

# **“CALLED TO THE JOY OF LOVE” NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING**

*Supporting God’s gifts of love and life in marriage.*

**National Natural Family Planning Awareness Week**

**July 24–30, 2022**

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The sacrament of marriage symbolizes Christ’s relationship with His Church. What is this relationship but one of generous, self-sacrificing, passion-filled, and fruitful love! When married couples live their vocation according to Church teachings, especially regarding the transmission of life, many benefits can be reaped. Indeed, married couples who use Natural Family Planning (NFP) report that the benefits include growth in: understanding and appreciation of their fertility; emotional maturity—especially in their spousal communication; holiness; and respect for God’s gifts for married love.

The following are meant to aid the priest or deacon in planning his homily during NFP Awareness Week. The homily is not the place where details of NFP methodology are provided. The homily should include the core of the Church’s teachings that support NFP use in marriage with possibly some basic NFP information added.

Pastors should have NFP resources available in the church vestibule (contact your diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life Ministry or [nfp@usccb.org](mailto:nfp@usccb.org)). It would also be helpful to ask NFP teachers to staff information tables after Mass. For free resources, including short articles and two-page bulletin inserts for your parish, see [usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/national-nfp-awareness-week](http://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/national-nfp-awareness-week). If you have a parish e-mail list, consider inserting NFP information with a link to the USCCB resources ([usccb.org/nfp](http://usccb.org/nfp)) and your diocese’s website ([usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/directory-diocesan-marriage-family-life-directors-and-nfp](http://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/directory-diocesan-marriage-family-life-directors-and-nfp)).

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NOTE: Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the umbrella title for those methods of family planning that are based in fertility education (sometimes NFP is referred to as “Fertility Awareness Based Methods” or FABMs). NFP methods can be used to either attempt or postpone conception. For avoiding conception, the use of NFP means periodic sexual abstinence. No devices or drugs are used to harm God’s design for married love. NFP methods call for husband and wife to learn, understand, and apply the information in their conjugal life. NFP methods are the only methods of family planning that support the married couple’s relationship and the child who may come from them. NFP methods respect God’s design for married love. Read more at [usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/what-natural-family-planning](http://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/what-natural-family-planning).

## HOMILY NOTES

**Sunday, July 24, 2022**

**SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

First Reading: Genesis 18:20–32

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 138:1–2, 2–3, 6–7, 7–8  
*Lord, on the day I called for help, you answered me.*

Second Reading: Colossians 2:12–14

Gospel: Luke 11:1–13

Today's readings highlight that God is both infinitely just and infinitely merciful. In the first reading we see God in the process of rendering judgment against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. In these cities God's plan for sexuality has been cast aside and men had taken up having relations with men. The outcry against these cities for their grave sin has come to the ears of God. Yet, in the process of judging the sinfulness of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah, we see both God's justice and his mercy. Abraham, concerned that God will wipe away the innocent with the guilty, questions God about the judgment he is about to render. Abraham asks God if He would spare the city of Sodom if there were but fifty, or forty-five, or forty, or thirty, or twenty, or ten innocent people left in the city. Each time God responds that he would spare the city for that number of people. This line of questioning shows that the judge of the world acts not only with justice, but also with mercy in that He is willing to allow the guilty to live for the sake of the innocent. Reading further into Genesis 19 we come to know that there was only one just man left in Sodom, Abraham's nephew Lot, and God seeks to rescue Lot and his family from the just judgment that the sins of the other residents faced. The fact that Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed for their heinous sins leads us to believe that the people there had willfully departed from God's plan for human love and allowed themselves to be thoroughly corrupted. They wanted no part of God's plan for human love.

Had the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah humbled themselves to call upon God for help, God would have answered, as the responsorial psalm proclaims. "God knows and is near to the lowly, but sees the proud from afar." And God's kindness endures forever to those who humble themselves before God. It is in refusing to humble themselves and follow God's design for human love that the proud residents of Sodom and Gomorrah meet their end.

St. Paul reminds us that we have been buried with Christ in our baptism, and have been raised to new life in him. Being alive in Christ we can always call out to God for help, knowing that we will be heard! The Gospel acclamation picks up on this theme in St. Paul to remind us that by dying and rising in Christ we have received a Spirit of adoption, through which we cry, Abba, Father! We now have the unfathomable dignity of

being able to call ourselves children of God, and being able to turn to God as our loving Father who will always answer when we call for help!

In today's Gospel, Jesus himself teaches us to pray to God as our Father. Through a parable, Jesus exhorts us to be persistent in prayer, asking for what we need for ourselves and for others. Jesus shows us that to humble ourselves in offering persistent prayer God will give us gifts beyond our wildest dreams, because He gives us His very Spirit! This is a Gift of Joy that is unimaginable! It is a Gift that we could never have earned, but a Gift that is freely given to those who are baptized into the humility of Jesus. Thus, God shows that He is not only just, rendering to us what is due to our actions, but He is infinitely merciful, coming to meet us in our need.

The message of trusting in God's justice and mercy is fitting for this Sunday, which is the beginning of Natural Family Planning Awareness Week—a week during which married couples are encouraged to humbly embrace the truth of God's design for the life-giving love of marriage. This particular week is designated Natural Family Planning Awareness Week because it was fifty-four years ago on July 25<sup>th</sup> (tomorrow) that Pope Saint Paul VI issued his encyclical *Humanae vitae* (*On Human Life*). In this papal letter, Paul VI provided instruction on the responsible transmission of human life, describing the nature of married love as designed by God and reiterating the Church's unchanging teaching on the immorality of contraceptive behavior. Many people disagree with this teaching, but this is not surprising in a society that has grown forgetful of or even rejected God's plan for human sexuality and has readily accepted and promoted contraception as a form of liberation. However, in her teachings the Church simply preserves and proclaims God's beautiful design for married love. According to this design, married love involves a total mutual gift of self between a man and a woman, and the totality of this mutual gift means that their love is permanent, faithful, and fruitful. This includes having a disposition of openness to new life and trust in God's providence to support new life. This is a sacred responsibility, since from the beginning the Lord God entrusted husband and wife with the gifts of love and life!

When a husband and wife express their total, self-giving love for each other in the marital act, their bodies speak a "language" of mutual self-donation. Because the marital act is designed to express marital love, a husband and a wife are to give and receive all that they have to offer, including their fertility. Spouses should want to reverence God's design for their love and speak "the language of the body" in truth. This is where natural methods of regulating fertility differ strikingly from contraception. Natural Family Planning, or "NFP," allows a couple to work responsibly with God to either achieve or avoid conception, while reverencing both the dignity of each other and the nature and dignity of the marital act. NFP allows a couple to give all of themselves, including their procreative potential, to each other in every marital act. If there is a reason to avoid a pregnancy, couples practicing modern methods of Natural Family Planning are able to identify when they are fertile and refrain from the marital act during that time. So, whenever a couple practicing NFP engages in the marital act they always speak the "language of the body" in truth.

The theme of this year's Natural Family Planning Awareness Week is "Called to the Joy of Love." Because NFP allows married couples to speak "the language of the body" in truth, it allows them to experience the joy of living according to God's design for spousal love. Following the message of today's readings, married couples are encouraged to humble themselves before God and embrace His plan for their love. Unlike the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah who cast aside God's plan for human sexuality, Christian married couples are called to reverence God's plan for marital love. Christian spouses should call out to God to help them follow his plan for their love, knowing that God is infinitely just and merciful. Christian spouses should know that being alive in Christ Jesus, they are children of a Father who will always come to their aid and assist them to find the joy of love.

Humbling themselves to live according to God's truth, a husband and wife have nothing to fear, and can have confidence that whatever effort is required to live according to the truth, God will make it worthwhile. Speaking the "language of the body" in truth will provide husband and wife with a deep sense of peace and joy, knowing that they never lie to each other in the most intimate form of communication possible between two human persons. God calls husband and wife to live in a manner that is worthy of their call as spouses who are married in the Lord, relying on the Holy Spirit to live as children of the Father. And, as they seek to follow the Lord and His plan for their love, Christian spouses can be confident in knowing that the God of justice and mercy will answer when they call upon Him for help. If married couples follow God's plan for their love, they have no reason to doubt that God will reward them with abundant gifts – the greatest of which is the joy that only the Holy Spirit can give!

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*Optional notes—please adjust per the needs of your parish*

If you would like to learn more about Natural Family Planning, please pick up resources we have available in the vestibule on the information table (or in the display stands). You can also visit our diocesan website (*insert your web address here*) or that of the U.S. bishops' conference at [usccb.org/nfp](http://usccb.org/nfp) to learn more. or the parish website.

Today we have couples with us who teach and use NFP. They will be in the vestibule after Mass to answer your questions. I encourage you to visit with them!

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Let us support each other in humbling following God's design for married love, and proclaim the truth of that love, knowing that only the truth that comes from God will lead to true joy!

*Petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful*

*A variety of Prayers of the Faithful can be downloaded at [usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/awareness-week/upload/Generic-2019-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf](http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/awareness-week/upload/Generic-2019-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf).*

## DAILY READINGS

**Monday, July 25, 2022**

**FEAST OF SAINT JAMES, APOSTLE**

Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:7–15

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 126:1BC–2AB, 2CD–3, 4–5, 6

*Those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing*

Gospel: Matthew 20:20–28

As this is Natural Family Planning Awareness Week, and as today is the fifty-fourth anniversary of Pope Saint Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*, I want to relate the readings for today to the theme that the NFP Program of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has chosen for this week—"Called to the Joy of Love."

In the first reading St. Paul reminds us that in the earthen vessels of our bodies that are subject to persecution and death resides the power of God. Not only the death of Jesus but also the life of Jesus is manifested in our bodies! We have the spirit of faith that allows us to speak the truth of Christ. And we are empowered to speak that truth even through our bodies! This happens particularly when Christian spouses speak the truth of God's life-giving love in the marital act.

The responsorial psalm reminds us that those who sow in tears shall reap rejoicing. Even if we feel that (or: as if) we have been held captive by our sinfulness, by accepting the grace of repentance the Lord can rescue us from our sinful exile and give us a share in His joy! This type of joy is possible for a married husband and wife to experience in their love for each other, even if they have succumbed to the worldly temptation of contraception. God wants them to experience the joy of living in His love and embracing His plan for married love!

In today's Gospel, Jesus interacts not only with the Apostles James and John, but with their mother. On this Feast of Saint James, Jesus teaches us that regardless of what James and John and their mother thought, following him does not lead to worldly prominence. Instead, following him entails selfless commitment to serving God and our neighbor. The selfless service that Christian spouses can offer to God, each other, and the world is to live in accord with God's plan for the married love, which involves maintaining the inseparable link between procreation and loving union in each marital act.

For Christian spouses, relying on the help of the Holy Spirit to speak truth through their bodies, being willing to return from the exile of sin to the truth of love, and selflessly serving God's plan for married love will always lead to joy—guaranteed!

*Petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful*

Merciful Father, help us to rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit within us to enable us to proclaim Your truth always. In particular, inspire Christian spouses to always speak the truth of married love through their bodies, by revering your design for the marital embrace. We pray to the Lord,

Gracious God, through the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony, empower Christian spouses to embrace a life of selfless service to you, to each other, and to the gift of life itself. We pray to the Lord,

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**Tuesday, July 26, 2022**

**MEMORIAL OF SAINTS JOACHIM AND ANNE, PARENTS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**

NB: In the Church this is also “World Grandparents Day”

Reading: Jeremiah 14:17–22

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 79:8, 9, 11, and 13

*For the glory of your name, O Lord, deliver us.*

Gospel: Matthew 13:36–43

Both the first reading and the psalm are pleas to the Lord for deliverance. Acknowledging the sins that have led to the sorry state of exile from their homeland, both the prophet Jeremiah and the psalmist, acknowledge the greatness of the Lord and beg Him to deliver His people from the suffering and subjugation of exile. Jeremiah implores the Lord to remember His covenant with His people, and the psalmist begs the Lord to pardon their sins.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus likens the good seed that the Son of Man sows to the children of the Kingdom. These children are those who avoid sin and the influence of the Devil. During this Natural Family Planning Awareness week, we should remind ourselves that being children of the Kingdom means rejecting the evil influences of our culture that tempt us to reject God’s gifts of life and love in marriage. Being God’s people means acknowledging the greatness of God, admitting our sinfulness, and asking for the Lord’s forgiveness when we have strayed from His path of love. Married couples need to acknowledge God’s greatness and live according to the truth of the marriage covenant that reflects God’s life-giving love. In doing so, Christian spouses will avoid the fate of the exile suffered by God’s people in the Old Testament as well as the fate of the weeds in today’s Gospel. Our gracious God, whose name is glorious and who alone is our savior, will always come to the aid of those who call upon Him to deliver them.

Today, on the Memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and therefore the grandparents of Jesus, the Church also celebrates World

Grandparents Day. Grandparents are a source of unconditional love for grandchildren and a source of wisdom for the family. They serve as a living memory of God's graciousness and a living example of how God dotes on each of us as His children. May God bless and strengthen grandparents to witness to the truth of His love, and encourage their progeny to follow God's plan for human love.

*Petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful*

Merciful Father, grant all of us forgiveness for the times we have departed from your covenantal love, offered to all through your Son, Jesus Christ. In particular, help married couples to ask for forgiveness and healing for any time they have departed from Your life-giving plan for the covenant of marriage. We pray to the Lord,

Gracious God, help all of us, especially married couples, to reject the influence of the culture of death that leads to exile, and embrace Your gifts of love and life. We pray to the Lord,

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## **Wednesday, July 27, 2022**

Reading: Jeremiah 15:10, 16–21

Responsorial Psalm: 59:2–3, 4, 10–11, 17, 18

*God is my refuge on the day of distress.*

Gospel: Matthew 13:44–46

In today's Gospel, Jesus explains the Kingdom of Heaven by comparing it to buried treasure or fine pearls that are worth selling everything we have so that we can acquire them. Each of us needs to be willing to give everything we have and everything we are to enter God's Kingdom, which is the only place we will find true happiness and joy. The prophet Jeremiah gave everything he had and everything he was in service to God, and in the first reading we see Jeremiah bemoaning the opposition and the torment he faced as he proclaimed God's word to His people. Jeremiah cries out to the Lord who reassures Jeremiah that if Jeremiah remains steadfast in the Lord that the Lord will deliver and rescue Jeremiah. As the responsorial psalm proclaims, the Lord is Jeremiah's true refuge and stronghold. God alone is the source of true joy, and he is worth giving everything for.

If we give everything to enter the Kingdom, we will enter into God's presence, and become radiant with joy. During this Natural Family Planning Awareness Week, married couples should consider how they can give fully of themselves to enter into the joy of God's Kingdom. Married love is a beautiful, yet demanding love. It is a love that requires a mutual and total gift of self, which sometimes entails sacrifice, or in the language of today's Gospel, "selling all we have." When the self-giving love of marriage is expressed in the conjugal act, married couples give and receive the totality of themselves, holding nothing back, including their procreative potential. We are not our

own. We belong to a God of love, and this loving God has created the marital act to unite a man and a woman in a mutual gift of self that is open to life. We need to trust in God's beautiful plan for married love, and trust that if we follow it this plan will lead to the true joy of the Kingdom. In reality, true joy is only found when we choose to live according to the truth that comes from God, so that we may enter into His Kingdom. Walking in the way of truth may not always be easy, as Jeremiah shows us, and it may cost us all that we are, but it will always be worth it.

*Petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful*

May married couples give all that they are in the service of God's Kingdom. We pray to the Lord,

May married couples recognize the treasure that they have in each other and in God's gift of the life-giving love of marriage. We pray to the Lord,

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## **Thursday, July 28, 2022**

Reading: Jeremiah 18:1–6

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 146:1B–2, 3–4, 5–6AB  
*Blessed is he whose help is in the God of Jacob.*

Gospel: Matthew 13:47–53

Today we continue to here from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. Today's reading reminds us that we are like clay in God's hands. In the Gospel, Jesus explains the Kingdom of heaven with the image of a fishing net, noting that only the good fish will be retained, while the bad will be cast aside. During this Natural Family Planning Awareness week, married couples should pray for the grace to allow themselves to be molded by God into the husbands and wives He wants them to be. This includes allowing God to mold their hearts according to His plan for married love. In order to be properly molded, Christian spouses should not be afraid of approaching Jesus to ask him to re-mold their hearts. And, if you have fallen into the practice of using contraception, do not fear approaching Jesus to ask him to help mold you in a different pattern of behavior. Instead, profess anew your faith and your trust in Jesus by seeking his healing and his strength in the Sacrament of Confession where he can begin to mold your hearts. Commit to embracing his plan for your love and experience the re-fashioning of your marriage. Let us all commit to following Jesus' plan of love in our lives so that we can remain in the net of the Kingdom.

*Petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful*

May married couples renew their faith in Jesus, and allow him to mold their hearts according to his design for married love. We pray to the Lord,



May married couples embrace Natural Family Planning as a means of allowing themselves to be molded by the hands of the Divine Potter. We pray to the Lord,

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## **Friday, July 29, 2022**

### MEMORIAL OF SAINTS MARTHA, MARY, AND LAZARUS

Reading: Jeremiah 26:1–9

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 69:5, 8–10, 14

*Lord, in your great love, answer me.*

Gospel: John 11:19–27

Today, we again hear Jeremiah speaking for God, warning God’s people to live according to the law God has placed before them. We also see the peoples of Judah taking offense at Jeremiah, indignantly rejecting this warning, and seeking to put Jeremiah to death for speaking the truth. Further, we here the responsorial psalm stating that those who speak God’s truth may have to endure insults and wrongful accusations and to be ostracized, as happened to Jeremiah.

During this Natural Family Planning Awareness week, we need to ask ourselves if we have taken offense at the Church for proclaiming the God’s plan for the marital act. Have we been indignant when presented with the Church’s teaching on contraception, instead of abiding in the law of God that seeks our happiness and our freedom? Have we become so attached to our contraceptives that we hurl insults and harbor resentment against those who proclaim the truth about married love? Instead of resisting God’s plan for sexual loving, we need to allow zeal for God’s house to consume us, reject the evil of contraception, proclaim the goodness of natural family planning, and call on the Lord to answer us in His love, even when we face opposition in proclaiming the truth!

In today’s Gospel, read on the Memorial of Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, Martha professes faith in Jesus, proclaiming him to be the Son of God who has the power to raise her brother Lazarus from the dead. Jesus, who is in our midst, always seeks to raise us to new life, not just at the end of time, but now. He desperately desires to help us conquer sin in our lives and to give us the fullness of life in his love. He desperately wants us to speak and live the truth so that we can find the true joy of love! He wants us to leave our contraceptives in the tomb, and experience a renewed joy-filled life!

[NB: If Lk 10:38–42 is read, the last following notes could be used]

In today’s Gospel, read on the Memorial of Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, we see Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to his every word. Martha has busied herself with so many things that perhaps she has overlooked this most important aspect of life. This can happen to us too. Mary’s posture of eager listening, is the opposite of the people to whom Jeremiah spoke. Far from taking offense at the truth proclaimed by Jesus, Mary

adopts a disposition of eager and humble acceptance of the truth. Once she accepts this truth, nothing and no one can take it away from her, nor can the joy of abiding in the truth be stolen from her. Similarly, may married couples eagerly listen and live according to God's truth about the live-giving love of the marital embrace, and thereby find the joy of love!

*Petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful*

May married couples not take offense at Jesus, but instead embrace his plan for married love. We pray to the Lord,

May we open our ears, our minds, and our hearts to receive the good news about the life-giving love of marriage that Jesus teaches through his Church. We pray to the Lord,

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## **Saturday, July 30, 2022**

Reading: Jeremiah 26:11–16, 24

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 69:15–16, 30–31, 33–34  
*Lord, in your great love, answer me.*

Gospel: Matthew 14:1–12

Since Tuesday our first readings have been from the prophet Jeremiah. Today, we see the priests, prophets, princes, and all the people conspiring to kill Jeremiah for preaching God's truth to them. Jeremiah, confident in the truth that God had sent him to proclaim, says to those who oppose him, "Listen to the voice of the Lord your God!"

The Gospel for today recounts how John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets leading up to the coming of Jesus, met his end. John, like Jeremiah, preached the truth in the face of opposition, (in John's case, about God's plan for marriage), and zeal for God's truth clearly governed his life more than did the threats of Herod or any other worldly power.

On this final day of Natural Family Planning Awareness Week, let us pray for ears that can listen to the voice of the Lord, even when we hear truths that we may view as "hard" or "difficult." Let us call on the Lord, asking for the grace to form our lives around His truth, knowing that He will answer us.

Reverence for the beauty of God's design for human love and for the marital embrace is essential for couples to live truly happy marriages, and for society to flourish. Natural Family Planning promotes reverence for God's plan and safeguards the dignity of spouses and spousal love. May we all be filled with the confidence and zeal for God's plan for married love and proclaim it unabashedly through our words and our actions!

*Petitions for the Prayer of the Faithful*

That God will give married couples the ears to hear His voice, so they may live out God's plan for their love instead of capitulating to societal influences. We pray to the Lord,

That married couples will reject contraceptive lifestyles and embrace Natural Family Planning as part of living God's plan for spousal love. We pray to the Lord,

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