

Dear Parishioners,

In considering the *indissoluble, intimate, and exclusive* nature of marriage, as well as the *procreative* and *unitive* goods of marriage, we've learned that marriage is for life, and that it is ordered both toward the procreation of children and growth in love and holiness through the mutual self-giving of the husband and wife. Additionally, because Holy Matrimony is one of the sacraments of the Church, it is ordered toward our salvation!

At the very heart of marriage, of course, is the *marital act*. For a man and woman to be married in God's eyes (and those of the Church) requires the ability to enter into this beautiful union of life and love. The marital act is truly sacred, beautiful, and dignified, 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.

While most married couples are open to the unitive good of growing together in love and holiness, many married couples are not as open to the procreative good of children. Exacerbating this lack of openness to children is the widespread availability of contraception, which promises the pleasure of the marital act without the responsibility of children that naturally flows from it. Our Catholic Faith has always taught that intentionally rendering the marital act sterile through contraception (or sterilization or withdrawal) is gravely immoral because it is a deliberate violation of God's design for the marital act, stripping it of one its essential qualities. Intentionally sterilizing the marital act removes God and His desire for new life from the marital embrace, rendering the act sterilized of both its fruitfulness and its sacredness.

Married couples express their lifelong commitment to one another with more than words. With the marital act being the sign of a couple's covenantal commitment and a means of renewing their nuptial vow to give of themselves fully to one another (and to receive each other fully), we can see that contraception introduces a lie into this intimate form of marital communication. When married couples suppress their fertility through contraception (or sterilization), they are no longer giving themselves fully to one another, and the marital act thus becomes less marital in nature! Marital love (and thus the marital act), *by its nature*, is meant to be fruitful, and to suppress one's fertility not only robs the marital act of its procreative quality, it also erodes the unitive quality such that the mutual self-giving love of the couple suffers. Both the procreative and unitive goods of marriage rely upon the marital act to bring them about. If a married couple damages the marital act by rendering it infertile, this damaged marital act will also be less effective in bringing about its unitive good. Many studies show that couples who are always open to the procreative good are statistically much more likely to stay married and avoid divorce.

While married couples must not do anything to suppress their fertility, they are not required to have as many children as possible. Rather, married couples are called to be prudent yet generous stewards of their fertility. For just reasons (such as serious financial, physical, psychological, or responsibilities toward other family members) a married couple may avoid conceiving through

abstinence or by engaging in marital intimacy only during the wife's naturally infertile time in her cycle. Doing so does not change the nature of the marital act because there is no deliberate suppression of fertility, but rather only a cooperation with the body as God so magnificently designed it!

In Jesus and Mary,
Fr. Reid