

## **Marriage, Family and the Election**

*This is the third in a series of reflections related to the upcoming election offered by the bishops of the four dioceses in Kansas.*

*The intention of this reflection is not to endorse or oppose a particular candidate or political party. Instead, it is to show how human reasoning enlightened by our Catholic faith shapes our participation in the political process.*

“... there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding” (John 2). Jesus’ first miracle, His self-manifestation, came at a wedding, as a man and a woman were united, until death do they part. As our Savior experienced the delight of this wedding, he showed us the great importance of the gift of marriage, and we call upon Him to strengthen marital love and fidelity.

“Marriage is a lifelong partnership of the whole of life, of mutual and exclusive fidelity, established by mutual consent between a man and a woman, and ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation of offspring,” begins the wonderful reflection of the U.S. Bishops entitled *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*. Yet, this truth of marriage is often under attack today, in our personal lives, in the political realm and in our court system. Catholics are called to the reality of marriage taught by Sacred Scripture and the Catholic Church. God writes this reality in our hearts, leading us to true happiness. With God’s grace, we strive to not be led astray by the false voices wishing to change God’s holy plan for marriage and family. Our actions in the upcoming election can then advance the Lord’s joy-filled design for marriage and family, call us to holiness and authentic fulfillment, and benefit the common good of our state and country. The U.S. Bishops sponsor an inspirational website about marriage: <http://foryourmarriage.org/>.

### **The Two Purposes of Marriage**

Marriage has two fundamental and essential ends: the unity of the spouses and the procreation of children. These two purposes are entirely equal, and together help us to understand God’s design for a true and valid marriage. In the beginning, God designed us to love and be loved, and for spouses to unite in this love, as he created Eve to be Adam’s spouse. This unitive aspect is more than just a fleeting feeling, it is a conscious decision to love sacrificially, to love unconditionally, to give and receive without counting the cost, until death. The husband strives to imitate Christ’s love for His Church, and the wife strives to imitate the Church’s love for Christ (cf. Ephesians 5). The symbol of this great love is the cross, as Jesus gave His life for you, for me, for us all. The end of this great love is genuine happiness, as the spouses delight in each other in good times and in bad.

God’s way also calls a married couple to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1). Children, another purpose of marriage, are brought forth in the loving marital act, as the husband and wife become “cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person”

(John Paul II, *On the Christian Family in the Modern World*). Children are an extraordinary fruit of the unitive love of the married couple, as husband and wife become father and mother. The blessing of children helps build up the family (the domestic Church), brings genuine happiness to a married couple and provides society a future.

Circumstances may require a single parent to raise a child or children. Catholics have a responsibility to pray for and to assist as much as possible such parents who heroically strive to provide the best possible environment for the physical, emotional and spiritual maturation of their children.

### **The False Voice of Contraception and Sterilization**

God's beautiful plan for marriage and family is under assault in our society by false voices, including, for example, the lie of contraception and sterilization. Contraception breaks the unitive and procreative aspects of the marital embrace, as the spouses say "no" to God's design of love and fertility. On the surface, contraceptives provide a technological attempt, with many risks and dangers, to control the fertility of the couple. Yet this control prevents the complete self-giving that the spouses promised each other at their wedding. Chemicals or barriers thwart the couple's heartfelt desire for genuine intimacy. Elective sterilization takes away the gift of fertility, similarly rejecting God's way.

A married couple planning their family may choose morally acceptable means such as Natural Family Planning (NFP). This scientific method uses periodic abstinence from sexual intercourse based on the wife's natural signs of fertility, in order to achieve or postpone a pregnancy. NFP cooperates with God's gift, in a natural, "green," and healthy manner, as the husband and wife see each other as a beloved son and daughter of the Heavenly Father, and grow in communication, patience, and virtue (<http://foryourmarriage.org/parenting-family/family-planning/>).

Recently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services mandated that most health insurance policies must include coverage for contraceptives, sterilization, and abortion causing drugs. This is an affront to religious freedom and to conscience, as religious employers will be required to purchase health care plans for their employees that provide these morally objectionable products and services. For more details, please see <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/>. We are called to be involved in the political process, and strive to overturn this grave offense to religious liberty and conscience.

### **The False Voice of Same-Sex Civil Arrangements**

The complementarity of male and female is intrinsic to God's design of marriage, fertility and children. Jesus himself taught that marriage is for a male and a female, as "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Matthew 19). Legislators and courts cannot redefine this spiritual and biological

reality. The U.S. Bishops explained clearly: “By attempting to redefine marriage to include or be made analogous with homosexual partnerships, society is stating that the permanent union of husband and wife, the unique pattern of spousal and family love, and the generation of new life are now only of relative importance rather than being fundamental to the existence and well-being of society as a whole” (*Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*).

A child deserves, if at all possible, to have a mother and a father. It is tragic that in some states Catholic Charities has been forced to cease providing adoption and foster care services, because of the insistence that children under its care only be placed with a married husband and wife in a stable and healthy relationship, and not with same-sex couples.

The legislative and legal effort to establish same-sex unions in our country is not just one issue among many for Catholic voters. As Pope Benedict XVI said in 2006, “Recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family - as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage” is, like opposition to abortion, “nonnegotiable.” It is not a matter of personal opinion. Catholic voters and public officials are morally obliged to stand against laws that establish same-sex unions and to defend the traditional family structure willed by our Creator.

Those who struggle with same-sex attractions, all children of God, are called to a life of chastity. A key is to develop chaste friendships and to be supported by parish and family as children of God worthy of respect and compassion. Our Chaste Jesus gives the grace and strength we all need to live within His plan for human sexuality. The sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist will help. The blessed ministry of the Courage Apostolate is a wonderful resource: <http://couragerc.org/>.

### **The False Voice of Pornography**

The false voice of pornography is very destructive to marriage and family. The Catechism describes the evil of pornography: “It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others” (#2354). Pornography is often addictive, and many adults, teens and even children are ensnared in its false appeal. In the public forum, let us strive to restrict the spread of this obscenity in our society. A helpful resource to combat pornography is the “My House Freedom from Pornography Initiative,” <http://www.loveisfaithful.com/>, sponsored by the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas.

### **The False Voice of Cohabitation or “Trial Marriages”**

Many couples today are cohabiting before marriage (<http://foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage/church-teachings/cohabitation/>). Their physical desire for sexual intimacy seems to convince them that they “try out” marriage by “living together.” Other couples

believe the lie of the “hook-up” culture, treating sex as recreation or a salve for loneliness, thus sinfully distorting God’s gift of human sexuality. Some even try to rationalize the sin of cohabitation as “a way to save money.” Yet a decision to “try out marriage” is contradictory, since God’s design for marriage is a committed, life-long covenant. Most couples who cohabit end up separating, resulting in many emotional scars. Often an individual then falls into another “trial” relationship, which again breaks up, and the cycle of trauma continues. The virtuous solution is to follow God’s design: the man and the woman stay chaste, developing their emotional, familial, and spiritual knowledge of each other, and giving of themselves in physical intimacy on their wedding night. This will bring the husband and wife the joy of dedicating themselves to each other completely, for the whole of life. God will give the couple the grace to grow in this true intimacy, His gift of married love and children.

### **The True Voice of Jesus: Do Not Be Afraid; The Truth Will Set Us Free**

For Catholics the defense and support of marriage and family are not “side issues” that distract from the more significant issues of the economy or foreign policy. Marriage is the foundation of the family and strong family life is the foundation for our nation. Threats to the very nature and vitality of marriage place our culture and society in serious jeopardy.

Jesus Christ pours forth His grace on us, that we may listen to His true voice about marriage and family life. This voice is heard in our hearts. Listening to the Lord’s voice is crucial as we prepare for the upcoming election. Jesus exhorted us many times in the scriptures: “do not be afraid” (cf. Luke 12). At times we are fearful of offering public witness on behalf of Catholic moral teaching in the midst of a culture that is often hostile to our values. At times we are tempted by the false voices of society and of the evil one. At times we just don’t know what to do. Let us listen to the voice of Jesus speaking to us through the teachings of the Catholic Church. Let us trust in our Savior. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and His truth will set us free (John 14; John 8). Our Risen Lord loves us more than we can ask or imagine.