



Saint Paul the Apostle Orthodox Church

24 BURKE ROAD

FREEHOLD, NJ 07728

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 27, 2013

Father Robert E Lucas, Pastor; Subdeacon Daniel J. Korba and Nikitas Tsokris, Cantors
Rectory 215-862-9227; Parish Center 732-780-3158

We Are A Stewardship Parish Of Time, Talent and Treasure

The mission of our parish faith community is to teach the Gospel message in the rich tradition of the Orthodox Church; to enable people to reflect the image of Jesus Christ in every day activities of life; to offer spiritual formation through changing times; and to celebrate community among Orthodox believers in our Freehold area.

We of St. Paul the Apostle Parish dedicate ourselves to maintaining the sanctity of worship and spiritual enlightenment in a family environment that reaches and involves all ages and unifies all people.

We believe in the spirit of ecumenism in which we share our faith by word and example and extend our spiritual insights to all people.

We accept the responsibility of Christian Stewardship that through generous giving we may all experience a faith communion with Christ as the Center of our lives.

We dedicate ourselves to insuring the well-being of all people so that we may truly experience the message of Christ's salutary gospel.

We are a beacon on a hill with the eyes of many upon us; that beacon is the inspired Light of Christ which must shine brightly in our lives.

It is not ourselves we preach but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts, that we in turn might make known the glory of God shining on the face of Christ. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in us 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – 8.

GLAD TIDINGS

+++ Every Monday, we have prayerful devotions before the Myrrh bearing icon at 6:00 PM. Everyone is invited to be present in praise. The Birthgiver invites us to manifest our faith in response to her first shown love. Invite your friends and neighbors to join us.

+++ Pirohi Schedule for the next few months December 7. The Bake Sales will take place on November 22 and December 20. Order sheets are available in the kitchen. Preparations will take place Thursday morning at 7:00 AM. We ask all to solicit orders to assure success.

+++ Please keep the intentions of these members of our parish intercession community in your daily prayers: Anna, Ryan, Richard, Subdeacon Daniel and Michael.

+++ The sign-up sheet for both the Web Site and Bulletin sponsors is on the bulletin board in the kitchen. Please sign up as soon as possible. Do NOT make payment until your sign-up month has arrived. This will make it easier for Father to keep track of payments. Thanks in advance to all who support the parish in this way.

+++ We offer thanks to the Blessed Trinity for inspiring generosity in the souls of our faithful and the blessing of abundant grace in our midst with the offering received last Sunday: Tithe Offering, \$416.00; Candles, \$25.00; Food Coupons, \$300.00; Kitchen, \$141.00; Holyday, \$5.00, for a total of \$887.00. We express our profound gratitude to the parishioner communicants who offer their God-given treasure and labored for the sake of the Lord and the good of our parish. God bless and reward you good and faithful souls! The attendance was 44 adults and 13 children last Sunday.

+++ As faithful believers, we intercede and associate ourselves in prayer with the following who have prayed and offered seven day lights for their intentions: Father Lucas, Anna Zacharyczuk, Eleanor Korba, Marilyn Korba and Pani Buletza.

+++ We make a PENNIES FROM HEAVEN Canister available for our faithful to bring in pennies for our altar and its appointments. We are already in receipt of \$1708.00 from this apostolate. Even your pennies can help and are a blessing to our parish.

+++ Please be certain to see a member of the Parish Council if you would like to help our parish by using Shop Rite Food Coupons available in \$20.00 denominations. We invite ALL to be caring and supportive and use Grocery Coupons for food shopping as we have gratefully realized \$5600 on this project to date!

+++ The Clothing Drive is a permanent on-going project in our parish. Please bring any type of clothing and fabrics along with stuffed animals and shoes for the benefit of our parish. The bags can be left in the vestibule or on the front porch of the rectory. Please invite your friends and neighbors to assist us in disposing of unwanted clothing, shoes and fabrics.

+++ Please pray the Lord our God grants us an enrichment of our spiritual lives for his glory.

+++ May all glory, adoration and worship be accorded our God in the Holy Trinity by all the faithful of our parish with one mind, one soul and one heart each day of the week!

LORD



TEACH
US

Sovereignty Of God

Lord you have been our dwelling place in every generation. Before the mountains were brought forth, or even before you formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You turn men to destruction and say, return, children of men. For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past and as a watch in the night Psalms 90: 1 - 4.

Do you not see that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven and say, I live forever Deuteronomy 32: 39, 40.

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Answer, if you have understanding. Who laid the boundaries, if you know? Or who stretched the line upon it? Where are the foundations of the earth fastened? Or who laid the cornerstone? When morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy Job 38: 4 -7?

Whom have I in heaven but you and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides you Psalms 73: 25.

This is the purpose for the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all nations. For the Lord of hosts has proposed and who shall annul it? And his hand is stretched out and who shall turn it back Isaiah 14: 26, 27?

For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of contrite and humble spirit, to revive the heart of repentant ones Isaiah 57: 15.

Surrendering to God

The Need Of A Daily Examen

Someone recently lamented how little time people have to think or reflect on their lives. Who or what has pressured us into accelerating the pace of living? Why do we frequently race from one activity to another? Where are we going, and, more importantly, why? Not everyone's life, however, is controlled by the tyranny of time. Many have time on their hands. Bored with life, they waste away their days, hour by hour.

Mere mention of the need for silence, reflection, and spiritual reading will likely raise the eyebrow in disbelief. "Let's get real," comes the response. "We are concerned with practical matters – the stock market, paying bills, our families, our desire to live 'the good life.' Leisure time, quiet thinking, reflection? That's passé" Mere mention of discernment – making important decisions in prayer – may elicit skepticism expressed facially by the remark, "This person lives on another planet. There is no time for that."

It is no secret that excess of one stripe or another has taken its toll in a dysfunctional society. Excess is a way of searching for meaning and fulfillment in the wrong places. What advice can we offer, but a simple one?

We must habitually pray over our thoughts, speech, opinions, aspirations, desires, decisions, judgments, over our lifestyle and the state of life and calling we pursue, so that we may better discern the will of God, respect our neighbor and properly understand his life, actions, and efforts in the spirit of charity. For we are all God's children, led by Him to eternity, each in the way He chooses. His ways are always true ways, leading to holiness, ways hidden and obscure to human reason, demanding however, humble faith from us rather than knowledge and proof.

The person who lives in, with and for God, does not live without adversity. To be human means that we experience ups and downs, excitement and ennui, hopes and fears. Indeed, it is a part of being human. Yet a person who firmly believes in Divine Providence, lives in such a way as to make decisions at the level of faith. Discernment

does not supplant common sense. But it does mean that we maintain our life in continuing grace.

If we are to live a fulfilling and satisfying Christian life, reflection and prayer are its essential components. In solitude, which is still possible to find, we evaluate our activities in the light of pleasing God. Human nature must serve us in our ultimate goal, for if there is no God, there are no standards and no virtue. Anything and everything is permissible. This thought is one of Dostoyevsky's favorite themes in his literary works. In reflection and prayer, we gain a self-knowledge from God that will not come directly from any other source, regardless how long we live or how in depth and varied our experiences.

Can we find fifteen minutes twice a day to recall God's abiding presence in all our daily activities? If we could, the day would be less stressful. It is full of stress because the release from that stress, the freedom from and emancipation from that stress is kept out of our lives; we leave God at the doorstep of our lives. We don't permit Him entry. We should not skip a daily examen and should have a set time for doing it. The daily order of our being has a healing power to it. We ought not dwell on the negative. To dwell on the negative is to regress. If the negative lingers, it will poison the spirit. When in prayer, we neutralize it and give it to the Lord, then God transforms it into an abiding peace. He knows where to correct, to eliminate, to change, to discard and delete what is incompatible in us whom He is preparing to receive His precious gift of salvation. It is He Who teaches us, to each in the way He chooses. It is all in His favor.

The daily examen is a time of restful prayer when I evaluate the day's activities in the light of faith made perfect in love. The examen trains me to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and to find God at work in the holy moment of the present time, the here and the now. It keeps me steady and poised before all created things. The examen is not an exercise in mere self-control, self-analysis, or journal/record keeping. For the devout and active Christian, the examen forms a necessary part of a life lived in, with, and for God. It is an excellent means for receiving grace from God, then transforming me into a contemplative-in-action. Mystics are in closest touch with reality because they are one with it. They can touch God at any given moment.

During the examen, I allow the attitude of Christ to take over my entire person, created in God's image. By "putting on Christ," I become gradually transformed into the divine likeness. Life in Christ then is viewed as a continuous ascent to Divine Glory. A few scriptural passages remind us of our nobility as human beings: "Let us make man

and woman in our image, in the likeness of ourselves” Genesis 1: 26, and “Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor” Psalms 8: 5. Orthodoxy expresses this sentiment this way: “God condescended to assume the condition of a human being so that man and woman might ascend to the divine likeness, a little less than God.”

We must seek the presence of our Lord in all things, in speaking, walking, seeing, tasting, hearing, thinking, and in whatever else we may do. For, indeed, God’s majesty is in all things, through His indwelling, through His working and through His essence. He who abandons his own personal inclination and undertakes everything for God’s sake can render some service to His divine majesty and come to the assistance of those for whom He died that they may have life and thus, continue to belong to Him.

The daily examen is important for making decisions in the light of faith. At every hour, the sincerity of my love is tested; demands are made on my time, energy, patience and wisdom. As the raw material for holiness, my activities are transformed into acts of love. The divine Presence always and everywhere, is energizing all created matter. Without God, I can do nothing, but with God, I can do all things. Doesn’t Jesus assure us, “I am with you all days even to the end of the world” Matthew 28: 20?

Our America does not simply need what we have. It needs what we are. Our culture, unfortunately, communicates many false prophets and the Johannine gospel warns that “...it is not every spirit that you can trust; test them, to see if they come from God” John 4: 1. St. Paul observes that “...what the Spirit brings is very different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control” Galatians 5:22.

Indeed, our culture needs what we are. A daily examen consists of several parts: gratitude to God for His blessings, asking the Holy Spirit for self-knowledge and reflection on my relationship with God and with myself, with my ability to deal with the daily grind, sorrow for my faults, a resolve to make a fresh start, and a closing prayer for generosity. This may in fact be the Lord’s Prayer or whatever favorite prayer we have made our own. In the final analysis, the believing Christian prays, “Lord, You have given all to me; I now return it to You, to be used simply as You wish. Grant me only your love and your grace. It is all I need.”

Called to Love

Our heavenly Father created man as a unity of body and soul and the fundamental vocation of every person is to be loving as the Father loves us. When we come to appreciate and understand ourselves as created in God's image and strive after imprinting through grace his likeness on our soul, we grasp the revolutionary and profound truth about man's most basic and elementary experiences – who we are and who we were created to be.

God's teaching about our human physical created being does not denote abstract ideas. Theology does not only deal with our questions about God; it deals primarily with God's word to us, his revelation of himself, that is, the way He speaks with us and tells us about himself and his inordinate love for us. In theology, the Incarnation is central and pivotal, the sacred event in which God himself comes to meet us and becomes visible by assuming a human body. Because of the Incarnation, the body enters into the realm of theology, God's word and teaching. When the Word became flesh, our heavenly Father made clear to us that the body has a language able to talk about God and about the way He calls us to love him and each other, as a primary fulfillment of itself.

Precisely to bring our vocation to love out of the abstract ideas about God, the Church shows just how personal God's vision for each of us is. We need to always remember how concerned the Church of Christ is totally committed to the care of married couples and the family. Understanding our exalted human creation, our physical body is a key element of this pastoral approach.

Central to this insight is the concept of the communion of persons which is seen as a reflection of the inner life of the Holy Trinity. The basic good news of Christianity is that God is love, a communion of

divine persons in which the Father gives himself totally to the Son in the union of the Holy Spirit. So we come to understanding of man in light of this Trinitarian love. Human love and particularly the love of the family – between husband and wife, parent and child, brothers and sisters – is the mirror in which God's love shines and resonates in the world, and man is able to share in it in virtue of Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharistic life. Thus we see dramatically the whole of man's vocation and destiny. This is a vitally important concept for the daily work of believers in Christ.

The aim of the Church is to help the believer discover the great vocation to which God calls man: a vocation to love. We often live unaware of the single great invitation to love and are thus unable to make an adequate response to it. Thus, our lives risk being wasted, without attaining their fulfillment. Consequently, the Church ever hopes to reawaken the believer to the great news of God's constant striving for man's betterment after the original plan. The insights afforded man about his bodily creation is not only a teaching about human sexuality, but contains a whole understanding of the human person and the world. The Church aims to give an account of the whole of reality in terms of love. Every person has a common vocation to love. Thus we can better understand better our vocation within marriage, within the family and in the world.

As we ponder the meaning of our own creation, the importance and nature of human love as a reflection of God's own innate love relates to marriage and family life and emphasizes its vitality. The family is the place where we discover who we are; our identity as human persons is formed in the family. The fact that we are children of our parents, for example, is not something accidental, but constitutes a central part of our being, physically and spiritually. The same is entirely true for a parent; it is not just that a person has a child; but that he or she is a father or mother. In the family, we understand that we come from another as children and are called to become spouses and parents ourselves. In other words, one's life is defined by an original love that is first received, as a child and then given and shared with another in order to be fruitful.

The family is the central place of encounter between Christianity and contemporary society. If we do not understand our lives as spouses and parents in a profoundly Christian way, it is very difficult to live a Christian life in today's world. By understanding our lives as spouses and parents as God intended and the Church teaches, we learn how to live an authentic Christian life. This is true even for those who never marry.

Beginning with man's original experiences in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, the Church's teaching about the human body is, in a way a commentary about human nature. It is Christian revelation alone that explains the reality of man because secular terms are not sufficient as man is a composite of body and soul. Today, contemporary man suffers from a crisis of identity. We need to know who we are and what our appropriate path in life is. In the Book of Genesis, we see the genetic code of our identity as human beings. There was an original solitude. Adam realizes in the garden that he is alone. This experience is interpreted in light of man's relationship with the Creator, the only one who fulfills our expectations and desires. This means our identity is always constituted before the mystery of God, as creatures who come from him and have the source in him.

Then we experience unity. We only know who we are and how to reach God when we encounter another person through love. Precisely because of our human experience, understanding our creation as human beings becomes universal and refers not just to Christians alone, but to every human being. Undoubtedly every human being asks himself about the meaning of life and how to find fulfillment and work towards perfection. All of the arousals of the heart and mind are answered in terms of God's initial love for us and in the love in which we are created.

Since God is love, Christ reveals to man his own vocation, which even in the earthly end we begin by looking at the Crucified One. It is at the foot of the cross we learn what love is all about. It is before the open and empty tomb that God's manifests his radiant and compelling love. By seeing in Christ the revelation of God's love, which makes us who we are and sets before us the way of living to which all human beings are called, we have the security of safely radiating that love to needy mankind.



Life is God.

Did You Know That ...

...it is your thinking that attracts what you receive?

...lions are not caught with mouse traps?

...the mind that creates traps will catch something astonishing and destructive?

...even in old age, we can be brought to submission in Christ because all we have is our future?

...you know what you are today, but only with God's grace will you ever learn what you can be tomorrow?

...believers always look at things as they can be and labor toward that goal?

...when you do all the things you are capable of, you literally astound yourself?

...if you genuinely wish to become a saint, you will achieve your goal?

...self-esteem is so delicate a flower that prayerful encouragement tends to make it bloom while discouraging derision often nips it in the bud?

...you should never make a permanent decision based on a temporary condition?

...when raging billows occur today, remind yourself, "this too shall pass" because only God and the person of faith endures?

...when we see problems as opportunities for spiritual growth, we tap a source of knowledge within ourselves which carries us through?

...all the inspiration a believer needs is the distinct awareness that God loves us?

...the art of life is to know how to enjoy a little and endure much?

...we should learn to enjoy the little things of life because there are so many of them?

...believers forget about likes and dislikes because they are of no consequence?

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 5, 1-11



THE GOSPELS OF LUKE AND JOHN

Luke pictures Jesus teaching that the kingdom of God is

- a long way off
- in the past
- in the midst of you
- a good king's reign

A chief tax collector who climbed a tree to see Jesus:

- Zacchaeus
- Nicodemus
- Bartimaeus
- Nathanael

A nobleman entrusts some of his servants with

- three other servants
- ten pounds
- his whole fortune
- all his sheep

Jesus weeps when he thinks of the coming destruction of

- Nazareth
- Rome
- Bethlehem
- Jerusalem

People ask Jesus whether it is lawful to give tribute to

- Philip
- Caesar
- Xerxes
- Alexander

Pilate hears that Jesus is a Galilean and sends him to

- Augustus
- Antiochus
- Herod
- Ptolemy

Jesus was crucified between two

- criminals
- rulers
- prophets
- soldiers

Jesus' followers recognize him when he

- speaks familiar words
- walks on water
- breaks bread
- heals the sick

John says that in the beginning was the

- good news
- Word
- earth
- sea

John the Baptist said: I am the voice of one

- decrying wealth
- denying wisdom
- seeking vengeance
- crying in the wilderness

The Fourth Gospel says John called Jesus the

- prophet Elijah
- Lamb of God
- keeper of the seal
- author of psalms

Nathanael said: Can anything good come out of

- Nazareth
- Jerusalem
- Bethlehem
- Samaria

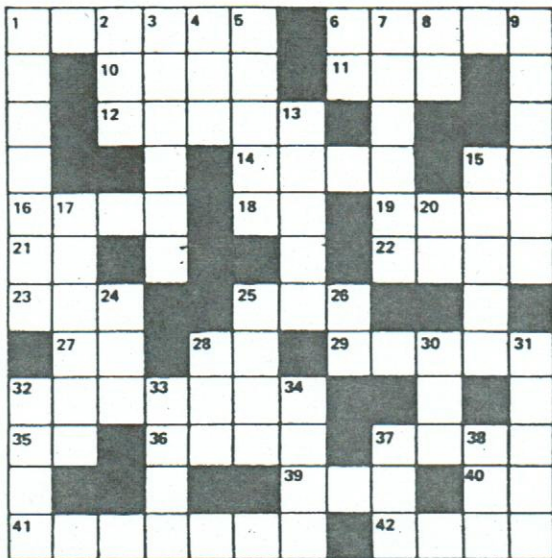
The Fourth Gospel says Jesus' first miracle was

- walking on water
- casting out demons
- turning water into wine
- healing the sick

Gospels of SS. Luke & John

in the midst of you
Zacchaeus
ten pounds
Jerusalem
Caesar
Herod
criminals
breaks bread
Word
crying in the wilderness
Lamb of God
Nazareth
turning water into wine

BOOK OF WISDOM

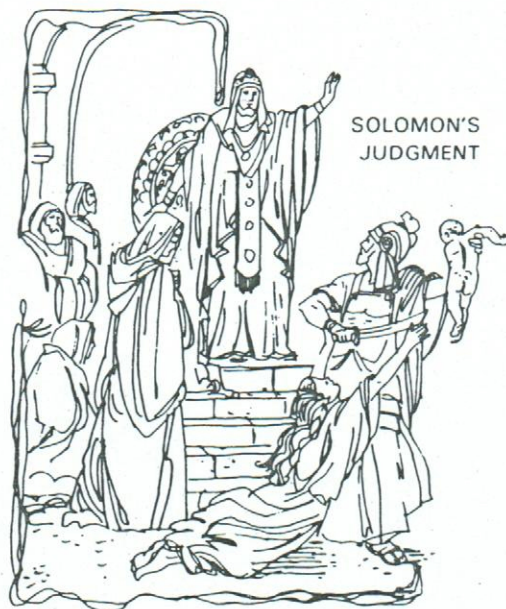


ACROSS

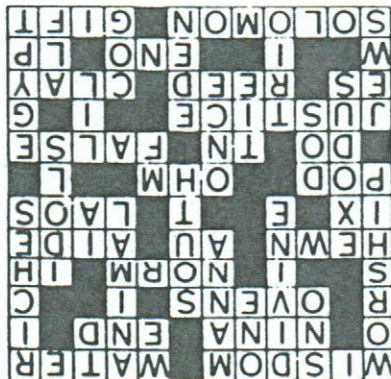
1. The Book of — was written about 100 B.C.
6. Ch. 11:6: " — punishes Egyptians and helps Israelites.
10. One of Columbus' ships.
11. Ch. 3:19: "Dire is the — of the wicked generation."
12. Chambers for baking.
14. Wisdom exhorts justice as the — for living.
15. International Harvester.
16. Felled by sharp instrument.
18. Chem. symbol for "gold."
19. An assistant.
21. King of Greek mythology. (abbrev.)
22. Country in Indochina.
23. Any dry seed vessel.
25. Electrical resistance unit.
27. First tone of diatonic scale.
28. Ton (abbrev.).
29. Ch. 13 discusses — worship.
32. Wisdom teaches of God's —.
35. Emergency Service. (abbrev.).
36. Old Jewish measure of 6 cubits.
37. Ch. 15:7 recounts the theme on the Potter and — idols.
39. Short for "Enos."
40. Type of phonograph record.
41. Ch. 6:22: Wise man of OT.
42. Ch. 8:17-21: Solomon says Wisdom is a — of God.

DOWN

1. Ch. 13 stresses the fallacy of nature —.
2. — cones; cool summer refreshment.
3. Ch. 6 begins discussion of — wisdom.
4. Ch. 13-15 teaches that there is only — God.
5. Ch. 13: "Israel gets a "rain of —" from God.
6. First person plural pronoun.
7. Ch. 11: God sends punishment through an —.
8. Touchdown. (abbrev.).
9. Ch. 7: Solomon received this when he prayed.
13. Direction opposite North.
15. Ch. 13:11 discusses wooden —.
17. Ch. 11:2-16 begins the message of Wisdom during the —.
20. Iowa. (abbrev.).
24. Direct Order Sale. (abbrev.).
25. One time and no more.
26. "Messo forte." (Music abbrev.).
28. To fasten or attach.
30. Short for "Lillian."
31. Author of Wisdom lived in —.
32. Apostate fellows — had oppressed their brothers.
33. A set of three.
34. Biblical name for the earthly paradise.
37. Tooth in the rim of a wheel.
38. Short for "Alfonso" or "Alfred."



SOLOMON'S
JUDGMENT



BOOK OF WISDOM

ST. PROKLA: WIFE OF PONTIUS PILATE

During the Divine Liturgy, we hear the Nicene Creed. It is our concise statement of Faith in which the basic truths of Christianity are gathered.

One may wonder why then, in the fourth article, we hear "He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate . . ." Why is the Roman governor of Judaea, who condemned our Lord to death, mentioned? It points to the Creed's historical accuracy and reminds us that although he found "no fault with this man," he still allowed Christ to be delivered for crucifixion. Pilate's crime consists of being able to protect the Righteous One, and not doing so. His weak-mindedness and fear of Caesar leads him to be remembered.

The interesting figure that graces our Bulletin today is ST. PROKLA. Holy Tradition tells us that she was the WIFE of Pontius Pilate. She makes a brief appearance in the story of our Lord's Passion. She had just spent a sleepless night and sends a message, begging her husband to release Christ. She relayed to him, by her servant, that Jesus of Nazareth was innocent. **"Have nothing to do with that just Man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him."** (Matt 27:19). We all know now that Pontius Pilate did not heed this wise advise.

Following our Lord's Resurrection, Prokla was baptized and became one of our Lord's disciples. Sometime after her husband's relief of his Judaeian governorship, she returned to Rome. It was here that she suffered greatly for the name of Christ.

Eighteenth Sunday

Our Lord in his enduring love for the disciples tells them to pull out into the deep even after they have tried and been unsuccessful. Although they earlier attempted and did not succeed, they respond to his loving kindness and are greeted with success beyond comprehension.

As we read the spiritual patrimony of King David of old, we are uplifted and apply its value. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and loving kindness. He will not always reprove or be contending, neither will he keep his anger forever or hold a grudge* Psalms 103: 8, 9.

A woman I know tells a story about the time she burned out the engine of her father's car, which he loaned her when she was in college. It was the end of semester break and she was going to head back to school on the bus, a seven hour ride with a lot of stops on the way. She had been given a lot of holy day gifts usable at school and which were bulky, including a down-filled comforter and a new desktop computer. Her father told her that rather than deal with so many big items on the bus, she could drive his car back to school and return it the next time she came home for a visit. What a gift!

The ride back to college was a breeze. She parked the car in a safe spot and planned to drive home and return it within a few weeks. In the meantime, every now and then she would drive to the grocery store or the mall. Pretty soon she was taking her friends on short trips here and there and going out with them just for fun. On one of these trips she noticed a red light blinking on the dashboard. She did not think it was anything serious, after all, her father had always taken good care of the car and it was in good condition. She just kept driving.

Soon she noticed some fumes coming out of the hood and decided she had better get the car back on campus. Next came a few loud sputters and the engine died. When the tow truck driver arrived, it did not take him long to figure out the problem. That red light on the dash was an oil indicator. The young lady had neglected to check the light and now the engine was beyond repair.

A few days later when her father arrived in his other car, and she met him at the gas station, she was terrified. She had abused a privilege and ignored a simple warning. There was no excuse for her neglect and now she destroyed her father's car. She knew

he was furious and there was no defense for her behavior. She did, even with tears in her eyes tell her father how sorry she was for her carelessness, but he just told her to sit in the car while he assessed the damage. Her father arranged for the gas station to dispose of it. He actually had to pay them to take it off his hands. Now it was time for the young lady to face her father's wrath. While driving away, the father asked for the best restaurant in town. And when they arrived there, she could not think of food. All she could think about was her father's disappointment and welled - up anger. All the father could think about was scanning the menu and finally ordering a tasty meal.

He finally spoke to her and said "I want to teach you a lesson you will never forget." She knew she deserved whatever she got. Would he make her pay for the car? She knew that would take forever. Would he yell at her and belittle her? Maybe he would just tell her how disappointed he was in her behavior. In some ways that would be the worst punishment.

Then the father said, "I am going to teach you how to remove the bony skeleton from a cooked trout." Not a word was said about the car that night or ever again.

Yes the father was angry with the young lady; who wouldn't be? But he also knew from her demeanor that she had learned her lesson without retribution from him. That story of a father's forgiveness has been retold so many times because she is still in awe of her father's compassion. The grace made a profounder impact on her life than any punishment he could have justly dealt her.

God's revelation to us in Scripture tells us He behaves the same way toward us that the father showed his neglectful daughter. *The Lord your God is in the midst of you, a Mighty One, a Saviour. He will rejoice over you with joy. He will rest in silent satisfaction and in his love he will be silent and make no mention of past sins, or even recall them; He will exult over you with singing* Zephaniah 3: 17.

To be sure there are many examples of our heavenly Father getting angry, but that does not mean that He is an angry God. He does at times get angry at sin, disobedience and rebellion, but He is slow to anger, abundant in mercy and always ready to forgive if we but sorrowfully approach him. All our sin, past, present and future will be forgiven if we cooperate with his grace. We ask forgiveness and our joy is then full John 16: 24.

There are people who spend their lives thinking and believing that God is angry with them, when forgiveness you need is available. So speak freely with our heavenly Father in the sacramental Mystery of Reconciliation about your sins. Confess them, receive

forgiveness for them. Do not carry them as a burden for any period of time. Do not let anything remain hidden between you and God, but liberate yourself in confession and sorrow. It is awesome to think and know our God understands because He loves us. That does not mean He approves of sinful behavior, separating behavior, but He does understand the weakness we suffer with in the flesh Hebrews 4: 15, 16 and if we are sincere, His power enables us to overcome our weaknesses. It is very evident from the story of God's Chosen People, that He is faithful and always ready to forgive and restore. Again King David urges us to consider: *As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father loves and pities his children, so the Lord loves and pities those who fear him with reverence, worship and awe. For he knows our frame, He earnestly remembers and imprints on his heart that we are dust* Psalms 103: 12 – 14.

We are continually reminded that our heavenly Father understands our weaknesses. He knows we will at times succumb to temptations and wrong behavior, but He is also a compassionate, loving Father who stands ready to forgive everything when we simply ask to be forgiven. The very fact that we cannot do everything right is why the Father sent the Son to pay the price of our redemption. The very reason Christ asks the disciples to try again to overcome the past failure is reminder enough for each of us to arise in penitential sorrow for our wrong doings and our sins, knowing we will hear his words of forgiveness.

Same

Sex

Marriage

SAME - SEX MARRIAGE

Public demands for legal recognition and approbation of same-sex “marriage” have recently grown louder and more insistently vociferous. Debates about the matter have intensified, dividing legislative bodies, courts, communities, even families. Where does the Church of Jesus Christ stand on the issue and why?

What is Marriage?

The Church of Jesus Christ teaches that marriage as God instituted it, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong covenant; the permanent union of one man and one woman joined through a mutual giving of themselves and sustained by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In marriage, husband and wife commit themselves totally, not only to each other, but also assume the responsibility of bringing children into the world and caring for them, nurturing them as potential citizens of heaven.

This understanding of marriage and insight into its authentic life is found in God’s revelation to us in Scripture which begins with the creation of man and woman by God in his own image. “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them” Genesis 1: 27. “It is not good,” the Creator says,” that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” Genesis 2: 18. So it is God himself, the Creator who gives man and woman to each other in marriage; it is He who unites them to “...be fruitful and multiply” Genesis 2: 24; 1: 28. Jesus later in time confirms this unchangeable truth and reality in his teaching on divorce. “Some Pharisees came up to him and said to him, ‘May a man divorce his wife for any reason whatever?’ He replied, ‘Have you not read that in the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and declared, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become as one? Thus they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, let no man separate what God has joined.’ They said to him, ‘Then why did Moses command divorce and the promulgation of a decree of divorce?’ ‘Because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses let you divorce your wives,’ he replied, ‘but it was at the beginning not that way. I now say to you, whoever divorces his wife, lewd conduct is a separate case, and marries another, commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery” Matthew 19: 3 – 9

Because our heavenly Father created us out of love, He also calls us to participate in and extend that love. It is our fundamental vocation as creatures made in his likeness. The mutual love of man and woman in marriage becomes in this way a sacred image or manifestation of God's own love for his people, of Christ's love for us. "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loves the Church. He gave himself up for her, to make her holy, purifying her in the bath of water by the power of the word, to present to himself a glorious church, holy and immaculate, without stain or wrinkle or anything of that sort. Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Observe that no one ever hates his own flesh; no, he nourishes it and takes care of it as Christ cares for the church, for we are members of his body. 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be made into one.' This is a great foreshadowing; I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church. In any case, each one should love his wife as he loves himself, the wife for her part showing respect for her husband" Ephesians 5: 25 - 33.

Scripture, in fact ends with a vision of the marriage of the Lamb, "For this is the wedding day of the Lamb, his bride has prepared herself for the wedding. She has been given a dress to wear made of finest linen, brilliant white the linen dress is like the virtuous deeds of God's saints" Revelation 19: 7 - 9, when God the Son and his bride, the Church will be finally fully united in everlasting love.

As a sign of this love, the valid marriage of baptized Christians is a sacramental Mystery; a saving reality that introduces God's grace into our lives and helps to make us holy. Sacramental marriage points the world to Christ's own faithful, creative and self-emptying sacrificial love and is always open to the transmission of life.

Isn't marriage just a religious institution?

Decidedly so!. The vocation to marriage and parenthood is stamped into the very nature of humanity. In other words, human beings are literally wired for marriage. Though man and woman are equal, they are different from each other by nature. Their difference, which includes their sexuality, is complementary, because man and woman fulfill each other. Their complimentary natures draw them together into a union, loving and life-giving, that carries the potential of procreation.

Because these truths about the very essential nature of marriage and its dignity are present in the natural order itself, they can be understood through the use of logic and reason. Though some cultures do not recognize these realities as clearly as others, some sense of the greatness

and fundamental importance of marriage can be found in every culture, even those which are largely secular.

Marriage is also a basic human and social institution. Though it can be regulated by civil and Church law, it did not originate either with the Church or state, but long before either existed, from the Creator of mankind, the eternal God. Marriage, whose nature and purpose are established by God, can only be the union of a man and a woman and must remain such in law and human understanding and acceptance. Or, we are constrained to ask, "Can God's provision be improved upon?"

Isn't government free to define marriage any way it chooses?

Marriage is the oldest human institution, existing long before any human government that today attempts to define it. The Church has never traditionally accepted nor recognized the interference of secular government in matters of marriage, but has readily responded to governmental cooperation with the Church in safeguarding the dignity of this sacramental Mystery.

Despite the many variations marriage has undergone through the centuries in a range of cultures, it displays certain common and permanent characteristics because of its foundation in the never-changing mind of God. Government has no competence in describing or defining religious principles and understandings nor in compelling their observance.

Such descriptive characteristics are not arbitrary. They reflect the reality that God endowed marriage with a specific nature to be governed by particular adherence to his inspiration. Thus we have harmony from the mind of the Creator with the very essence of marriage, safeguarding it to secure the well-being of the family and in turn, to society as a whole.

Marriage, then, is not merely a human institution and although being susceptible to human misinterpretation and error, government may find it necessary to regulate it in certain ways, but must conclude it reaches beyond itself in attempting to define or redefine the marriage vocation. It remains by the design of Almighty God, a permanent union between one man and one woman. Governments issuing laws contrary to this reality only create legal conditions that lead to moral and social confusion and chaos.

Why are same-sex relationships not equivalent to marriage?

As part of God's plan "from the beginning," the expression of sexual love serves the purposes of both procreation and the bond of union between a man and a woman, as husband and wife. Marriage – as a permanent, exclusive, mutual commitment – is the necessary context for such sexual expression.

Human sexuality is naturally structured to make man and woman complementary partners in transmitting life. This sexual complementarity can only be expressed by the union of male and female. It is the unique difference between partners that makes possible the conjugal bond at the heart of marriage.

Same-sex union, then, is contrary to the very nature of marriage. It is not based on the natural complementary difference between male and female. And it cannot by nature bring children into the world. A true conjugal union cannot be entered into by two persons of the same sex, not even in their deluded imagination.

Thus, same-sex relationships, regardless of artificial creative imaginary bolstering, can never be equivalent to marriage.

If two people want to be married, why should it matter to the rest of us whether the law recognizes their union?

Marriage is a personal and private relationship, but it has openly public implications and consequences. In every age and culture, the family is founded on marriage and society is founded on the family.

Why is this so? First, marriage provides the best environment and protected setting for rearing children: a stable, loving, on-going relationship between mother and father. Second, marriage offers society an essential pattern for male-female relationships. It models interdependence and life-long commitment, between men and women to seek the good of each other, their families and others.

Consequently, human governing agencies are right and correct to recognize and foster marriage relationships through law because marriage makes a unique and crucial contribution to the common good. But any attempt to redefine marriage, making other relationships its equivalent, only devalues marriage and weakens it. Such an attempt denies the need for

complementarity between marriage partners and for the conjugal bond that makes possible the transmission of life.

Public laws share and express a culture's ideals, thoughts and behavior. They have considerable power to determine what a society finds vital, important and morally acceptable. Inevitably, legal status for same-sex unions would function as an official stamp of public approval on homosexual behavior.

All those who exercise influence over communities and social groups should work efficiently for the welfare of marriage and the family. Public authority should regulate it as a sacred duty to recognize, protect, and promote their authentic nature, to shield public morality, and to favor the prosperity of home life. Regardless what politicians in their imagination conceive, nothing can alter what God has established.

Is it not unjust discrimination to deny marriage to homosexual persons?

On the contrary, granting legal status to same-sex unions would be an injustice because it would be based on falsehood. Since marriage and same-sex unions are essentially different realities, it would be wrong to ignore this difference and pretend it does not exist.

To deny legal status to same sex unions is not to deny the dignity of homosexual persons, who, too, are created in the image of God. It is simply to bear witness to the truth of what marriage is and is not. The Church insist that even as we oppose homosexual acts as gravely immoral, we must defend the dignity of homosexual persons and invite them to seek wholeness in Christ through a life of chaste love for others.

There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family. Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts are in opposition to the revealed moral law.

Why has confusion in the public arena nurtured same-sex marriage mentality?

It is fair to conclude, that use of the procreation argument to define the scope of marriage is in serious trouble. Why is it no longer self-evident? And what are the consequences of this change?

Undoubtedly, history is repeating itself. The moral and family disciplines of the old Roman Republic were fading, being replaced by the intoxications of empire. Slave concubinage flourished in these years. Hedonistic pleasure counted for much and was vastly sought after. Divorce by mutual consent became easy and common. Adultery was fashionable and widespread. In the swollen city of Rome, homosexuality emerged as an open practice. Indeed, there is some evidence that same-sex “marriage” occurred. There was also a disregard for infant life with infanticide and abortion becoming regular practices. St. Ambrose writes with purpose: “Women are in a hurry to wean their children; if they be rich, they scorn to suckle them; poor women abandon and expose their children and if found, refuse to take them back; the rich, rather than see their potential fortune divided, use murderous juices to kill the fetus within the womb.”

As early as 18 BC Caesar Augustus worried about the plummeting Roman birthrates and implemented the so called Augustan Laws, measures that punished adultery, penalized childlessness and showered benefits on families with three or more children. These laws appear to have slowed the empire’s demoralization for about a century. Thereafter, the old trend lines returned.

Between AD 50 and 400 and out of this same circumstance, the Fathers of the Church and in this case, perhaps even the usually unheralded Mothers of the Church as well, crafted and defined what was the Christian sexual order. Procreative marriage served as its foundation in response to the initial mandate of the Creator at the very beginning: “...be fertile and multiply...fill the earth and subdue it” Genesis 1: 28. Most importantly, the expression of the mind of God was primarily in reaction to the Gnostic host of heresies that threatened the young Church and human life itself.

Emerged lunacy now inspires contemporary thinking

The Gnostic idea arose independently of Christianity and adversely influenced it and threatened it. It drew together myths from Iran, Jewish magic and mysticism, Greek philosophy and Chaldean mystical speculation. More troubling, they also appealed to an exaggerated freedom from the law, said to be proclaimed by Jesus and Paul. In this sense, they were antinomians, that is, they believed that the gospel freed Christians from obedience to any law, be it scriptural, civil or moral.

Gnostics claimed to have a special *gnosis*, a *secret infused knowledge*, denied ordinary Christians. They appealed to unseen spirits. They denied nature. While they developed a

mélange of moral and doctrinal ideas, most Gnostics appear to have shared two views: They rejected conventional marriage as a child-related institution, and they scorned procreation.

Given the circumstances and moral climate prevalent in the empire, this idiotic heresy posed a grave challenge to the Christian movement. Indeed, the epistles are full of warnings against Gnostic teachings. St. Paul writes that "...some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons...who forbid marriage" 1 Timothy 4. In Jude 4, we read that admission into the Christian community "...has been secretly gained byungodly persons who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness" 2 Peter tells us of false prophets corrupting the young church: "...irrational animals, creatures of instinct...reveling in their dissipation, carousing with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable souls."

Relative to sex, it appears that Gnosticism took two forms. One strand emphasized total sexual license. Claiming the freedom of the gospels, the Gnostics indulged in adultery and ritualistic fornication. The Church Father, St. Irenaeus opined about those who "...introduced promiscuous intercourse and marriages...(saying) that God does not really care about these matters." St. Epiphanius, a future bishop of Salamis, described in detail his involvement as a naive young man with a secret Gnostic group in Egypt that infiltrated a local church about 335 AD. After a lavish meal of meat and wine, he said the men of this group would exchange their wives and "...indulge in promiscuous intercourse." This would be done, he noted, "...not to beget children, but for mere sensual pleasure." The group's rituals included grotesque perversions of the Holy Eucharist. In this episode, eventually ninety members of the congregation were finally excommunicated.

Other Gnostics of the libertine persuasion taught that "marrying and bearing children are from satan," and that the true believer should enjoy every possible sexual experience that his imagination can lead him to discover.

In marked contrast to this polymorphous romp, a second Gnostic strand totally rejected human sexuality. Tatian led a faction called the Encratites or "the self-controlled." According to St. Irenaeus, they "...attacked marriage as corruption and fornication." He also complained that these Encratites rejected "...the ancient work of God in forming man and implicitly blamed him – God – for creating male and female for the admitted generation of other men."

These so-called Gnostic gospels drove the lessons home. In the *Gospel according to the Egyptians*, Salome asks, "How long shall men die?" Jesus is said to answer: "As long as you women bear children." From this, the ascetic Gnostics concluded that they could defeat death

by ceasing procreation. They also celebrated androgyny, since they reasoned, a being without sexual identity could obviously not procreate. The *Gospel of Thomas*, a favorite of modern feminists has Jesus saying, "Every woman who makes herself male enters the Kingdom of Heaven." So we observe that a host of other problems about sexual identity also have their source and encouragement in ancient errors that conveniently resurface now.

Grave Threat

Within this broad context of Roman civilization sliding into family breakdown and sexual anarchy, the young Christian Church is faced with the infiltration of life-denying ideas in its own ranks. For Christian leaders obviously important was explaining and teaching what marriage is for.

From Judaism, the Christian could see children as a divine blessing for parents and for the community as a whole. As told in Deuteronomy: "And because you harken to the ordinances, and keep and do them, the Lord your God will love you, bless you and multiply you...You shall be blessed above all people; there shall not be male or female barren among you" Deuteronomy 7: 12 - 14. Through the centuries the Jewish sages also declared that "He who does not engage in procreation is as if he diminished the divine image." The ascetic Essene community, now famed for compiling the Dead Sea scrolls provides a healthy insight into marriage which they entered "not for self-indulgence, but for the procreation of children."

Still another rather pregnant understanding is provided by Philo, a Jew trained in Greek philosophy, who expressed revulsion over pagan Roman pleasure-seeking. "Like a bad husbandman," he writes, "the homosexual spends his labor night and day on soil from which no growth at all can be expected." The sexual act was for procreation, Philo insisted. Seeking a consistent sexual standard, he also opposed marriage to women known to be sterile.

Another source for early Christian understanding was apparently the stoic ideal. Also repulsed by the sexual excesses of first and second century Rome, Stoics, including philosophers such as Epictetus and Musonius Rufus, summoned reason to control human desires and behavior. They also held that there was natural law which gives order to human life. Sexual intercourse in marriage, the Stoics concluded, found its clear and natural purpose in the propagation of the human race. However intercourse only for pleasure was suspect. As the first century Stoic, Seneca declared: "All love of another's wife is shameful; so too, too much love of your own. A wise man ought to love his wife with judgment, not affection...Nothing is fouler than to

love a wife like an adulteress....Let men show themselves to their wives not as lovers, but as husbands.”

And of course, the bishops of the early Church primarily drew on the Gospels and letters of St. Paul with the complementary inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Orthodox gospel texts show Jesus attending the wedding feast at Cana and performing there his first miracle. Jesus also condemned adultery and divorce. St. Paul teaches that “...women will be saved through bearing children” 1 Timothy 2: 15. And he equates the marital love of husband and wife to the bond between Christ and his Body, the Church in the fifth chapter of the Ephesian epistle which is read as a teaching tool during the marriage ceremony.

All of the plainly libertine influences, brought to the fore by the Holy Spirit, guided early Church bishops to one conclusion: that sexuality was to be used for mutual fulfillment and absolutely certainly for procreation. Marriage could only be entered if it was open always to bearing children. While also praising life long chastity, they refused to abandon the need for children. Justin Martyr explains in the mid-second century, “We Christians either marry to produce children, or, if we refuse to marry, are completely continent.” Christians also insisted on monogamy; one man married to one woman for life.

Around the year AD 400 Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, wrote the book, *On The Good Of Marriage*. In it he argues that God desires man’s perpetuation through marriage. Offspring, he insisted were an obvious “good” of marriage, the other two being fidelity and sacramental union. Then he elaborates: “What food is to the health of man, intercourse is to the health of the human race, and each is not without its carnal delight, which cannot be lust, if modified and restrained by temperance, it is brought to a natural use, procreation. He concludes by observing and insisting the act of procreation includes “the receiving of children lovingly, the nourishing of them humanely, the educating of them religiously.”

Heartening Encouragement

Even the tremors of the so-called Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century arguably strengthened the powerful tie between procreation and monogamous marriage. The Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, believed that God’s words in the Book of Genesis, “Be fruitful and multiply,” represented more than a command; they were, he said, a “divine ordinance which is not our prerogative to hinder or ignore” This led him to reject forced celibacy as a spiritual state and to urge its practitioners to marry and have children. He wrote: “We were all created to do as our parents have done, to beget and rear children.” While it is

true Protestantism injected more passion and intimacy into the marriage bond than would have been considered seemly by the Church Fathers, the understanding is and remained rightly bound to procreation.

Closer to our time, attitudes toward birth control revealed the continuing strength of the bond between monogamous marriage and procreation. In 1873, the US Congress approved and President Grant signed the Comstock Act whose provisions included prohibitions on the import, sale, or distribution by mail of items or information designed to prevent conception or induce abortion. This was followed by individual states passing mini-Comstocks in affirmation.

The unlikely Sigmund Freud observed in *Civilization and its Discontents*, present day culture makes it plain that it will only permit sexual relationships on the basis of a solitary, indissoluble bond between one man and one woman, and that it does not like sexuality as a source of pleasure in its own right and it is only prepared to tolerate pleasure because there is so far no substitute for it as a means of propagating the human race. Freud was clearly not happy about the restrictions but they testify to the survival of traditional morality well into the twentieth century.

Secularly Inspired

In 1965 the US Supreme Court began and initiated a fundamental change and recognized the right not to procreate in marriage, affirming this has its origin in the Bill of Rights, to the "right of privacy" and thus then declared marriage largely empty of meaning. If the right of privacy meant anything, it is the right of the individual, married or single, to be free from unwarranted governmental intrusion in matters fundamentally affecting a person as he decides whether to bear or beget a child. The Court thus denied the substance of both publicly sanctioned marriage and its grounding in religious and natural law. A year later, the same secret knowledge led the Supreme Court to overturn the abortion laws of all fifty states, renewing the "right to abortion." Continually the court has reaffirmed the right of the individual to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life as it extolled and affirmed abortion rights, using what some claim to be original language of the Gnostic idea. Further, in Texas was the right affirmed to uninhibited sexual expression, in this case, a right to sodomy. Yet again, another branch of the Gnostics would have been delighted.

The decline and fall of "illegitimacy" also points to the disappearance of the bond between marriage and procreation. From its inception, the word "illegitimacy" was a part and parcel of our civilization's moral code and today most are bothered by its use. To the politically correct, it is insulting and punishes innocent children for the sins or acts of their parents. Historically, there have been repeated attempts to banish the word "illegitimate" even in communist society which emphasized equation of the sexes and elevated cohabitation with marriage. Because of its abuse, the idea of "illegitimacy" returned right after World War 2.

In countries the traditional roles of husband and wife were abolished to make divorce easy, to eliminate the status of marriage as an economic unit and to raise cohabitation to equality with marriage, in time the association of marriage and procreation was legally severed. With the home functionally dismantled and with procreation unrelated to marriage, it is an easy and most logical step to extend marriage-like "registered partnerships" to same sex couples as well.

Gnosticism reshapes the modernist feminist view and gives it new contemporary form. Nothing that Western civilization has considered or judged natural, traditional, sacred, or moral is safe from the Gnostic idea. And no appeal to history, to nature, to culture, to human experience of any kind can prevail against the "special knowledge" of modern antinomians.

Now in America, the "right to privacy" conceived by the Supreme Court, is foe of both Christian marriage and procreation and is especially hostile in defense of this union. Thus long ago, before anyone ever imagined same-sex marriage, the stage was set for the battle which is already being lost. No one today, even those who oppose same-sex marriage are ready to reopen or argue for the re-criminalization for sale of contraceptives. How many want to advocate a strict legal and cultural imposition of the word "illegitimate" on certain little children?

The Sexual Constitution of Western Society has indeed been abandoned and overthrown during the last several decades. Thus we are prepared to witness:

Among the native born, a low and falling birthrate;

Among the children continuing to be born, an ever growing number being born to unmarried women;

Pornography growing ubiquitously;

Homosexuality become acceptable, even normal alternative;

Legalization of abortion and promotion of contraception by the state;

Public welfare costs soaring as family networks prove unable to care for the young, the sick, the handicapped, and the old;

Sexual disease multiplying in kind and virulence;

Children being inducted into sexual knowledge and practices at even younger ages; and
Political borders being overrun by new 'barbarians' with stricter sexual and moral codes.

Does any of this sound familiar?

Building a new moral order as the Fathers of the Church did, is far more difficult, for it requires choice, a voluntary surrender of individual freedom and immediate pleasure in favor of certain ideals and it also requires acts of courage that run against the value currents of the present age.

Are twenty first century Christians ready for these tasks?

Our moral vocabulary is at root unintelligible and arbitrary in much the same way that it was centuries ago when Christianity appeared on the scene. It has to be taught; it has to be explained and it must be made plain and inspirationally compelling. The original significance and rationale has disappeared from understanding in present day culture. The loss in our society of the meaning and conceptual foundations of moral vocabulary make it easy for enemies of God to advance their cause. And the Church has failed to advance the cause of Christ, to explain it and to witness for it. The persistence of only a fragmented vestige of an originally larger whole leaves the opaque system of rules incapable of providing reasons for its demands. The hollow world of prohibitions came to an end, not with a bang, but with an isolated whimper and the Church stood by picking its nose and scratching itself. Present day vocabulary and marriage customs have entered a stage at which their long-standing rupture from marriage's natural and original significance is provoking the abolition of what is now considered arbitrary taboos which can no longer be made sense of.

To put it bluntly, traditional, historically understood and established marriage as a public, cultural and spiritual institution has not existed in our society for quite some time. What

mainstream American, both conservative and liberal, religious and secular, has been and is now describing and calling "marriage" is not really marriage, but a kind of contractually formalized "couplehood." We continue to maintain the word "marriage" as an esteemed and protected word, but what the word once signified and the value it conveyed has been lost to public understanding within our culture. This is, of course, a highly distressing thesis, and on surface, it may seem implausible. Unfortunately, it is nevertheless true.

The older understanding of marriage, philosophically rooted in God's creative intention and historically embodied in Christian tradition, includes clear and unique qualities that specify a relationship as marriage. The first and most obvious of these defining characteristics was that marriage is the singular place of appropriate sexual intimacy, and that this is always between one man and one woman. Classical natural law teaches that the actualization of our sexual faculties outside of this union is contrary to their natural, healthy and humanly fulfilling end.

The sexual union that is the singular gift of married life is always to be open to the generation of new life. Sex has natural purposes that must be respected if we are going to live life according to the Author of our nature. Chief among these is the generation of a family. Thus at the heart of the marital covenant is, first, the inextricable intention to bring forth a family; and, second, the commitment never to sunder one's sexual life from that significance.

This is to say that every act of unitive sexual intimacy must aim at procreation, but that spouses are not to deliberately frustrate the procreative significance of their sexual faculties. Thus, the deepening of their intimacy and union that is also effected through the conjugal act is never to be divorced from the procreative significance of that act. By nature, then, to choose sex is to choose marriage, and to get married is to choose to have children. It is this intrinsic ordination toward procreativity that makes marriage naturally between only a man and a woman.

What are appropriate insights?

There are many who honestly question the adequacy of this understanding of marriage, based on the fact that some marriages are validly entered into where there is little or no possibility of a child issuing forth from the union. One thinks of marriage between those who are beyond normal child-bearing age. Or one may wonder about a woman who has had a hysterectomy. Is she no longer able to get married because conjugal intercourse with her husband could not be procreative?

The short and obvious answer is "Of course not!" In such cases there is true marriage even if the spouses are unable to realize all the ends that God naturally intends for conjugal life. The simple reason and distinction is that the spouses have not chosen to render their marriage infertile. Rather, time, disease, or some other infirmity of the body has made procreation impossible for them. In other words, the cause of their marriage not embodying the full procreative purpose intended by God does not reside in the expression and working of their will, but in some external circumstance beyond their control or doing everything within their power to conform to and participate in the natural and divine significance of marriage. Their serious life together manifests as much of the reality of life-giving conjugal love as their bodies are able to provide, and thus, there is nothing morally deficient about their union.

Following from the principle that brings forth a family is of the essence of marriage, the perennial natural law understanding of the marriage union and its indissolubility. Because the nature of marriage is to bring forth children, a man and a woman through that act are meant to become permanently united to each other in the "one flesh" of their child.

Simply by entering the sacramental Mystery, a husband and wife express such intention for an irrevocable bond, and the child is, in turn, a source of strength to union whose claim is larger than their subsequent emotions and fluctuating feelings. Their life becomes mutually invested in their children and grandchildren. They uniquely show what is most crucial and important in their lives. Thus, inextricable to the intention to marry is the intention never to be united to another in marriage as long as one's spouse is alive. This is the meaning of "til death do us part."

Contemporary "Marriage"

It does not take much reflection to see that the understanding of our current society and understanding and practice of marriage does not correspond and for some time now has not related to either essential element in marriage. Whether chatting with a bozo at Starbucks or entering a conservative talk show or participating in a wedding ceremony in a local church there is discernible near-unanimity regarding marriage that underlies the public dispute over who can enter into it. Secularism has not so nobly advanced, but nevertheless has captivated the lowest common denominator in humanity.

The most commonly recognized ingredients of marriage are a man and woman who are in love and want to be with each other and make a willful commitment to achieving that end by the assistive grace of the Holy Spirit.

Public Recognition of Commitment

There should be no doubt any time that there is complete sincerity on both sides about wanting to make a life-long run of it "til death do us part."

However, two other cultural assumptions stand out as highly significant and socially fitting the contemporary understanding of marriage. The first is that children are commonly thought to be an attractive but supplementary add-on to a marital relationship. In other words, the intention not to have children is not seen as belonging to the essence of what it means for two people getting married. Children are now considered accidental and posterior to the marriage union. How many today are saying matter-of-factly the conditions in the world are too deplorable to even consider subjecting another generation to these woes? Added to this is the fact that using contraception is taken to be about as controversial in our society as brushing one's teeth. Where can you find someone who really believes or regards acts of sexual intimacy, whether in or out of marriage as intrinsically procreative in nature? For most, sex is simply delightfully, uniquely appropriate for expressing one's romantic feelings and it also happens, as it were, the most useful way to have a baby, if that thought or inspiration ever occurs.

The second cultural assumption has to do with the intentionality with which a couple enters the marital union. Assuredly, they want to be together for life, but what if you press deeply enough, you will discover that almost everyone will allow for the remote and perhaps undesired possibility that should things not work out, another marriage to a different spouse is theoretically possible. In other words, there are certain conditions attached to the union. Should the unthinkable happen and one or both of the spouses become miserable with little prospect of amelioration, divorce and re-marriage would be acceptable. American society does not regard marriage as indissoluble. It is a revocable contract and ultimately may be dissolved and then entered into once again with a newer, more exciting party.

While it is still true in some circles there remains a strong sense of the propriety and desirability of life-long marriage, but in the actual belief and frequent practice of mainstream American culture, conservative and liberal alike, is that a "do over" is always possible simply because everyone deserves happiness.

Even in the Roman Church which is unfortunately just about the only major institution in the Western world whose core doctrine attempts to preserve the procreative and indissoluble nature of marriage by its extensive pre-marital instruction and preparation, there is an ongoing annulment crisis that reveals a widespread inadequacy in the way couples are being prepared

to enter the covenant of marriage and how they may simply elude its principles and declare the marriage as non-existent.

These people have not, in fact, gotten married, for marriage is a sacramental Mystery instituted by God and as result the covenant cannot be entered into but with the properly positive intention on their part. If the surrounding culture gives a couple no indication of what they are supposed to be intending, but on the contrary, profoundly distorts the meaning of the union they are seeking and if their Christian community has either forgotten or failed to communicate the nature and conditions intrinsic to this exalted state of life, how can we possibly expect men and women to embrace something they have scarcely seen or heard of?

Is ignorance bliss?

So our society has preserved the label of marriage while having lost all living contact with what that word originally and essentially signified. When a modern American couple, oblivious as they are to the procreative and indissoluble nature of the marital covenant, goes to the altar or courthouse, which to most has no contrasting difference, and commits to living together for life, they are not actually getting married in the original sense of that word, rather they enter into a contractually formalized "couplehood."

This does not mean their love and commitment does not deserve support or respect or that their life together is a joke to be treated with levity. It only means our cultural deterioration has largely deprived them of the opportunity to enter into the kind of union which used to be uniquely labeled "marriage" and embrace its indissolubility and intrinsically procreative purpose which is what makes this relationship marriage. Because neither of these is customarily regarded by our society as of the very essence of marriage, it does not really have a public life in our culture. What passes for marriage in the Western world today, both in terms of cultural sensibilities as well as in law, is what inspires them to be a "couple" for life. This is only because they are crazy about each other at the time, a simple emotional construct, not at all as serious as an act of the will required for validity.

The problem with this acceptance of our culture's understanding of marriage as contractual couplehood is that two women or two men can also fit into this description. A same sex couple can be just as sincerely crazy about each other as a heterosexual one, committed to being together hopefully for life and desirous of a public recognition of the commitment. Exactly like the heterosexual married couple, they regard the question of children as fundamentally unrelated to their initial commitment to their relationship and may equally see

the idea of later having a different approach as an unattractive, highly remote, but nevertheless real possibility.

Mainstream American society, even as it statistically somewhat opposes same-sex marriage more than in favor of it, envisions "marriage" in a way that cannot beware any retinal scrutiny of its exclusion of a same-sex couple. Indeed, a consistent thinker must be sympathetic to the situation. Such people justifiably say they are being arbitrarily discriminated against, given what American society understands "marriage" to signify.

What is the attitudinal difference after all, between a heterosexual couple who marry with no intention of having children, engage solely in non-procreative sexual activity, and regard their union as dissolvable on the one hand, and a same-sex couple who marry with no intention of having children, engage solely in non-procreative sexual activity and regard their union as dissolvable?

There is no rational difference. Both are a non-marital coupling of sexually de-gendered and bodily homogenized selves contractually and thus conditionally, seeking mutual physical/sexual and emotional fulfillment. God is not part of the picture, nor need He be. Both equally fit with our society's fundamental presuppositions about "marriage." Yet we are somehow supposed to be okay with the former but against the latter?

Moreover it would be hard pressing to concede that the degree of promiscuity among gay men noticeably surpasses the level desired and pursued by typical heterosexual pagan fraternity boys who probably outnumber gay men ten to one. The tyranny of the libido seems to be just about authoritarian among that demographic as among gay men. It is unreasonable for us to harp on the destructive sexual activity among gay men and simultaneously ignore the bacchanalia engaged in on a regular basis by today's high school and college students, increasingly more often with the explicit open blessing and encouraging permission of their parents who for some strange reason are glad their offspring now openly are doing what they felt deprived of at a similar age!

Obviously, commitment and sacrifice of just this kind cannot itself be what is objectionable in such unions, otherwise we would have a very paltry understanding of marriage. If there is something wrong with such public unions, it must reside in the uniquely sexual nature of the married relationship. And yet it is precisely here that defenders of "marriage" are entirely without rational resources.

The truth of the matter is that the ultimate reason why homosexual acts are contrary to human nature, namely that they violate the generative purpose of sexual union is the reason why contraceptive heterosexual activity is also unreasonable behavior. They stand or fall together. There certainly is a gradation of moral gravity in the ways which human sexuality is deprived of its due ordination towards a natural end. Thus we speak of the "vice against nature" as the greatest sin among the various species of lust because of the idolatrous proportions it generally reaches in its practice, as witnessed to by St. Paul in his Roman epistle, but it is altogether, equally idolatrous activity.

The Church has always seen what most Americans like to over-look, namely that although these acts differ in the degree to which they gravely corrupt the order of nature established by God, nevertheless each of them is wrong based on its common violation of the same moral implication. Accordingly, most traditionally minded members of our society seem to be maintaining that ban of same-sex "marriage" as other cultures have advanced the course of their "taboos," which is to say arbitrarily, because they ruptured the ban from the original reason for it.

While current American culture can offer no rational opposition to same sex marriage possibility, it can re-examine its practice and insights and alter them to revert to original revealed meaning and practice. We can inject correct meaning to the word "marriage" and our moral customs whose exclusions have become rationally baffling because they return nor present relationships to the original significance that naturally engendered them.

If we are truly to defend marriage, and not contractual couplehood that has for some time now been disguising itself as "marriage," then it is imperative for us to recover the full meaning of the beautiful and pristine covenant, established in paradise by our Creator God, whose embodiment is not clandestine and highly countercultural.

This will have to be done from the ground up and the Church must become loudly and compellingly expositive in explaining its meaning and value for individual Christian dignity. It will have to believe and live out in small communities of faith that embrace and support the self-giving, procreative and indissoluble nature of that union and who do so not as unjustifiable exclusion, but as a positive commitment to protect such an important, difficult and edifying undertaking.

We would not now be arguing about homosexual "marriage" had heterosexuals themselves retained a sense of the holiness of marriage and the centrality of procreating in the marital act.

They came up with novel ideas to circumvent God's will and now wonder why homosexuals have gotten on their bandwagon. They were as eager to distance themselves from and abandon a sense of the holy and enduring in their marriages as homosexuals are eager to embrace some sort of enhancement they judge to see in their vision of "marriage." Tolerance and acceptance of one error, contraception, leads with inevitable logic to tolerance of homosexuality generally.

If a husband and wife engage in the marital act while attempting, in that same act, to thwart its meaning and natural fulfillment in conception, they are doing what is in itself a holy thing, in the wrong way and for the wrong ends or at least for a badly reduced end. But two men cannot engage in the marital act at all; they cannot become a one-flesh organism that alone can naturally beget and conceive a child. Their sexual relationship can only parody that act; they are wrong then in themselves and not by circumstance.

The intrinsic unnaturalness of the act should cause us to ask whether marriage is the only good thing that, in itself corrupts. A prior corruption of marriage is a prior precondition for our tolerance of the sins of Sodom.

The commitment to recovering the natural meaning of conjugal life need not make one any less humane toward those who misconstrue it or who have tragically fallen short of it. But perhaps this is only another way of saying the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life can be satisfied, so that both morality and civility among believers survives through the new darkness which already is enveloping us.

The response of believers

Believers in Christ have a moral and conscientious obligation to bear witness to the truth about marriage. Faith must not be separated from actions in either private or public life. We must educate ourselves about what the Church actually teaches and then prayerfully act on our beliefs accordingly as we make them our own.

In prayer we should ask our heavenly Father to strengthen married couples with his grace to carry out their vocation faithfully and with joy. In private conversations, we should stand charitably but firmly for the truth as revealed in the life of the Body of Christ, through Scripture and Tradition. In public by voice and by vote, we should do all we can to ensure that our nation always reflects the realities of divine law expressed in nature. In particular, we must oppose any attempt to legalize same-sex unions as equivalents of marriage.

Above all, married couples themselves have an irreplaceable role in promoting and defending marriage in our society, not according to their own superficial vision, but that of the mind of our Creator expressed in the teaching of the Church. When married couples practice sacrificial, faithful life-giving love, they teach their children - and all of us - the truth about marriage as our Creator God designed it to be.

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