

Take-Home 11. Be Fruitful

From the Beginning

What We Found

The passages we surveyed present children repeatedly as a gift, a heritage, and a reward, and they take the sorrow of childlessness seriously rather than explaining it away.

The marital act has two meanings that belong to it by nature: it unites the spouses, and it is the kind of act by which new life comes to be. The Church teaches that these are inseparably connected and that the connection is not ours to break.

Contraception performs the act while acting against one of its meanings. In vitro fertilization breaks the same connection from the other direction. One principle, two applications.

There is a difference between declining to make a promise and making a promise while intending not to keep it. The outcome can be the same. The acts are not.

A child conceived through any technology is a person of full and equal dignity, and no judgment attaches to that child.

Spouses may space births for just reasons. The Church deliberately does not publish a list of qualifying reasons, and asks for genuine discernment rather than a form.

Natural family planning is not the rhythm method. It ordinarily benefits from qualified instruction, from both spouses taking part, and from time to learn the chosen method, which is usually months rather than days.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. PAUL VI ON THE CONNECTION THAT MAY NOT BE BROKEN

In *Humanae Vitae*, St. Paul VI taught that there is an inseparable connection, established by God and which man may not break on his own initiative, between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the marital act.

That sentence is the foundation of the teaching. Much of what the Church has said since about contraception and about reproductive technology applies it, alongside her teaching on the dignity of the child and of embryonic human life.

Humanae Vitae, section 12.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. GIANNA BERETTA MOLLA

St. Gianna Beretta Molla was an Italian pediatrician, married with children, who in 1962 faced a serious medical condition during pregnancy and chose the course of treatment that preserved the life of her unborn child. She died shortly after giving birth, and was canonized in 2004 with her husband present.

Two things are worth saying carefully. Her decision was extraordinary and the Church has never taught that a mother is obliged to make it. And she was not a martyr to a rule; she was a working physician and a wife who loved her marriage, which is why she is a fitting patron for a room of engaged couples.

Historical summary. Canonized in 2004; her husband attended the canonization.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH ON THE CHILD AS GIFT

Teaching on reproductive technology, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith argued that a child is not owed to anyone as a right and may not be treated as an object of ownership, but is a gift, and that the child has the right to be conceived within the marital act of his own parents.

That framing is the reason the Church's objection to certain technologies is not a suspicion of medicine. It is a claim about how a person ought to come into existence.

Summary of the teaching of Donum Vitae (1987), developed in Dignitas Personae (2008).

Live It This Week

- **Book the course.** Find a certified natural family planning instructor this week and register. Not research it. Register.
- **Say your number.** Tell each other how many children you have quietly been assuming, and how strongly you hold it.
- **Read Humanae Vitae 12 and CCC 2366 to 2370, together, once.** It is short. Read the actual text rather than commentary about it.
- **Read Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4 before next session.**

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Find a certified natural family planning instructor and register for a course. Ask the parish for their recommendation, and put the class dates in your shared calendar before the wedding planning fills it.

Also. Tell each other how many children you have quietly been assuming, and how strongly you hold that number.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Lo, sons are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.

Psalm 127:3

Before next session: Read Genesis 1:27 and Matthew 19:4 before Session 12.

Catechism: CCC 1654, 2366, 2368, 2370, 2373-2375, 2376-2377, 2379.