

Marriage and Family Life, Part 6

As mentioned last week, we are so submerged in corruptions of marriage and family life – through the media, entertainment industry, educational systems and so on – that it would be surprising if people are completely unaffected. The God-given role of the Church is to proclaim the truths revealed by God, including that of marriage and family life, to continue the work of St John the Baptist – a voice crying out in the desert – not as some sort of chastisement but rather that people can know what is right and good and true, what leads to true and lasting happiness. It is the role of the Church to be *the* beacon of light, especially when times are dark.

It would be grossly remiss not come to **two great corrupters of marriage and family life** that have become commonplace today: **Cohabitation and Contraception**, scrouges in our contemporary society. The entertainment industry has been a significant force in normalizing living together outside of marriage (cohabitation). It is now thought of as simply “the next step in our relationship,” and the response of others is supposed to be something like: oh how wonderful. Maybe a helpful to place to start on the subject of living together outside of marriage is with the “reason” that couples very often give: it’s for financial reasons, or maybe even to go further: we can’t afford to do otherwise. What is that saying? It is saying we pay homage to the god of money; we are willing to sacrifice what is right and good and true for the sake of financial gain, for our worldly desires. Couples will often say this to the priest with (seemingly) the expectation that that settles the issue, because of course everyone has to pay homage to the god of economics, the priest included – as if the priest is to immediately say: oh well, in that case ok, yes, money does come first, I understand, yes we must bow down to this god, it is first, that’s good. No, it’s not good, it’s not ok. Let us consider this claim a little further – you mean that if the two of you had never met and thus were not living together, you’d be out on the street, unable to support yourself? Not likely. Suppose you do want to save money. There’s no relatives you can live with? There’s no one you could find for a roommate? Again, not likely. The issue is: I don’t want to make that sacrifice. That is really the crux of the problem. Most fundamentally of all this is saying: we are not willing to sacrifice worldly gain, and in fact we put that first. That mentality, you surely realize by now, is intrinsically anti-marriage, anti-family, and thus anti-Christ. It is yet another expression of practical materialism. Even if a couple are engaged or plan to get engaged, a cohabitating couple is starting out by rejecting the very nature and purpose of marriage and family life – sacrifice of self. How can it possibly be surprising, then, that those who cohabit, and do eventually marry, have a 50% higher divorce rate?

Sometimes a couple will say that they are going to live together outside of marriage to see if they are compatible. Surely by now, after all that has been said, you can see the absurdity of such a statement. Of course you’re not compatible. Compatible means: able to be together in a peaceful, agreeable, and harmonious way. Original sin corrupted the capacity to do this. The very purpose of marriage and family life is precisely to work out that corruption. Now there might be such vast differences in beliefs or goals or lifestyle or temperament or any of a great number of things that a person might decide this is not the spouse for me. But these things are not discovered by living together; they are discovered by talking and listening to one another, spending some time together, observing one another, and, incidentally, through prayer. Furthermore, suppose you do discover such things while living together. The very act of living together makes it all that much more difficult to end the relationship. It is a self-defeating proposition all the way around. Cohabitation is also a refusal of commitment and the very act of cohabitating entrenches that refusal as a habit. If the couple does get married, they have already formed the habit of committing to little more than their own desires. What should we expect? That this will suddenly change on the wedding day?

We have to be careful, however, not to just rely on arguments against this or that – including contraception and cohabitation – or explanations of why they’re wrong. Yes, explanations can be helpful in conversion but that is not faith and without faith, you might as well live it up according to your own desires in this very brief part of our existence (this life) because you are headed for a never-ending hell. The point is this: we have to get back to the point where: “Because God said so” is not only an acceptable answer to “why” questions, but the very first answer I seek, regardless if I understand why. Once I know that this or that is what our Lord teaches definitively in and through His Church, I say: I know this is true because God said so. That is faith. I can search further to increase my understanding, that’s good, but that is faith seeking understanding (St Augustine) – faith is first; there is no such thing as faith dependent on my understanding or approval. That’s called pride.

Celibacy before marriage also builds greater trust within marriage. Couples will invariably have disagreements. What then? Is the husband or wife going to think: is my spouse going to look for someone else? Will they have an affair outside of marriage? If a couple had sexual relations before (i.e., outside of) marriage, why wouldn't they believe the other person wouldn't at least entertain the notion? If there's no evidence of: willingness to deny myself, come what may, for the sake of what's right, why would they think otherwise? On the other hand, if each spouse can say: they wouldn't even do that with me outside of marriage, is there not a greater trust in the marriage? Would the question of fidelity of your spouse even cross your mind? Does that trust not then lead to a greater freedom within marriage, a freedom to work things out as is meant to be done in marriage? Do you not want to know that your spouse is a person of real virtue? Is this not the basis of *any* good relation? We have to stop letting ourselves be "educated" by that "grand pillar of virtue" – the University of Hollywood (the entertainment industry) – know what is truly right and good, and then live it out. It's as simple as that.

Perhaps this is a good place to stop and talk a little about sexuality, the *marital* act. The marital act is also something sacred because it too reflects the interior life of God. In the Trinity, there is a deep, personal, complete communication of each Divine Person to the other. Likewise, the marital act is a very special communication between the husband and wife in which they both say: I give myself completely to you and I receive you completely. This is a very special, intimate communication between *just* the two of them. The husband, maybe without even fully realizing it, says to himself: no one knows my wife like I do and no one else knows me like my wife does, and the wife says the same. Thus, it binds the two together, because of the very fact that it is something special, deeply personal, intimate, and *only* between the two of them. It is perhaps somewhat obvious, then, why God created sexuality to be used only within the marriage bond, not willy-nilly, however or whenever it suits me. No, there is to be a real bond formed first – a solemn, lifelong bond and commitment – like that between the Persons of the Trinity – and then that commitment is expressed in a bodily way through the marital act. Making use of sexuality outside of marriage weakens its capacity to bind the two together in marriage. The husband and wife are saying to each other: I give myself to you alone in this way – well if I've already "given" myself outside of marriage or to others, it weakens that statement, it weakens the power of sexuality to bind the two together. Is it any surprise that with the so-called sexual revolution came an increase in divorce and a deterioration of family life? Now we always want to remember to power of repentance – if I have fallen and I deeply repent, God can and will restore new life.

Notice that marriage and sexuality are also teaching about what relation with God is meant to be like. We speak of union with God, relation with God, love of God – but what is that meant to be like – interiorly, spiritually? The analogy used in Sacred Scripture is that of a good marriage between one man and one woman, who truly love each other, who put the other before themselves. The marital relation (love) is meant to be unique and exclusive between the husband and wife. Our relation with God is meant to be likewise. No one else can take your place in your relation with the Lord – though it has aspects in common with everybody else, it is unique and unrepeatable. St Padre Pio said that the Lord and our Holy Mother treated him as if He was their only child. Can another child in the family replace a child that is already there? Of course not. So it is in our relation with God as well. The marriage bond, once formed, lasts a whole lifetime, which also reflects our relation with God.

We should now be in a position to recognize corruptions of sexuality. Any use of sexuality outside of marriage is grave matter – the matter of a mortal sin, mortal sin being that which completely breaks relation with God. If we are in a state of mortal sin, we have to get to Confession, with a firm purpose of amendment, before receiving Holy Communion. If we die in a state of separation from the All-Good (from God), then we will forever suffer that separation. Recall also that in God, the act of life and the act of love are one thing. The Father generating the Son, for example, is, at one and the same time, an act of life and an act of love. If two things that go together are split apart, they cease to be what they are. Artificial contraception, even within marriage, does just that. Notice also that contraception also introduces a false statement. In the marital act the couple are to be saying to each other: I give myself completely to you and I receive you completely. But with contraception, they are saying: not this part of me (my reproductive capacity), that part I withhold. Contraception, in addition to also being grave matter, will wear on a marriage. At the very least, the couple will not know the heights of marital happiness or the happiness brought about by sacrificing one's self for the sake of the Lord. IVF does the same thing – it splits apart two things that are meant to be together. Fr Kuhn.