

Humanae Vitae 50th Anniversary Homily

St. Agnes Cathedral 11am Telecare Mass

Most Reverend John O. Barres, STD, JCL

Sunday, July 22, 2018

The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Gospel of Mark speak this morning of the responsibility of the Shepherd to lead and to teach the truth courageously and faithfully.

Blessed Pope Paul VI who will be canonized a saint by Pope Francis on October 14 was a Holy Father and Shepherd in history who exemplified this Scriptural emphasis on the sacrificial and Paschal Mystery Shepherd who prophetically and courageously teaches the truth and is willing to carry the Cross to do so.

In the turmoil of 1960s and 1970s, he spoke up prophetically for the missionary spirit of the Church, the Church's true doctrine of the real presence concerning the Eucharist, and the need in a spirit of Catholic social justice for Development and Progress in the Third World.

This Tuesday, July 25, 2018 we will celebrate as a Universal Church the 50th Anniversary of Blessed Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae/On Human Life*.

As your Shepherd and Bishop, in union with Blessed Pope Paul VI, St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, I will issue a Pastoral Letter commemorating the true and prophetic teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. It is entitled *The Supreme Gift: The Gift of Life*. It will be available in our parishes this next week.

In the Pastoral Letter, I trace the fundamentals of Blessed Pope Paul VI's teaching, teaching that is as relevant and as urgent today as it was when he taught it in 1968.

Pope Paul begins with this statement: “God has entrusted spouses with the *extremely important mission* of transmitting human life.”¹ Marriage is a gift that God gave to men and women at the beginning of creation, and with that gift comes the responsibility of fulfilling a special *mission*. That mission is not only to share the joy of life with Him, but also to share with Him the joy of *creating*. Spouses are co-creators of new human life. When couples do this in marriage, they “freely and consciously” return a gift to God, for the gift He has first given to them.²

The Pope says: “When Jesus Christ imparted His divine authority to Peter and the other Apostles and sent them to teach His Commandments, He established them as authentic guardians and interpreters of the whole moral law.”³

The love spouses have for each other comes from God, and so is more than biological, it is also spiritual. Marital love is not meant to be selfish but must be marked by generous self-giving. Marital love is also called to be fruitful since it looks beyond the spouses themselves to the birth of children.

Pope Paul also quotes the Second Vatican Council’s *Gaudium et Spes*: “Marriage and marital love are ordained by their very nature to the procreating and educating of children. Offspring are clearly *the supreme gift of marriage*, a gift that contributes immensely to the good of the parents themselves.”⁴ Marriage is a gift from God to men and women, and within that gift, there is another gift. The *supreme gift* of marriage is the gift of children. When children are born in marriage, they are a twofold gift: they are a gift from God to the couple; and they are also a gift of the couple to God.

There are two “ends of marriage”: a “unitive end” and a “procreative end”. These two ends cannot be separated. The marital act unites a couple as a physical and outward sign of a deeper and inner spiritual reality. As they were united by God in a solemn covenant on their wedding day, when they promised to give themselves to each other completely by their vows, so every act of marital intimacy in marriage renews that covenant.

¹ Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, 1. The translation of *Humanae Vitae* used in this document is that of Janet E. Smith, Ph.D., taken from: *Self-Gift, Essays on Humane Vitae and the Thought of John Paul II* (Steubenville, Ohio: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 17-37.

² *Humanae Vitae*, 1.

³ *Humanae Vitae*, 4.

⁴ *Humanae Vitae*, 9, quoting *Gaudium et Spes* (*The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*), 50.

In our diocese the *Gianna Center for Women's Health and Fertility* provides medical assistance, information and training to women in all these areas such as Natural Family Planning in accord with the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, honoring the dignity and sanctity of human life.⁵ This health care center is committed to delivering high-quality, scientifically based, and ethically sound healthcare for all women, including preventive and specialized obstetrical and gynecologic care. It offers women a natural, restorative and scientifically based approach to improving their overall health while addressing their fertility issues. Couples having difficulty conceiving a child need not resort to methods like *in vitro* fertilization, which the Church's moral teaching prohibits. The Gianna Center can assist couples who wish to conceive in methods which are natural, holistic, and healthy for both mother and child, and which are also morally acceptable.

In 1968, Pope Paul stated that the use of contraception in society would: (1) Lead to an increase of infidelity in relationships. (2) Lead to a general weakening of morals throughout society. (3) Lead men to lose respect for women. (4) Lead public authorities to force contraception upon people for the public good. Additionally, the Holy Father adds the danger that people will come to think that they, and not God, have complete dominion over their own bodies, and may therefore use or alter them at will. As we know here in 2018 fifty years later, these prophecies have come true.

The teaching of Pope Blessed Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* stands in agreement with that of his predecessors throughout the ages, as well as his successors, especially Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Francis. Throughout his pontificate Pope John Paul preached the "Gospel of Life" and became *Humanae Vitae's* staunchest defender. Through his talks on the "Theology of the Body", and his encyclicals and apostolic exhortations like *Veritatis Splendor*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope St. John Paul II to the day of his death continued to preach and teach the truth of *Humanae Vitae*, and its necessity for happy, healthy and holy families.

Pope Francis will canonize Pope Blessed Paul VI on October 14, 2018. Pope Francis frequently quotes Pope Paul and references his *Humanae Vitae* teaching. The Holy Father has identified a "social and spiritual crisis" so severe that "never before has proclaiming the Gospel on the Family ... been

⁵ Website: www.chsli.org/gianna-center-long-island; Tel. 631-376-3232.

more urgent and necessary.”⁶ The Pope has said: “The defense of the environment and the fight against exclusion demand that we recognize a moral law written into human nature itself, one which includes the natural difference between man and woman, and absolute respect for life in all its stages and dimensions.”⁷

In 2015, at a meeting with families in Manila, Pope Francis said: “I think of Blessed Paul VI. At a time when the problem of population growth was being raised, he had the courage to defend openness to life in families. He ... looked at the peoples of the earth and he saw this threat of families being destroyed for lack of children. Paul VI was courageous; he was a good pastor and he warned his flock of the wolves who were coming ... Our world needs good and strong families to overcome these threats! ... Every threat to the family is a threat to society itself. The future of humanity, as Saint John Paul II often said, passes through the family ... Be sanctuaries of respect for life, proclaiming the sacredness of every human life from conception to natural death.”⁸

As your Shepherd and Successor of the Apostles on Long Island, it is a great joy to celebrate with you today both the upcoming October 14, 2018 Canonization of Blessed Pope Paul VI and the July 25, 2018 50th anniversary of his prophetic teaching on marriage and the family contained in *Humanae Vitae*.

With Blessed Pope Paul VI and Pope Francis, and with all the bishops, priests and deacons of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, I want to thank you for your marriages and families and your love for the teachings of your Catholic faith.

This teaching is the Splendor of Truth that sets you free, the Truth that in the words of Pope Francis ignites families with the power of the Holy Spirit and the Splendor of Christ’s Truth “to transform the world and history” with Christ’s love. Blessed Pope Paul VI, pray for us!

⁶ Synod of Bishops, *Preparatory Document for the III^d Extraordinary General Assembly*, “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization”, 2, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20131105_iii-assemblea-sinodo-vescovi_en.html.

⁷ Ibid., cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 155, 123, 136.

⁸ Ibid.