cost, including the complete text of the bishops’ *Married Love and the Gift of Life*, which summarizes the Church’s teaching on conjugal love and responsible parenthood in an easy to read question and answer format (see: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/upload/Married-Love-and-the-Gift-of-Life-English-version.pdf). A two page bulletin insert of *Married Love and the Gift of Life*, copies of which could be provided in your church, is available at: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/upload/Married-Love-A-Bulletin-Insert.pdf>; also available in Spanish at: http://old.usccb.org/prolife/issues/nfp/married_love_bulletin_insert_sp.pdf. For all NFP information, see: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning.

Display the NFP poster in your church (to view the current poster see: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/awareness-week/posters.cfm) along with resources for people to take home! Order the NFP poster, brochures or booklets via the USCCB Respect Life Catalogue: call toll free, 1-866-582-0943; or write, customerservice@ifcweb.com. Hard copies of *Married Love and the Gift of Life* as well as the bishops’ pastoral letter on marriage, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, are available from USCCB Publishing at www.usccbpublishing.org or call toll-free 1-800-235-8722.

HOMILY NOTES

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Sunday 22 July 2012

“Make Jesus the Shepherd and King of Your Family!”

First Reading: Jeremiah 23:1-6

The Lord God would gather the flock and appoint new shepherds to care for it.

Psalm: 23:1-3, 3-4, 5, 6

The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.

Second Reading: Ephesians 2:13-18

In Christ, we are reconciled and united with each other and with God.

Gospel: Mark 6:30-34

The disciples returned from work and went with Jesus to a quiet place to rest.

In the first reading the prophet Jeremiah proclaims two powerful messages:

1. God himself will bring the people back to Himself because the shepherds, the leaders of God's people have failed to care for them, and by misleading them have scattered them *and*
2. God will raise up a new king like David who will reunite Judah and Israel into one people.

The second reading, from Ephesians, proclaims that God has brought about reconciliation, peace, between Jew and Gentile through the sacrificial blood of Christ. Because of Christ's sacrifice, the way to peace and unity has been opened.

In the Old Testament vision, God's people were to be one people so that they could bring all peoples together for God. Both the Gospel and the second reading from Ephesians proclaim Jesus as the fulfillment of the shepherd-king, like David (who was both a shepherd and a king), who not only unites the twelve tribes of Israel (symbolically in calling his twelve apostles), but also unites Jew and Gentile through his one death for all.

During this week of national education on the Church's teaching regarding marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood, a good question to ask is

“What are the divisions we wrestle with that need Christ's peace?”

Perhaps, there are the divisions from sin, within our mind and heart that we struggle against. How open are we, in all seriousness, to let Jesus be the shepherd and king of our minds and hearts?

Perhaps, there are divisions within our family or within the marriage itself. How open are we to allow Jesus to be shepherd and king of our families and marriages? This takes faith!

Today begins National Natural Family Planning Awareness Week. I would like to propose that Natural Family Planning is a way that married couples can allow Jesus to be the king and shepherd of their marriages.

Now, if you are now ready to “tune me out,” please consider two simple questions:

1. “The Church is neither irrational nor malicious (and neither are you!), so why do you think the Church refuses to waver on its opposition to contraception, despite what popular opinion says?”
2. “Wouldn't it be worthwhile to give the Church's teaching at least a fair hearing?” (I would add, that a fair hearing means you should get to ask questions as well. After all, most of us learn when we can discuss a topic freely.)

Fulton Sheen once said that few Americans truly hate the Catholic Church, though many hate what they *mistakenly* believe to be the Church. One might say the same about the Church's teachings on human sexuality, marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood! In fact, NFP couples often remark that these teachings are the Church's “best kept secret.” Many people do

not understand these beautiful teachings. They certainly do not know much information about the methods of Natural Family Planning (or “NFP”) which respect God’s design for married love.

As Catholics, we owe it to our Church to understand her teachings! To help you in your faith’s journey, I encourage you to pursue that understanding by studying Church teaching. An easy way to get started is to take a look at the website of our U.S. bishops (www.usccb.org). The section on Natural Family Planning (search “Natural Family Planning”: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning) has basic information on Church teaching as well as the methods of Natural Family Planning which can help a married couple live those teachings in their everyday lives. In this homily, on the other hand, I would simply like to share a few of the most common benefits that couples cite for using NFP. These insights include:

- “Scientific”
The NFP methods are based on a wealth of scientific research.
- “Realistic”
NFP treats each menstrual cycle of the woman as unique and teaches a couple to observe the signs of fertility on a day-to-day basis.
- “Authentic family planning”
NFP methods are unique among methods of family planning because they enable couples to understand when they are more likely to achieve a pregnancy or avoid one.
- “Healthy”
The methods of NFP have no harmful side effects. They work with the body rather than against it.
- “Effective”
When couples understand the methods and are motivated to follow them, NFP is up to 99% successful in spacing or limiting births.
- “Inclusive”
NFP methods can be used throughout life including special circumstances such as, post-partum, during breastfeeding, and pre-menopause.
- “Shared responsibility”
NFP calls for mutual engagement and responsibility by both husband and wife.
- “Better communication”
NFP requires the couple to communicate about important and ongoing matters.
- “Economical”
Once a couple learns an NFP method, it is virtually cost free!
- “Moral”
The methods of NFP respect God’s design for life and love.

Lastly, the methods of NFP are not a “silver bullet” that will fix marital difficulties, but, they can be one step toward the solution. Married love is a gift. NFP respects that gift!

We're all struggling with divisions from within and without. The only proven way to resolve those divisions is by inviting Jesus to be shepherd and king of our souls, our lives, yes, even our marriages and families. Let us be not afraid, but open wide the doors of our hearts to Christ! Allow Christ to be shepherd and king of your marriages, your families and your lives!

EXTRAS for the Sunday Sermon

By USCCB staff

The HHS Mandate, Contraception and God's Design for Married Love

The following is a brief reflection for further consideration as you prepare your homily.

We have heard much about contraception in the news due to the federal government's Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) new "contraceptive mandate." This new mandate requires all employers to pay for contraceptive coverage, even potentially abortifacient chemical contraceptives (many people do not understand that all chemical contraceptives have a secondary action which may prevent new human life from implanting in the mother's womb). The HHS contraceptive mandate allows only a very narrow "religious conscience exemption" and violates both institutional and individual religious freedom (to learn more see: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/conscience-protection>).

Not all Catholics may realize what is at stake regarding the HHS contraceptive mandate and their religious freedom. Much of the rhetoric in the public square has attempted to divert attention from the very real and grave threat to religious liberty. The rhetoric has also caricatured the Church's teaching on contraception as somehow archaic, irrelevant, and even "anti-woman." This is false. Religious liberty *is* at stake, and the Church's teaching on human sexuality, marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood is timely, necessary, and absolutely "pro-woman." This is an opportune time to help your parishioners understand these teachings.

Teach your parishioners about the *why* of God's design for life and love. Help them understand the difference between Natural Family Planning and contraception. Proclaim to them that the Church's teaching on marriage is good news! Behind the "no" is a greater "yes" to true freedom—the freedom willed by God for His children. As noted above, the USCCB has many resources to aid you in your work.

As you preach and teach, you may want to root your remarks in our baptismal call. We are grafted into the Body of Christ. We have received the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. We are called to share this joy with others! Inseparable from this joy is the beauty of the truth we have received through Christ and the Church. This includes the truth of the nature of human sexuality, marriage and the family.

We know that the Church's teachings on the moral life are accessible to right reason. They are *reasonable* in a fundamental way. As we celebrate NFP Awareness Week, let's take some time to explore and perhaps invite others to consider the *why factor* and the great *yes* of the Church's teaching: the new evangelization beckons!

Couples' Insights

The following are quotes from testimonies given by couples who have benefited from NFP. Some of these quotes could be used in your homily or inserted in the Sunday bulletin. Please also see the additional resources the USCCB offers at: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/awareness-week/index.cfm

“Much to my surprise, I also learned how grateful my wife was that I was willing to learn how her body worked.” *An NFP husband*

“Teaching NFP for seven years and talking to couples about these issues, my wife and I have ... consistently seen a mixture of surprise, joy and peace.” *NFP teaching couple*

“NFP gives couples a way to measure and chart their fertility signs. We also learned how responsible parenthood is the virtuous application of this fertility knowledge.” *An NFP couple*

“My husband and I signed up for NFP class. It may sound like an exaggeration, but from the first day we began using NFP everything immediately felt different. My husband would set the alarm, take my temperature, and record the numbers on the chart. I felt so taken care of. I felt a tenderness that I hadn't felt in a long time. I liked that he was learning about my body. It was helpful that he knew where I was in my cycle, especially during difficult days. I came to understand this total love and acceptance in a deeper way.” *An NFP wife*

“Whereas artificial contraception usually places the full burden of family planning on the woman, NFP promotes shared responsibility of the fertility of both the husband and wife. It lends a spirit of togetherness to a marriage. ... In our marriage there's no holding back that precious part of ourselves, our fertility. Rather than a burden to be dealt with, for us it is a blessing to be understood and respected. The complete self-giving says, I love all of you.” *An NFP couple*

“With NFP we could not ignore how God made us— as a man and a woman.” *An NFP couple*

“[Contraception] cheapens the marital act. [It] seems to say: “I love you, honey, but I don't love you THAT much.” *An NFP wife*

“NFP also guards against the objectification of the woman in the relationship. Contraception often keeps the woman in a defensive position because it allows “intimacy on demand.” NFP does not allow this because of the practice of periodic abstinence when not seeking a pregnancy. A deeper equality between husband and wife can be nurtured with NFP. NFP begins the process of this awareness.” *An NFP husband*

“Modern NFP has no side effects. It strengthens marriages and ... is up to 99% effective.” *An NFP teacher*

DAILY READINGS

Monday 23 July 2012

Reading: Micah 6:1-4, 6-8

Psalm: 50:5-6, 8-9, 16bc-17, 21, 23

“To the upright I will show the saving power of God.”

Gospel: Matthew 12:38-42

Micah presents a trial between God and his people with all of creation as witness. God presents his charge against Israel, and recounts his faithfulness, and then Micah responds with what the appropriate response to God’s covenant offer should be: Justice, Mercy and Faithfulness. Justice without mercy is cold; mercy without justice is an illusion; and either without faithfulness loses credibility.

Both Micah and the Psalmist call for more than mere words. The Psalmist proclaims that God will do more than talk of salvation, “To the upright, I will *show* saving power.”

In the Gospel, Jesus asks that we get beyond needing or even wanting to experience miracles or the supernatural in order to believe. Rather than wanting to be dazzled with supernatural entertainment, he calls us to seek wisdom—which is truth as discerned in the experience of our own senses.

Every relationship that will endure needs to practice justice, mercy and faithfulness. It needs to be more than mere words. And it needs to be rooted not in being entertained by the other, but in finding wisdom in him or her—a wisdom which manifests a loving, just and truthful reality.

Natural Family Planning is a wisdom based practice that pushes couples to communicate (e.g., “Do we want a child at this time or not?” “What is God’s will for us and our family?”), to love beyond pleasure (periods of abstinence prove that love is more than pleasure), and to seek justice (by treating each other with mutual respect).

Challenge to spread the word: Make a point to mention, even in passing, to others this week how “Church teaching about NFP really does have a lot of wisdom behind it,” and that “NFP is worth trying in order to strengthen one’s marriage.” Tell couples how to find out more by visiting the bishops’ website at: www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning.

Tuesday 24 July 2012

Reading: Micah 7:14-15, 18-20

Psalm: 85:2-4, 5-6, 7-8

Gospel: Matthew 12:46-50

“Lord, show us your mercy and love.”

Micah gives us important information about God: He removes guilt; He pardons sin; He does not persist in anger; He delights in clemency. God’s delight has nothing to do with anger, but with clemency, with mercy. In the dark days of the civil war, Abraham Lincoln used to find renewed energy in going through the sentences of those convicted of crime and finding reasons to show mercy. It is in God’s nature to do the same.

While the Psalmist proclaims that God, through the Old Testament system of animal sacrifice “covers” all our sins, the New Testament proclaims that Jesus, through His cross and resurrection, does not simply cover sins, but destroys them.

The blood of Jesus does not simply “cover” us on the outside. Through faith and through Holy Communion, His precious blood flows within us, making us members of His body, making us his true family: mothers, brothers and sisters all.

NFP is not just something couples do or don’t do with their bodies. It also promotes a spirituality, an internal and spiritual connection between husband and wife, but also between a couple and God. It goes beyond biology to the spirituality of what it means to be a family, to sacrifice for one another, to love and forgive, and to cooperate with God’s plan for faithful love.

Challenge to spread the word: Ask another if they have a sense of their own marital spirituality. Encourage married couples to develop their marital spirituality and mention that NFP fosters precisely such a development. NFP encourages “faithfulness” to each other as spouses and to God.

Wednesday 25 July 2012

(Feast of St. James, Apostle; anniversary of *Humanae vitae*)

Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:7-15

Psalm 126:1bc-2ab, 2cd-3, 4-5, 6 “*Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing*”

Gospel: Matthew 20:20-28

St. Paul says that he carries about in his body the dying of Jesus. He gives a partial list of what that “dying” looks like for him: being afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down. When we encounter similar “dyings” in the course of our lives, we do well to consider how Jesus endured such dyings throughout his earthly life. Such would be the Christian way to live our trials, our dyings.

The Psalmist sings of weeping as we go out and rejoicing as we come back. This going out and coming back is reminiscent of exile and return, of sin and redemption, of suffering and healing, of coming into the world and of going out of it.

We do well to consider our own notions of what Jesus means by Kingdom. James and John and their mother thought they understood, but Jesus seems to tell them they really don't. At the end of today's passage, Jesus tries again to explain that Kingdom. Jesus says that the “power” of his Kingdom is in being a servant, the glory of his Kingdom is to put others first.

This same James who here thinks of the Kingdom in terms of earthly power, becomes the James who after the resurrection will be the first of the Apostles to give his life in witness to Jesus, a life of dying to sin and worldly power; a life of rising to virtue and apostolic service. Legend has it that before his martyrdom, he had traveled to Spain to witness to the Gospel. The most famous pilgrimage destination in Europe is Santiago de Compostela, the place where reportedly his remains were taken after he was killed by the sword by “King” Herod Agrippa (Act. 12:1-2).

NFP may call married couples to a similar kind of dying to old ways of thinking or to stubborn desires to stay in step with worldly ways of “living.” A contraceptive mentality seems to think that the world should be shaped in “my own image” and manipulated to “my own time schedule.” The NFP mentality, on the other hand, calls for the spouses to be generous—to think of each other and God's desires for their lives.

Married couples are called to serve each other mutually by respecting the integrity and timetable of their bodies and loving the whole person, including their fertility, whether they choose to seek a pregnancy sooner or later. In order to have a generous heart, a person has to die to one's self and this can be painful as today's psalm sings. Our faith tells us however, that a heart open to each other and to the Lord God is where our happiness lies. Indeed, it paves the way to eternal life in the one who has loved us from the beginning!

Challenge to spread the word: Encourage your children or your grandchildren (or friends) to think about their marriage or future marriage as opportunities for service and for training in discipline, dying to selfishness and living for God and the other. This is precisely what NFP promotes.

Thursday 26 July 2012

(Saints Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary)

Reading: Jeremiah 2:1-3, 7-8, 12-13

Psalms 36:6-7ab, 8-9, 10-11

“With you is the fountain of life, O Lord.”

Gospel: Matthew 13: 10-17

Jeremiah recalls the honeymoon of God and His people during their time in the desert (though to read the accounts of the desert wanderings, the Israelites were far from perfect!). What is idealized about that time, however, is that the people, after grumbling or rebelling, repented and returned. They never gave up entirely on God and God certainly never did on them. That’s what makes the current situation so much worse: they have both forsaken the “source of living waters” and turned to other gods, making other things the center of their lives—which Jeremiah calls, “broken cisterns that hold no water.”

The Psalmist reinforces that there is only one true water source, life source, for God’s people. The true fountain of life is God’s own Spirit. This is what we must drink deeply if we would have life abundantly.

These images of living water in Jeremiah and the Psalm are parables of God. Such images stay with us longer. This is what Jesus is saying in the Gospel. He speaks parables because sometimes people are not ready to hear all that He has to say. Their hearts are hardened for whatever reason. But the parable works a message into the hard soil of their hearts, and if later they allow the Spirit to pour in some living water, that Gospel seed can spring up to produce the fruit of conversion.

Little is known about Joachim and Anne. Actually, we know them best only through their daughter, Mary and grandson, Jesus. Given the fidelity of both Mary and Jesus to the Jewish Torah, it is fair to say that Joachim and Anne were equally devout. This sense of their faithfulness has been passed down through the ages through legends where we are told that Saints Joachim and Anne prayed as a couple that God would give them a child. That child is of course, Mary the mother of Jesus. Faith, the faith of Saints Joachim and Anne, is a hallmark of their marital relationship and an inspiration for all married couples.

NFP enables a married couple to have a built in courtship or romance renewed every month during the times of abstinence. It can be a time to renew and deepen the “devotion of youth” and the time as “bride” and “bridegroom.” It can be a time of returning to one’s source, the divine and living waters to remember the purpose and gift of the whole marriage covenant.

Challenge to spread the word: Ask couples if they take time to court each other anew and thereby to deepen their marital love and commitment. Mention that the practice of NFP fosters just such a renewal and deepening on a regular basis.

Friday 27 July 2012

Reading: Jeremiah 3:14-17

Psalm: Jeremiah 31:10, 11-12abcd, 13 “The Lord will guard us as a shepherd guards his flock.”

Gospel: Matthew 13:18-23

Jeremiah speaks to the northern tribes of Israel who are in exile. In their exile, they are now longing to see the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. Jeremiah does not simply prophesy their return, but something much greater. They will return not to see the Ark, which was a symbol of fidelity. They will return to see the whole city of Jerusalem living that fidelity, and therefore the city as a whole being God’s throne. Of course, this calls to mind the wedding banquet of the Lamb and the new Jerusalem in the book of Rev. 21-22.

In the Psalm response, Jeremiah stresses the importance to have God’s shepherding, not our own. He also says that the redeemed stream toward God and his blessings. In other words, the life of blessedness lies precisely in our going to God, not in expecting him to serve me. In going to God, he abundantly gives consolation and healing and joy.

If (perhaps “when”!) we find ourselves doubting or struggling with a teaching of the Church, the Gospel today encourages us to consider if the struggle is because 1) we don’t fully understand it; 2) or perhaps because outside pressure, stress, or even ridicule from others sours us toward it; 3) or perhaps because it affects my personal pursuit of worldly goods. Is my struggle with the teaching because it’s really not believable or because I’m too rooted in the thinking of this world?

The practice of NFP combines the needs of this world with the vision of our pilgrimage toward the next. It does this by leaving God’s sovereignty over marital life intact. The couple cooperates with God in planning to have or not have children, rather than co-opting God out of the picture by using barriers in their becoming one flesh. NFP sees that the bigger picture is fidelity to God and making Him the center rather than making our plans for this world the center.

Challenge to spread the word: Over the years NFP teachers have noticed that couples who follow Church teaching regarding responsible parenthood rarely divorce. In 2002, an *informal* study* confirmed this understanding estimating the divorce rate for couples who use NFP at 3-5% (compared with the national divorce rate which hovers between 40% and 50%, see a good explanation of American divorce statistics in, “The State of Our Unions” by The National Marriage Project, at <http://www.stateofourunions.org/2011/SOOU2011.pdf>). Ask another today if they have heard similar statistics and consider with them whether such success rates aren’t worthy of more serious consideration.

*See, Mercedes Arzú Wilson, “The Practice of Natural Family Planning Versus the Use of Artificial Birth Control: Family, Sexual, and Moral Issues,” *Catholic Social Science Review* 7 (November 2002); see also *What’s Wrong with Contraception?* (Cincinnati, Ohio: The Couple to Couple League International).

Saturday 28 July 2012

Reading: Jeremiah 7:1-11

Psalm: 84:3, 4, 5-11

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-30

“How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, mighty God!”

Jeremiah teaches us that religion is not about having a beautiful Temple or church building. Authentic religion is rather about the Temple of the heart and we need to pay attention to how well we keep that Temple. At times, for sure, we will need to beg Christ to come and drive out from the Temple of our heart whatever gets in the way of prayer, of connecting with Him.

The Psalmist is consumed with longing for the dwelling place of God. If we would fulfill these words of the Psalmist, then we need be consumed with longing to make our heart a suitable dwelling place for God, because with our baptism that is where He longs to be.

In the Gospel, Jesus teaches us that evil (the weeds) is not part of His plan—but rather the work of an “enemy.” In this world, fallen as it is, evil is tolerated so that the just might grow to maturity. But in the Kingdom (the Father’s “barn”), there will be no more evil, but only the just who have come to full maturity.

NFP does not place trust in externals (drugs or other devices), but rather focuses precisely on the heart. The way the spouses treat each other should not depend on the availability of drugs or devices, but on the maturity of their hearts, where real decisions are made based on love. Following God’s plan for married love is the sure way that married couples can prepare their hearts—as a couple—to be open to God’s will in their lives.

Challenge to spread the word: If you know someone who is interested in maturing spiritually, offer them information on the Church’s teachings on marriage and responsible parenthood. Ask them to consider attending an NFP class or give them an informational brochure. NFP is a way of disciplining and maturing the heart to love more deeply, and in doing so, to strengthen one’s marriage.



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