

Dear Parishioners,

Having considered the good of children and the procreative aspect of marriage, let us discuss the other good of marriage: the growth in love and holiness of the couple, sometimes called the *unitive* good of marriage. Because holy matrimony is a sacrament, it is ordered toward salvation! When a couple lives their marriage in a godly way, they naturally grow in holiness. Moreover, they grow deeper in love with one another as their covenantal bond grows stronger. But for this to happen, they must be committed to the *intimate, exclusive, and indissoluble* aspects of marriage. There must be a deep and abiding commitment between them (and with God) that they will be true to each other until one of them dies, no matter what. When couples have this type of covenantal commitment to one another, and readily rely upon God's grace to keep it, God blesses their union and gives them the grace they need to preserve their one flesh union and weather the sufferings and difficulties they encounter.

This unitive good of marriage is not wholly distinct from the good of children, for both the unitive and procreative goods of marriage rely upon the marital act to bring them about. Through the marital act husbands and wives not only beget children, but they also grow more deeply in love with one another and more firmly committed to one another. Thus the marital act is good and holy, and it can help bring about holiness in a couple. When husbands and wives enter into this sacred and life-giving action, they renew with their bodies the solemn vows they professed with their voices at their wedding. They say, "I do" to one another all over again! Indeed, the marital act is a prayer and an act of the will by which husbands and wives completely unite themselves as one flesh, a union symbolizing the love God has for each of us! For husbands and wives the marital act is a sign of their covenantal commitment with one another and their openness to both the unitive and procreative goods of marriage.

Thus the marital act possesses dignity and beauty. It is truly sacred, and therefore it should not be degraded, perverted, mocked, or made less than what it really is. According to God's plan and design, the marital act both symbolizes and effects a covenantal commitment between a man and his wife in which they give themselves to each other wholly and without reserve, the fruits of which are children and the unitive good. Therefore, those who enter into the marital act must be open to these goods.

When we come to understand the marital act in this way, we can see why the marital act is only appropriate for those who are married! We can also begin to see why adultery, fornication, all non-procreative sexual acts (including the use of contraception, masturbation, and homosexuality), and pornography are so wrong. Each of these sins does violence to the marital act, changing its nature and robbing it of its dignity and beauty. When married couples commit any of these sins, they not only cheapen their covenantal commitment with one another, they also weaken it because they place themselves outside of God's will. If we want to have God's blessings upon our marriages, then we must be willing to live out marital relations according to His plan and design.

Please remember that the "I do" pronounced at the altar is not just an agreement to be together for life. It's an act of the will by which the man and wife proclaim their willingness

and readiness to be open to all that God wants to bring about through their one flesh union, which is ordered toward both the procreative and unitive goods!

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Reid