



**Homily by Fr. Thomas LaHood, St. Mary of the Assumption**  
**Sunday, July 19, 2015**  
*Natural Family Planning (NFP) Awareness Week*  
*July 19-25, 2015*

Imagine a great violist leaving his Stradivarius violin to his six year old grandson. The boy looks at the violin and tells his parents that it will make a good baseball bat. They say “No” you can’t do that. Next, he says he wants to use it as a hammer. Again, the parents say “No.” Finally, the boy says it would make a good shovel for his sand box. The parents give a definite and final “No” to this suggestion. The parents decided that the easiest thing to do was to lock away the violin.

All that the boy heard from his parents was “No.” What if they had explained to him what the instrument was? What if they told him that it could make the sweetest music the human ear had ever heard? What if they had told the boy that they would pay for violin lessons and help him learn how to make music with the instrument?

The Church, rightly or wrongly, has been seen to be the No-sayer when it comes to human sexuality. Pope Paul VI, after issuing his encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) in 1968 was shown on a famous poster in an “Uncle Sam wants You” finger-pointing pose with the caption “The pill is a No-No.” The mission of the Shepherds of the Church is not just to keep the sheep from straying but also to show them

the way going forward. Far from just saying “No” here is what Blessed Paul VI said about marital love and children:

*Conjugal love reveals its true nature and nobility when it is considered in its supreme origin, God, who is love, the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.*

*Marriage is not, then, the effect of chance or the product of evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love. By means of the reciprocal personal gift of self, proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend towards the communion of their beings in view of mutual personal perfection, to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives.*

*For baptized persons, moreover, marriage invests the dignity of a sacramental sign of grace, inasmuch as it represents the union of Christ and of the Church.*

*Under this light, there clearly appear the characteristic marks and demands of conjugal love, and it is of supreme importance to have an exact idea of these.*

*This love is first of all fully human, that is to say, of the senses and of the spirit at the same time. It is not, then, a simple transport of instinct and sentiment, but also, and principally, an act of the free will, intended to*

*endure and to grow by means of the joys and sorrows of daily life, in such a way that husband and wife become one heart and one soul, and together attain their human perfection.*

*Then, this love is total, that is to say, it is a very special form of personal friendship, in which husband and wife generously share everything, without undue reservations or selfish calculations. Whoever truly loves his spouse loves not only for what he receives, but for the spouse's self, rejoicing that he can enrich his spouse with the gift of himself.*

*Again, this love is faithful and exclusive until death. This how the bride and groom intend it to be on the day when they freely and in full awareness assume the duty of the marriage bond. A fidelity which can sometimes be difficult, but is always possible, always noble and meritorious, as no one can deny. The example of so many married persons down through the centuries shows, not only that fidelity is according to the nature of marriage, but also that it is a source of profound and lasting happiness.*

*And finally this love is fruitful for it is not exhausted by the communion between husband and wife, but is destined to continue, raising up new lives. Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents.*

Blessed Paul VI goes on to explain the essential, inseparable connection, *willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning. Indeed, by its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, allows them to participate in the generation of new lives, according to laws inscribed in the very being of man and of woman. By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its direction towards man's most high calling to parenthood. We believe that the men of our day are particularly capable of seeing the deeply reasonable and human character of this fundamental principle.*

Because of this inseparable connection willed by God, there are some “no’s” that follow from this:

*to be excluded, as the teaching authority of the Church has frequently declared, is direct sterilization, whether perpetual or temporary, whether of the man or of the woman. Similarly excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means, to render procreation impossible.*

There can be serious and just reasons for spacing births. The Church, as Pope Francis famously said, does not require you to breed like rabbits. In such a case, there is a legitimate path to take:

*If, then, there are serious motives to space out births, which derive from the physical or psychological conditions of husband and wife, or from external conditions, the Church teaches that it is then permissible to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions, for the use of marriage in the infertile periods only, and in this way to regulate birth without offending the moral principles which have been recalled earlier.*

Blessed Paul VI also speaks with a prophet's voice in this encyclical. Consider that he wrote this almost fifty years ago:

*Upright men can even better convince themselves of the solid grounds on which the teaching of the Church in this field is based, if they care to reflect upon the consequences of methods of artificial birth control. Let them consider, first of all, how wide and easy a road would thus be opened up towards conjugal infidelity and the general lowering of morality. Not much experience is needed in order to know human weakness, and to understand that men -- especially the young, who are so vulnerable on this point -- have need of encouragement to be faithful to the moral law, so that they must not be offered some easy means of eluding its observance. It is also to be feared that the man, growing used*

*to the employment of anti-conceptive practices, may finally lose respect for the woman and, no longer caring for her physical and psychological equilibrium, may come to the point of considering her as a mere instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion.*

*Let it be considered also that a dangerous weapon would thus be placed in the hands of those public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies. Who could blame a government for applying to the solution of the problems of the community those means acknowledged to be licit for married couples in the solution of a family problem? Who will stop rulers from favoring, from even imposing upon their peoples, if they were to consider it necessary, the method of contraception which they judge to be most effective? In such a way men, wishing to avoid individual, family, or social difficulties encountered in the observance of the divine law, would reach the point of placing at the mercy of the intervention of public authorities the most personal and most reserved sector of conjugal intimacy.*

We only need to look at the proliferation of pornography, date rape, abortion, pre-marital sex, and the HHS Mandate to see how his prophecies have proven true.

Pope Paul concludes with words of encouragement to couples:

*Christian married couples, then, open to hearing her voice, must remember that their Christian vocation, which began at baptism, is further specified and reinforced by the sacrament of matrimony. By it husband and wife are strengthened and as it were consecrated for the faithful accomplishment of their proper duties, for the carrying out of their proper vocation even to perfection, and the Christian witness which is proper to them before the whole world. To them the Lord entrusts the task of making visible to men the holiness and sweetness of the law which unites the mutual love of husband and wife with their cooperation with the love of God the author of human life.*

This is Natural Family Planning (NFP) Awareness Week. I want to make all of you aware of NFP and the reasons behind it. As Pope Paul said this is the only legitimate way to take control of the procreative powers that a husband and wife possess. It fosters communication, intimacy, and a respect for fertility as a gift from God. In the bulletin I have included an insert with NFP Resources. There are many methods of practicing NFP, there is even an APP for that. If you are using artificial birth control consider what the Church teaches. You can learn these safe, effective, and natural ways of regulating the birth of children, while, at the same time living in conformity with the truth of how God created us. You will also be open to God's creative will. When we cooperate with

God, we also put our faith in His Providence; that whatever God asks of us he will provide for us everything we need in order to fulfill His Will.

Pope Francis has declared the upcoming liturgical year “The Year of Mercy.” He knows well, as do all Pastors, the struggles their people are having, particularly in this area. The teachings of *Humanae Vitae* can be followed with the grace of God; although it may take time, a lot of effort, prayer and penance. We are not sheep without a shepherd. Jesus gave the Church the authority to teach faith and morals infallibly. He knew that new situations would arise that would require a deeper understanding of the truth. From Pope Paul we have received a precious truth that needs to be witnessed to in our time. Saint John Paul II, through his theology of the body, expanded upon what Pope Paul taught. We are the Church of yes: Yes to God and his creation, yes to Jesus and his loving mercy, yes to marriage and family and finally, yes to forgiveness and grace.

*St. Mary of the Assumption Church,  
14908 Main Street, Upper Marlboro, MD 20772  
Phone: 301-627-3255    Email: [parish@stmaryum.org](mailto:parish@stmaryum.org)  
Website: [www.stmaryum.org](http://www.stmaryum.org)*