

National NFP Awareness Week—July 19–25, 2026

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

Designed by God

Guided by Love

Open to Life

Homily Notes for the Sixteenth Week in Ordinary Time (July 19-25)

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SUNDAY, JULY 19

Lectionary: 106

Our Lord loves stories about seeds, gardeners, and growth. But if we think about them for a moment, we might begin to question how good a gardener the Master really is. In the more famous parable (which we will hear this coming Friday) about the Sower who sows seeds on various kinds of soil, most of them bad, we might wonder why he doesn't concentrate his efforts only on the good soil to avoid waste. Similarly, in the wheat field we just heard about, wouldn't a good farmer tear out the weeds as soon as they sprouted to ensure a better crop? The good seed already faces numerous challenges to its growth—the weeds complicate everything further! In fact, it almost seems like the only job of a weed is to *prevent the good seed from becoming what it's meant to be*.

We may feel that our own lives are good seeds surrounded by weeds aiming to choke us. We may further wonder why God doesn't pull them up so we can flourish. Family life in particular can seem this way. The seed that is the modern family faces so many species of weeds that it would be hard to count them. Even one of the family's most fundamental realities—the generation of new life—can be compromised. *How can the good seed of the family become what it's meant to be?*

As we celebrate Natural Family Planning Week, we also commemorate the anniversary of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae* (July 25). We would do well to remember that this short document was planted like a tiny seed in a field of sprawling weeds, namely the late 1960s, when almost everything traditional was being challenged. The desire to technologically master nature rather than cooperate with it had taken hold, as had a libertine notion of personal liberty. Amid this topsy-turvy revolution, Paul VI proclaimed the bedrock truth of the family: *for the family to become what its meant to be, it must be open to life*. The encyclical was attacked immediately as being out of touch and out of date. Surely the Church needed to get with the times!

The critics must have somehow missed the beautiful image of the family that Paul VI brings to life in just a few pages. He reminds us that, “Married love particularly reveals its true nature and nobility when we realize that it takes its origin from God, who ‘is love,’ the Father ‘from whom

every family in heaven and on earth is named.”¹ Faithful family life perennially recalls its divinely inspired origins within the created order.

When our Lord’s opponents tried to trap him with a question about marriage and divorce, he counseled them to recall what the family was “in the beginning” (Mt 19:8). When we look back to the beginning, we see the family primed to become what it’s called to be: the lifelong union of one man and one woman making a total self-gift to each other so that they might “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). As magisterial teaching through the ages has declared, the conjugal union between husband and wife is rooted in openness to new life. This is the natural order of creation, and it mirrors the superabundant, life-giving love of God the Creator himself. Love always opens the way to life.

Although contemporary thought has tried to ignore or deny this, violating the procreative meaning of the marital act through contraception undermines not only the family’s fruitfulness but the loving unity of the spouses as well. *Humanae vitae* is famous for its prophetic warnings about the consequences of a contraceptive culture. Paul VI predicted that a lack of openness to life would result in greater marital infidelity, a general lowering of moral standards, the increasing objectification of women as mere instruments of pleasure, and governmental abuse of power in regulating and even imposing contraceptive methods. All this and more has sadly come to pass.

Even more sadly, we could update the list: severing the procreative meaning of marriage from its unitive meaning has also led to confusion about the very definition of marriage. If the marital act isn’t intrinsically ordered to the potential for new life, why should marriage be between one man and one woman for life? This tragic separation has also contributed to the denial of the body’s intrinsic dignity and its meaning in terms of masculinity and femininity. These are just some of the weeds that threaten the seed of the family today.

Natural Family Planning offers us a way to reflect once again on “the beginning,” to be reminded how true, good, and beautiful has been God’s loving plan for the family ever since Genesis. Cooperating with the natural order gives room for the seed of the family to grow with generosity and gratitude, *to become what it’s meant to be*.

But it also looks ahead to the end of time, to the communion of saints. Every birth changes the universe forever and makes possible a new saintly life that didn’t exist before. As Pope St. John Paul II exhorted married couples, “You yourselves, dear fathers and mothers, are the first witnesses and servants of...rebirth in the Holy Spirit. As you beget children on earth, never forget that you are also begetting them for God. God wants their birth in the Holy Spirit.... This is the great harvest which the Redeemer of the world, to whom the Father has entrusted judgment, will come to reap.”²

Such is the reaping we heard about today in the Gospel. And so, like our Lord, we end by going back to the beginning, namely to our earlier question about whether God is a wasteful and careless Gardener. He is not. Rather, He is a lavish and hopeful Gardener, one who spreads life

¹ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae vitae* (July 25, 1968), II. 8, here referencing 1 Jn 4:8 and Eph 3:15.

² Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (February 2, 1994), no. 22.

with unfathomable generosity and who longs for the growth in love of His own family, the Church. Today we must consider how we're called to participate in that divine generosity, whether we're married or not. As we prepare to receive our Lord in the Eucharist, another outpouring of God's generous love, we once more heed the call of John Paul II to let the seed grow: "*Family, become what you are...* [Become] an intimate community of life and love [whose mission it is] to guard, reveal, and communicate love."³

Please add the intention below in the Sunday Prayers of the Faithful

For all married couples, that the Holy Spirit may renew their strength, joy, and openness to life within the Sacrament of Marriage, let us pray to the Lord.

Daily Readings and Homily Notes

MONDAY, JULY 20

Lectionary: 395

Everyone wants a sign from God at some point. The two signs Christ offers here are the sign of repentance (Jonah) and the sign of wisdom (the queen of the south), and Christ is greater than both—he is, in fact, a “sign of contradiction” to the world (Lk 2:34-35). By means of a journey that begins with repentance and grows in wisdom, we encounter the risen Lord and become, like him, a sign that contradicts whatever is “evil and unfaithful” in our own generation. One excellent example of this is Godly family life: a marriage that contradicts the fallen world by remaining generously open to life and raising children with love in the Faith. Of course, repentance and wisdom are key elements in the great adventure of family life as well. May our families embrace their true Christian dignity, that they may “do the right, love goodness, and walk humbly with our God” (cf. Mi 6:8).

Please add the intention below to the Prayers of the Faithful

For all families, that their witness to life may become a beautiful sign to a lost world in need of hope, let us pray to the Lord.

³ Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (November 22, 1981), no. 17.

TUESDAY, JULY 21

Lectionary: 396

Critics sometimes use this Gospel passage to suggest that our Lord rejected His Mother in favor of His new disciples and ministry. But we know that she herself is not only an obedient disciple—she’s the greatest and most perfectly obedient disciple. Her obedience was manifest from the start, at the Annunciation, when she showed us what it means to be radically open to life. And from an earthly point of view, the circumstances weren’t favorable: Joseph was not the father, people were going to talk, and the future was far from certain. Husbands and wives today often face their own uncertainties, including the gossip of others, as they contemplate childbearing and child-rearing. May they, like our Blessed Mother, respond to God’s call with love, obedience, and trust in His providence.

Please add the intention below to the Prayers of the Faithful

For families facing great difficulties and uncertainties, that through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they may know the faithful, provident love of her Son, let us pray to the Lord.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 22 – Feast of St. Mary Magdalene

Lectionary: 603

Something special happened when our Lord called Mary Magdalene by name. She was confused, and then she understood. She was called to her senses and recognized him. A name is powerful; it’s among the greatest gifts bestowed on any child. Parents are naturally at their best when they contemplate together what to name their newborn child: “Who and what will he or she become, dream, attempt, accomplish, generate as a legacy?” We could say that the sky’s the limit, but that’s too limited. When a child is conceived, God has created a new human person to love and call by a brand-new name for a brand-new destiny. Mary Magdalene’s parents may have never imagined the possibility of their daughter becoming such an integral figure in salvation history. What hopes and dreams should parents have for their children today? The sky is not even the beginning of the limit.

Please add the intention below to the Prayers of the Faithful

For parents expecting newborn children, that they may be inspired to wonder generously at the plans God has to flourish them, let us pray to the Lord.

THURSDAY, JULY 23

Lectionary: 398

The two evils decried by Jeremiah pertain just as aptly to our own day and age as they did to his: the people have forsaken the Lord as the source of living water and devised replacements that cannot satisfy their thirst. Christ makes a similar condemnation when he laments a generation whose heart is “gross” because they’ve closed their ears and eyes to true understanding. These chilling descriptions could be applied to the various ways modern society has manipulated sexuality for selfish ends, whether through contraception or the technological “manufacture” of human life that sidesteps the conjugal embrace. By ignoring God and taking matters into our own hands, we wander through a desert with no lasting relief. Only by cooperating with the loving plan of God in marriage can our thirst be satisfied; only through generous self-giving within His natural order are peace, joy, and wisdom attainable. May we be among those who are blessed because they see, hear, and are healed.

Please add the intention below to the Prayers of the Faithful

For couples struggling with infertility, that they may be open to God’s healing touch and the many surprising ways He can bring about fruitfulness through their marital union, let us pray to the Lord.

FRIDAY, JULY 24

Lectionary: 399

Today’s alleluia verse summarizes the Gospel parable perfectly: “blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart and yield a harvest through perseverance.” The good soil of a family that is open to life yields such a harvest—but perseverance is key. When we consider the word “procreation,” we often think simply of the moments of conception and birth, but the procreative meaning of marriage also concerns the lengthy adventure of *raising and educating* children. The family, sometimes called “the domestic church,” is the training ground not only for a child’s entry into the world, but more importantly, for his or her entry into heaven. As such, openness to life means more than a willingness to accept pregnancy; it is openness to a lifelong commitment of relational growth and even perfection in eternity. How might we today make the soil of our family life more fertile for this beautiful harvest?

Please add the intention below to the Prayers of the Faithful

For parents of young children, that they may be encouraged in the procreative work of raising and guiding their families heavenward, let us pray to the Lord.

SATURDAY, JULY 25 – Feast of St. James, Apostle
Lectionary: 605

It's fitting to conclude Natural Family Planning Week today on the anniversary of *Humanae vitae* and the feast of St. James the Greater. We are reminded that God's design for marriage is conveyed faithfully through the Church's magisterial teaching, handed down from the apostles. And like the apostles, by virtue of our baptism, we too carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus so that His life might be manifested in us. We too are called to drink of His chalice so that we can give ourselves in love and service to others. Nowhere is this more evident than in a loving, fruitful family. St. Paul's words to the Corinthians could very well serve as a slogan for NFP couples: "Everything indeed is for you, so that the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God" (1 Cor 2:15).

Openness to life in marriage is a high and holy calling, one that comes with the blessing of the apostles. Let us take encouragement from the courageous Pope Paul VI, who reminded us of the beauty and truth of God's plan, with the concluding words of *Humanae vitae*:

Venerable brothers, beloved sons, all men of good will, great indeed is the work of education, of progress and of charity to which We now summon all of you. And this We do relying on the unshakable teaching of the Church, which teaching Peter's successor together with his brothers in the Catholic episcopate faithfully guards and interprets. And We are convinced that this truly great work will bring blessings both on the world and on the Church. For man cannot attain that true happiness for which he yearns with all the strength of his spirit, unless he keeps the laws which the Most High God has engraved in his very nature. These laws must be wisely and lovingly observed. On this great work, on all of you and especially on married couples, We implore from the God of all holiness and pity an abundance of heavenly grace as a pledge of which We gladly bestow Our apostolic blessing.⁴

Please add the intention below to the Prayers of the Faithful

For all involved with Natural Family Planning—those discerning it, practicing it, teaching it, or promoting it—that their efforts, faithful to God's design and the Church's teaching, may yield much fruit, let us pray to the Lord.

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⁴ *Humanae vitae*, III. 31.

