

Bulletin Article Series on the Family - Week 7: More threats to Marriage

Today, we will again recall what marriage in the mind of God is: a life-long union of husband and wife that is total, faithful, and fruitful (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church “CCC” 1643). And so anything that contradicts this definition, which we have already established comes from God, is a threat to marriage and family life.

Last week, we spoke about divorce, which is a threat to life-long union. So today, we will consider threats to totality, faithfulness, and fruitfulness. First, totality, because spouses are “are no longer two, but one flesh...called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving” (CCC1644). One of the greatest threats to totality is the widespread acceptance of cohabitation before marriage. The reasons people give for the choice to cohabit are many: it is a way to save money, it is a “trial run” before marriage, it might save the couple the pain of a future divorce, etc. While these reasons are understandable, they are not morally acceptable. Why? Because all fornication is “gravely contrary to the dignity of persons and of human sexuality” (CCC2353) and “always wrong to choose” (CCC1755). It is an action that can lead to the loss of the Kingdom of God if not repented of (cf. Galatians 5:19-21, I Corinthians 6:9-11, etc.). In addition, it sets cohabitating couples up for likely failure in a future marriage. How? In cohabitation, a couple is essentially saying to each other: “I will be true to you, unless it doesn’t work out.” But in marriage, they say: “I will be true to you, whatever comes.” In cohabitation, couples are living with someone who is not their spouse. In marriage, couples promise to be exclusively faithful to their spouse. So how can a manner of relationship that is the *exact opposite* of marriage possibly be a helpful preparation for marriage? No wonder one study from the University of Wisconsin found that the risk of divorce for those who live together romantically before marriage is 80%.

Next, we have threats to faithfulness. I think the danger and damage of adultery is still widely accepted by most people in society today (except those who now embrace so-called “open marriages”). But what is often overlooked is disastrous consequences of an “affair of the mind”; that is, the use of pornography. With the advent of the internet and smartphones, pornography is everywhere. We cannot kid ourselves here: pornography destroys marriages. It destroys the innocence of children. It enslaves both men and women, locking people in a prison of shame and addiction. And make no mistake, it is a multi-billion dollar industry that also enslaves people in its very creation. It’s a sad reality, but to not take family internet safety very seriously is the same thing as parents leaving their children home alone at night with the front door wide open and a sign out saying to the world “come on in, no adult is home”!

Threats to God-willed fruitfulness include artificial contraception, sterilization, and immoral means of conception. I have written about these topics before, but I would just like to highlight one Marquette University study found that a married couples’ embracing of periodic abstinence results in a ~40% *reduction* in the odds of being divorced, while using the pill or hormonal contraception resulted in a ~66% *increase* in the odds of being divorced. This is because *practicing* natural family planning takes self-discipline, self-denial, intentional communication, consideration for the other spouse, and reliance on God’s providence. All of these things are difficult, no doubt, but they are also the path to holiness and keys to a healthy marriage, when accepted out of love for Christ.

To conclude, it cannot be said enough: *no sin is beyond the reach of God’s mercy!* And that *Jesus Christ is our Divine Physician who can truly heal hearts and homes!* But the best path is to avoid self-inflicted wounds as much as possible to begin with, which is the purpose of this bulletin series.