

Ten After Ten Session 113: Conjugal Fidelity

2365 The Sacrament of Matrimony enables man and woman to enter into Christ's fidelity for his Church. Through conjugal chastity, they bear witness to this mystery before the world.

2366 Fecundity is a gift, an end of marriage, for conjugal love naturally tends to be fruitful. A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfillment. So the Church... teaches that "it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain ordered per se to the procreation of human life." This particular doctrine, expounded on numerous occasions by the Magisterium, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act.

2367 Spouses share in the creative power and fatherhood of God. Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God the Creator.

2368 A particular aspect of this responsibility concerns the regulation of procreation. For just reasons, spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood. Moreover, they should conform their behavior to the objective criteria of morality.

2369 By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its orientation toward man's exalted vocation to parenthood.

2370 Periodic continence, that is, the methods of birth regulation based on self-observation and the use of infertile periods, is in conformity with the objective criteria of morality... In contrast, every action which, whether in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible is intrinsically evil.

2371 Let all be convinced that human life and the duty of transmitting it are not limited by the horizons of this life only: their true evaluation and full significance can be understood only in reference to man's eternal destiny.

2372 The state may not legitimately usurp the initiative of spouses, who have the primary responsibility for the procreation and education of their children. In this area, it is not authorized to employ means contrary to the moral law.

2373 Sacred Scripture and the Church's traditional practice see in large families a sign of God's blessing and the parents' generosity.

2374 Couples who discover that they are sterile suffer greatly.

2375 Research aimed at reducing human sterility is to be encouraged, on condition that it is placed “at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights, and his true and integral good according to the design and will of God.”

2376 Techniques that entail the dissociation of husband and wife, by the intrusion of a person other than the couple (donation of sperm or ovum, surrogate uterus), are gravely immoral. These techniques (heterologous artificial insemination and fertilization)...betray the spouses’ “right to become a father and a mother only through each other.

2377 Techniques involving only the married couple (homologous artificial insemination and fertilization) are perhaps less reprehensible, yet remain morally unacceptable. They dissociate the sexual act from the procreative act...Such a relationship of domination is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that must be common to parents and children.

2378 A child is not something owed to one, but is a gift. The “supreme gift of marriage” is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged “right to a child” would lead. In this area, only the child possesses genuine rights: the right “to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents,” and “the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception.”

2379 The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil. Spouses who still suffer from infertility after exhausting legitimate medical procedures should unite themselves with the Lord’s Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. They can give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding services for others.