

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture Number 19

HOLY MATRIMONY V

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INTRODUCTION

“Poor Mrs. McGillicuddy is married to an alcoholic sex fiend who comes home drunk every night and beats her up and has sex. She has to take in washing to support seventeen children. She has a broken pelvis, and the brute keeps on demanding sex all the time. *Obviously* every woman should know about and use contraceptives!”

Another approach is don't marry the McGillicuddies of this world.

At any rate, that was typical of a lot of propoganda which appeared right after World War II.

Today, contraceptives are used routinely by most of the couples in our country. Nevertheless, although contraceptives may be justified in some cases, the matter is not as simple as we are led to believe.

There are some false assumptions which rarely get questioned:

- “Everyone is entitled to sex and everyone has to have it”

But no one is *entitled* to it any more than one is *entitled* to Holy Communion. God does want us to have it, but under the right conditions so that it will be a blessing instead of a curse.

- “Contraceptives are always an unmixed good, and there are no bad psychological, moral, or spiritual side-effects.”

Ideally, sexual intercourse should be an act of total self-giving, of self-abandonment, to one's spouse. That self-giving is most complete when you know that it is quite possible and, in fact you are hoping, that a living part of your body will unite with a living part of your spouse's body and become a new human being, part you and part your spouse.

That is a profound expression of your one-flesh union. And that is the obvious and natural meaning of sexual intercourse.

Any steps you take to prevent that one-flesh union from being completed is a declaration that, at least on that occasion, there is a limit to, a brake upon your self-giving. And so the self-abandonment will be less than total, and that is less than desirable.

Furthermore, if you are anxious because you are unwilling to have conception occur, or anxious that it might, your self-abandonment will emotionally be less than total.

On the other hand, if you have settled it in your mind that if conception should occur you will consider it a blessing, even though you are not trying to conceive, the anxiety will have

been removed and the self-abandonment can be total.

There may be times when you ought to use contraceptives or birth-control techniques. But those occasions are not nearly as common as one is often led to believe. If you suspect that you should use them, it might be a good idea to discuss it with someone whose judgment as a Christian you trust and who is not emotionally involved in the decision—perhaps your priest.

But even if it is the thing you should do, the side-effects of using contraceptives will still be there. After praying for God's guidance you will have to weigh them against the other considerations. And then make a careful choice remembering that your sexuality is God's gift to be used as He wants you to use it.

- “Contraceptives are dependable and fool-proof.”

But that is far from the case.

You may have heard about the young secretary who comes to work one Monday morning just bursting with good news. Her colleagues ask her what she is so excited about. She answers that she has just discovered the perfect contraceptive. They ask eagerly what it is. She answers, “Orange juice!” They ask, “Before or after?” She says, “neither—instead!”

The only way for a healthy, fertile couple to be *sure* that they will not have an unwanted pregnancy is to be willing to conceive every time they have intercourse.

And any circumstances which rule out conception for them also rule out intercourse. So if a doctor were to say, “Mr. Jones, if your wife gets pregnant, it will kill her;” or “Mr. Jones, you have AIDS, therefore use such and such a contraceptive,” that doctor would be telling him to play “Russian Roulette” with his wife.

- “*Sex-for-love* can be completely separated from *sex-for-babies* with no ill effects.”

But that is no more possible than it is to separate *eating-and-drinking-for-companionship-and-pleasure* from doing it for *nutrition* with no ill effects. The consequences of doing both are all around us.

VASECTOMIES

But what about vasectomies and tubal ligations?

These have additional drawbacks which other forms of contraceptives do not have. They assume that one knows *for sure* that God does not want him or her ever to have a child in the future. Or else they assume that it is none of God's business.

But a person's body belongs to God. It is not to be mutilated or rendered in any way unfit for God's use. It is the temple of his Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, the history of God's dealing with his people is full of cases in which He chooses one “born out of due time” to serve him in some important way.

There is always the chance that the day will come when you will wish that you could conceive.

And on the other hand, both vasectomies and tubal ligations have been known to fail. Not even they are 100% dependable.

JUSTIFIED CONTRACEPTION

Even though contraception is a natural evil, there are times when it may be morally justified as the lesser evil.

NOTE. Remember the distinction between moral evil and natural evil which we talked about last time. It can be illustrated this way: it is always *naturally* evil to stick a knife in a person's stomach, but it is *morally* justified in order to remove an appendix which is just about to rupture.

But even when it is justified, there is always a negative side-effect to contraception; there is always a trade-off, whether one thinks about it or not.

If it is necessary to practice birth control there is a way which is usually better than using contraceptives. It is sometimes called the "Billings Method", and it works this way:

At the time most women ovulate, they produce mucous in the vagina which lasts for about three days. While the production of the mucous lasts and for about three days after that, conception can occur. It is simple for a woman to learn to recognize the presence of the mucous.

It is a desirable expression of intimacy for husband and wife together to keep track of her menstrual cycle and of her time of ovulation.

The mutual decision of a couple to *refrain* from sexual intercourse out of a sense of responsibility, as an offering to God, can itself be a powerful means of strengthening their relationship with each other and with God.

READINESS FOR PARENTHOOD

Part of being ready for marriage is being ready to be parents.

When a couple marries, before any children are born, their relationship with each other is *face-to-face*. They are preoccupied with each other. They need something to take themselves out of themselves.

If they are not practicing birth control and are otherwise healthy, the chances are that they will conceive about the time the honeymoon is over. And so after a year to a year and a half, they will have their first child.

As the pregnancy begins, it starts taking their attention away from each other. And they realize more and more that something outside themselves has a greater claim on their attention. Their relationship has become shoulder-to-shoulder which is healthier. They needed a child.

That first child will have a problem if he remains an "only child". He will almost certainly become "spoiled" in some way, because he has two adults concentrating on him. To avoid that

he needs a sibling.

The best time for a second child to be born is when the first one is around two years old. After that it becomes harder and harder for the first child to move over and make room for the baby who has to be the center of his parents' attention.

And if there are only two children, that is less than ideal. Because the relationship of the two children will be face-to-face instead of shoulder to shoulder. So they really need a sibling.

If every family which is able to have children does have three, that will produce almost zero-population growth.

A complete family can usually be reached in about six years with a minimum of emotional damage to the children. During that time, contraceptives need never be used, and the sexual relations can be terrific.

BREAST FEEDING

For a number of important reasons, mothers should nurse their babies at the breast.

- The child receives natural immunities in his mother's milk. And the mother receives real grat
- The child's own emotional security is greatly strengthened by nursing at his mother's breast. It w
- Nursing stimulates the mother's organs to return to normal.
- Nursing tends to delay the resumption of ovulation and thus serves as a natural means of spa

READINESS FOR MARRIAGE

Some people should not get married, such perhaps as the following:

Career military people, show business people, people with pronounced homosexual tendencies, and people who have no desire to get married.

Although not everybody needs a sex life or has a right to it, everybody needs to be part of a community—the moral equivalent of marriage. The parish church should try to find ways to meet this need as much as possible. Monasteries and convents are the answer for some people. For others remaining unmarried and taking care of relatives is a possibility.

One should deliberately decide if he has a vocation to marriage. And then he or she should rationally and deliberately pick the person.

If you "cannot live without" the person, you should *not* marry him—or her! Such "eros love", dependency love, is destructive. It cannot be the basis for marriage.

Then what kind of people are ready for marriage?

A man should be *financially* mature before he marries. That is, he should have finished school, have a job, and have some cash reserves. Money worries put a burden of anxiety on any marriage. They undermine the husband's self-respect. They make it harder for the wife to reverence

her husband and for him to love her with the gift of security.

Both of them need to be emotionally mature, no longer *requiring* constantly to be receiving love and thus able to freely give love.

They need to be ready to abandon the single life style. Otherwise the parents come to resent the children, and the children become insecure.

They need to be ready to be parents.

And they need to be in agreement on what is more important than each other or their own happiness.

LIFELONG MARRIAGE

Marriage for life is clearly the standard of Jesus.

But the present fact of rampant divorce in our society has faced the Church with a very difficult choice.

She could excommunicate all those who have divorced and remarried.

On the other hand, she could give the appearance of lowering the standard both of Jesus and of the western Church's tradition ever since apostolic times. She could permit divorced people to remarry and still participate in the sacramental life of the Church.

In 1973, the Episcopal Church in the United States chose the second course. Nevertheless, it still requires the couple to sign a declaration of intention which states that they are making a commitment for life with no loopholes.

The priest is required to instruct the parties as to the nature, meaning, and purpose of Holy Matrimony. It is important to remember that the Church's blessing on the marriage which the priest pronounces is for members of the community of faith only. It is not for non-practicing Christians. That would be to make a mockery of the whole thing.

MONEY

As Christians, it is the responsibility of the family to manage its money as God's stewards. The family's money is not its own; it belongs to God along with everything else it has.

Television tells us that if we don't have all sorts of expensive things and do all sorts of expensive things that we are not "all right". So people usually behave this way: they first make an *emotional* commitment to a certain lifestyle, and *then* try to figure out how to pay for it. This, in turn, puts a heavy pressure on all aspects of the family.

It is very important to control money to God's glory instead of letting money control us. So the family, after mutual discussion, should agree on a budget understanding that it can be changed.

Whoever is best at it should probably be the family treasurer. And whoever it is needs to remem-

ber that, under God, it is “our” money, not “my” money.

Each spouse should have some discretionary money. Neither of them should always have to be asking the other for it if that can be avoided.

The budget should set aside the first ten percent for the Church, the second ten percent for savings, and the next five percent for contingencies.

Whatever state of disorder your finances may be in at this moment, make a definite plan deliberately to move out of debt, even if ever so gradually.

For example, if at all possible, before going into debt to buy something on installments, put the payments in the bank to see if you can really afford it. And if you succeed, you will have a sizable down-payment to start with.

In short, determine your income first, and only then decide on your life-style.

RESPECT

Jealousy is a sin, so avoid making demands on your spouse.

Respect your spouse’s privacy. Stay out of his or her pockets, purse, drawers, closet, mail, etc.

Leave your spouse free to control his own life. You do not need to share all the same interests. But you do need to have at least one major interest in common. If you haven’t got one already, deliberately pick one.

Criticism of your partner’s friends puts him in the position of having to choose between you, and that leads to resentment.

That is even more true of your spouse’s parents. And it is a frequent problem because it is hard for parents to stop trying to manage their child’s life even though the child is grown.

So for the sake of your spouse, woo and cultivate your in-laws. If they should have to be put in their place, it should be done by their own child. And that spouse should not wait until the other has to ask him to do it.

Under God, your primary loyalty is to your spouse before everybody else.

CHILDREN

Children learn primarily by example. So if a man wants to know what his wife will be like in twenty-five years let him look at what her mother is like. If she is not like her, she will have deliberately reacted against her. But in ways she is not aware of, she will still be like her. And husbands, likewise, turn out to be a lot like their fathers.

Whatever you want your children to become, do your best to be like that yourself.

Children are much more likely to do what we expect them to do than what we may tell them to

do. So, for example, if you emphasize that Johnny must not come home late, he may get the idea that you are expecting him to do exactly that.

If you take good behavior for granted and only pay attention when your child misbehaves, you will be rewarding the misbehavior which gets attention. So teach by positive reinforcement, and praise desirable behavior whenever you can.

Children have two great needs, love and discipline. So tell your children you love them by spending time with them. Tell them and show them you love them at random times when they have not done anything to earn it. Hug them and let them see you expressing love for each other.

The most effective way to punish is to withhold privileges. Punish your child only for rules he knows about. Otherwise it would be “dog law” which would demoralize him.

Even poor rules are better than no rules. So establish regular rules and habits such as the hour of bedtime and when homework is to be done.

Put commands in positive terms whenever possible. When commands are put in negative terms the subconscious mind doesn't seem to be able to register the “do not”. It remembers the forbidden thing as positive, and the “do not” only adds emotional force to it. For example, instead of telling Johnny, “Do not come home late,” tell him, “Please be home by ten o'clock.” Bring your child to the age of eighteen so sane and secure that he will no longer have to be receiving love all the time, but, instead, will be able to give love.

RELIGIOUS TRAINING OF CHILDREN

When your child is born on Tuesday, have him in church the next Sunday and every Sunday afterwards for the rest of his life, so that he will never be able to remember a time when he was not in church on Sunday.

If you whisper and poke at him when he is in church, you teach him that what one does in church is whisper and poke. Rather set him an example of serious worship.

The first night that you have him home from the hospital, kneel beside his bed and say his prayers for him. In time, he will join you, and eventually he will say them himself. You don't have to tell him what you are doing, just do it. Keep the prayers short, serious, and memorable.

Daddy says the blessing at meals. In Daddy's absence, mother says it until the eldest son reaches puberty who then does it in his absence. This way he learns that it is adult's work which he will “get to do” when he grows up, rather than child's play which he can give up when he grows up.

At bedtime, daddy gives all his children his blessing by laying his hand on the head of each of them and saying, “May God bless you.” This practice goes back at least as far as the Hebrew patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, about 4,000 years.

OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

Most professional people, not to mention the rest of us, are really uneducated. But it is the responsibility of parents to pass on our cultural heritage to their children.

Do something about this, and for yourselves, by reading to your children as well as letting them see you reading for yourself frequently. Parents who read raise children who read. Parents who do not read raise children who do not read.

Do what is necessary to have at least one meal together as a family every day. Carry on a general conversation with all the members of the family during the meal. Leave TV for another time. The conversation of the whole family at the dinner table is an extremely powerful way of passing on both our family culture and the culture of our society.

Children learn a tremendous amount from the attitudes which get expressed by their parents in conversation, even when the children do not appear to be listening. Let the conversation be pleasant for everyone present.

Save problem solving for another time if at all possible. The supper table is the family altar, and like the Eucharist, it is what gives the family its identity and its unity, both with each other and with God.

THREATS TO THE MARRIAGE

At the beginning of his public ministry, right after his baptism, our Lord was led or driven by the Holy Spirit out into the desert to be tempted by Satan. After the third temptation, St. Luke tells us, Satan left him for a more opportune time. Just such a time came following the feeding of the five thousand when the multitude tried to seize him and proclaim him king.

When they were at Caesarea Philippi, Peter confessed him as the Messiah and Jesus called him Peter, Rock(y). Then Jesus said they must go to Jerusalem and he would be killed and rise again. At that, Peter began to remonstrate with Jesus. And Jesus said to him what he had said to Satan in the wilderness: "Get behind me, Satan."

The disciples and the multitude were renewing the temptation to be the kind of Messiah the Jews (and all fallen men) want. And he rejected it again.

In Class #16 we talked about being in love with your dream girl (or boy) which does not exist except in your imagination or fantasy, and about falling out of love with Alice and then in love with Betty, etc. That cycle does not end just because you are married. Sooner or later the heady inflation of your ego subsides. And your marriage becomes the work of *agape* love. That is an opportune time for Satan.

Your dream mate always remains lurking at the edge of, or beneath, your consciousness. The first thing you know someone, perhaps a colleague at work, expresses appreciation of you in some way, and your self esteem begins to be fed.

It does not even have to be a person, it may simply be the satisfaction that comes from doing something well. Or it can be a hobby which feeds a fantasy which you have harbored ever since you were a child.

Anything which feeds your ego can be a competitor with your spouse. It feels good and you want more of it. You begin to chase the feeling. It may begin to consume an inordinate amount

of your time which only adds stress to your relationship with your spouse. It is an idol and you invest yourself in it. And as our Lord reminds us, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Whenever you catch yourself becoming intoxicated in this way (by the vain pomps and glories of this wicked world) it is time to do something about it. First recognize the satanic nature of what has been assailing you and renounce it.

Then take active steps to return your attention and affection to your spouse. Spend extra time with her. Start doing extra things to make love to her. Think of ways to invest yourself in her.

In spite of all your best intentions, in some form or other, such temptations are going to come to every married person, man or woman. They are times of crisis and times of opportunity for Satan, but they are also opportunities for the Holy Spirit and for you to deepen your love for your spouse.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen

DECLARATION OF INTENTION

We

and

desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife as it is set forth in the forms authorized by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

We believe it is for the purpose of mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, for the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their physical and spiritual nurture, for the safeguarding and benefit of society.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.

SIGNATURE OF GROOM

SIGNATURE OF BRIDE (MAIDEN NAME)

Dated

A.D.