

**MARRIAGE AND LIFE STUDY DAY:**  
*Marriage and the Current Debate*

**Church of St. Helena**  
**Monday, September 20, 2010**

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**I wish to welcome all of you here this morning to this study day focusing on two of the most critical issues for our time, namely: marriage and family life. I commend you for giving up these precious hours on a Saturday morning in order to devote yourselves to a study of importance that the essential place of marriage and family life ought to have in your lives, the life of our Church and in the future of this nation.**

**My parents died a year and a half ago after 65½ years of married life together. When the family gathered for their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, my younger sister said that her female colleagues where she worked had asked, “How can anyone stay**

**married to the same person for sixty years?” My mother did not hesitate to provide the answer. She immediately replied, “We didn’t think about it. We just got up every morning and lived our commitment.”**

**For me, there was something so refreshingly compelling in that statement. When a man and a woman bind their love in a life-long commitment that is mutual, exclusive and open to new life, the dye in a sense is cast; the adventure has begun. Unlike Lot’s wife, two persons who have become one flesh do not look back by second-guessing themselves or questioning their decision. Rather they accept the call to love that has been given them and they strive, however imperfectly, to live each day the gift of love that they share with their spouse and their children.**

**But, my dear friends, I do not have to tell you that the intended reality of marriage as a life-long, committed and**

**procreative union between one man and one woman is being severely challenged today:**

- 1. Four to five out of every ten marriages end in divorce;**
- 2. The rate of cohabitation has accelerated from 450,000 couples in 1965 to well over 5 million couples today;**
- 3. Nearly one of every three Americans over the age of 15 has never been married, the highest level in a decade (Star Tribune, 9-22-09, p. 1).**
- 4. The number of children under the age of 18 living with a single parent has risen from 6 million in 1960 to 19 million in the year 2000 (See 2000 Census, American Association for Single People).**

**Proponents of same-sex partnerships have sharpened their political advocacy to push for the recognition in law of “domestic partnerships” as being legally equivalent with heterosexual**

**marriage, desiring to provide them with all the rights and benefits thereof. Cleverly, their arguments are cloaked in the language of civil rights, as if the right to redefine the natural order of marriage was equal to the right of persons of different racial backgrounds to share civil liberties.**

**Much of this thinking reflects the influence of the Age of Enlightenment which celebrates a highly individualistic and subjective notion of “choice.” Denying the possibility of an objective order of truth, such reasoning allows for the natural order of the body to be molded into whatever use one might desire. As Robert Bellah pointed out in his 1988 bestselling book, Habits of the Heart, Americans have lost ways of talking about what gives meaning to their life commitments, except by using a subjective kind of “rights-talk.”**

**Presently, six states legally recognize so-called “same-sex marriage.” Six others allow for “domestic partnerships” that in**

**effect grant all the legal rights due to married couples.**

**Significantly, whenever this matter has been decided upon by a popular vote, rather than left to the interpretation of the judiciary, the result has been in favor of the protection of heterosexual marriage.**

**As you can see, the stakes are high at the present moment. A number of thinkers fear that altering the institution of marriage as it has consistently been understood in our laws up until this present age will have far-reaching and perhaps unintended consequences for the ways in which men and women understand themselves and the society in which they live.**

**It is perhaps helpful to reference debates that arose in the late 1960's and early 70's proposing changes in this country's divorce laws. Certainly the idea of no-fault divorce was intended, at least in part, to liberate women who were stuck in unhappy marriages. Yet, just the opposite has happened. We now experience the sad**

reality that between one-fifth and one-third of all divorced women have fallen into poverty as a result of their divorce (W. Bradford Wilcox, et al. 2005 Why Marriage Matters). Women more often than not remain the primary caretakers for their children.

Ironically, it is men, more often than women, who benefit from so-called no-fault divorce. Back in the early 1970's, few would have predicted the real effects that such a change in the law would eventually bring about.

The present proposal to expand the definition of marriage to include persons of the same gender touches upon a reality even more basic to the social order than no-fault divorce. What are the negative though unintended consequences of the changes now being proposed? Since the fundamental human institution of marriage and the family provides the very groundwork of the social order, such consequences would be devastating to both individuals and society alike.

**How then do we go about the process of avoiding such a negative situation? Well, I believe that we must move the tone of public discourse away from the polarizing concern for individual “rights” and the equally polarizing concern for righteous moralizing and begin to speak of the meaning that underlines the nature and purpose of marriage itself. All of us, whether married or not, have a stake in this debate as well as its outcome.**

**In an attempt to offer some thoughts on the meaning of marriage, I wish to consider in this presentation the biblical, philosophical and sacramental dimensions of marriage. Finally, I would like to give a brief reflection on how indispensable I believe the marriage relationship is to the rearing of children.**

## **I. Biblical**

**In the very first chapter of the Book of Genesis, the inspired author tells the story of the ordering of creation by a direct**

**intervention of God. At the culmination of this great work, God made man in his own image, after his own likeness. Male and female did he create them.**

**Herein lies an essential truth: man and woman together were made in God's image and likeness. This implies that somehow that image is not complete without reference to both of them.**

**Immediately after their creation, we are told that "God blessed them," saying, "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it." Thus, the first blessing given to the man and woman, made in God's image, is that of procreation: to be fertile and thus to multiply in bringing forth new life. But this new life was to be different than the birds of the air or the beasts of the field. The offspring of man and woman was to be a being also made in God's image and likeness.**

**Turning to the second story of creation in chapter 2, we find God forming man out of the clay of the ground and blowing the gift of life into his nostrils. Once God places this man in the Garden of Eden, he notices that it is not good for the man to be alone.**

**Ultimately, God casts a deep sleep over the man and removes one of his ribs. From that rib, God built a woman and presented her to the man.**

**Now observe carefully from where the woman comes. God did not take a piece of the man's head so that the woman would dominate him, nor did he take a bone from his foot so that he should dominate her. Rather, he took a rib from the man's side, signifying that the man would be an equal to the woman and she to him. And this complementarity, it can be inferred, is again an important, and I would say, essential component of the man and the woman together being made in God's image.**

**Jesus, of course, confirms the vision of Genesis in the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel when he is asked about the Mosaic law which permitted divorce. His words are instructive,**

**“Have you not read that at 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.”**

**(Mt. 19:4-6)**

**Given the context in which we are attempting to define marriage today, do we not find in the words of Jesus a direct command not to separate the natural complementarity of man and woman, made in God’s image and likeness? Such separation, one can logically conclude, would deliberately thwart God’s plan for the man and woman to grow in God’ image and likeness.**

## **II. Philosophy**

**Not being a professional philosopher myself, I lean on the writings of Robert P. George at Princeton University for the major ideas in this section. Those thoughts are contained in an article he published in his own edited volume, The Meaning of Marriage: Family, State, Market and Morals.**

**George opposes what he calls the dominant ‘lifestyle liberal’ views of marriage because he believes they misrepresent the nature of marriage as a purely instrumental good, rather than an intrinsic good in and of itself: “The marital act,” he argues, “is a two-in-one flesh communion of persons, which is only made possible by the biological, emotional, and spiritual complementarity shared between man and woman.” (xvi) This relationship is naturally ordered to the good of procreation as well as to the good of spousal unity.**

**But these two goods (i.e., the procreative and unitive), George contends, are tightly bound to form a single reproductive principle.**

**Here, he quotes Professor Germain Grisez who writes:**

**“Though a male and a female are complete individuals with respect to other functions—for example, nutrition, sensation, and locomotion—with respect to reproduction they are only potential parts of a mated pair, which is the complete organism capable of reproducing sexually. Even if the mated pair is sterile, intercourse, provided it is the reproductive behavior characteristic of the species, makes the copulating male and female one organism.” (“Christian Family as the Fulfillment of Sacramental Marriage,”**

**Studies in Christian Ethics, 9.1 (Spring, 1996)**

**23-33.)**

**George then goes on to assert that not all reproductive-type acts are marital. An adulterous act, for example, may be reproductive in type, but is clearly non-marital. But there can be no marital act that is not reproductive in type.**

**Masturbation, sodomy and other sexual acts that are not reproductive in type cannot unite two persons organically, which is to say, as a single reproductive principle. These acts cannot therefore serve as marital (that is one-flesh bodily) acts. Such acts may be performed for the sake of ends that are extrinsic to themselves as bodily persons, for example to achieve sexual satisfaction, to release tension, to obtain pleasure or to express affection or friendship. But they are not marital acts since they do not achieve the one-flesh bodily unity.**

**George concludes his remarks by saying:**

**“The one-flesh unity of marriage is not a merely instrumental good, that is, a reason for acting whose intelligibility as a reason depends on other ends to which it is a means. This unity is an intrinsic good, that is, a reason for acting whose intelligibility as a reason depends on no ulterior end. The central and justifying point of sex is not pleasure (or even the sharing of pleasure) per se, however much sexual pleasure is sought—rightly sought—as an aspect of the perfection of marital union; the point of sex, rather, is marriage itself, considered as an essentially and irreducibly (though not merely) bodily union of persons—a union effectuated and**

**renewed by acts of sexual congress—conjugal acts.” (p. 153)**

**Only a male and a female, therefore, can form a single reproductive principle wherein the unitive and procreative goods are closely bound together in a uniquely marital act. In this act, a false dualism is overcome by the embodied persons joining in a one-flesh bodily action. Such an act differs fundamentally in meaning, value and significance from the act of sodomy or any other intrinsically non-marital act. Children born of marital acts are not ends extrinsic to marriage but rather gifts that supervene on acts whose central and justifying point is precisely the marital unity of spouses.**

### **III. Sacramental Understanding of Marriage**

**Having reviewed the biblical evidence of complementarity between male and female and considered it as a reflection of the image of God himself, and having discovered in philosophical logic**

**the unique quality of the two-in-one flesh bodily union that alone defines a marital act, we come to the heart of today's talk in a consideration of the sacramental meaning of marriage.**

**The word “sacrament” comes from the Latin “sacramentum,” which itself is a translation of the Greek word “mysterion,” a word which signifies one of the seven central liturgical rites of the Church through which participants experience the Paschal Mystery of Christ and grow in the life of grace. The Church herself is the mysterion, or sacrament of salvation, as she communicates God's love which, in turn, draws believers into greater and greater levels of holiness.**

**The Second Vatican Council called for a renewal in the understanding, approach and practice of the celebration of sacraments within the total life of the Church. The sacrament of marriage has benefited from this renewal by receiving a greater emphasis on the interpersonal life shared between the husband and**

**wife, on how the spiritual life of the spouses grows from this interpersonal dynamic, and how these two factors both contribute in existential quality to the ongoing development of the marital relationship in a continual process of becoming.**

**Those of you who are involved in marriage preparation no doubt warn engaged couples against preparing only for their wedding day, but encourage them rather to look beyond that moment to a lifetime of interpersonal sharing in a common life together. As the result of a sacramental marriage, a couple is truly married “in the Lord” and his redeeming grace penetrates their love and deepens their union. Two essential qualities of God’s love are fidelity, that is, a being with, and forgiveness, that is, a being for. These two qualities become essential components of a Christian marriage.**

**Fidelity implies that one’s spouse holds an exclusive and preeminent place in the life of the husband and wife. That gives**

**rise to a claim on one's time, energy and talents. A second claim is given, in turn, to one's children and then to a wide circle of social contacts. Because God's love is always expressed in the giving of self, married love is never reserved just to the spouse and the home. Certainly, it begins and ends there, but in between it is meant to be shared for the benefit of the common good.**

**Forgiveness is an essential component to the vitality and permanence of the marital commitment. Rather than believing "love means never having to say you're sorry," a spouse who is cooperating with God's grace will always find the words to overcome pride in an ability to forgive the hurts inflicted by the other partner, whether intended or unintended.**

**Developing the interpersonal dimension allows the couple to never take the other one for granted, never to presume he or she knows the answer to the partner's next question, but rather is**

**always open to what may surprise or give greater insight into the other and their thoughts and opinions.**

**The spiritual dimension of this sacrament begins with an understanding that the couple are the ordinary ministers of the sacrament. In every other sacrament, an ordained minister presides and celebrates. But with matrimony, the priest or deacon is a witness, not the celebrant. This is an important distinction because it implies that the husband and wife themselves mediate Christ's love to the other. It is, therefore, the Christ in the husband who loves the Christ in the wife and vice-versa. Each becomes the cause of the other's growth in holiness. As the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, has said,**

**“The spouse is called upon to develop a new attitude of love, manifesting towards the wife or her husband a charity that is both gentle**

**and strong like that which Christ has for the Church.” (FC 25)**

**Lastly, there is a true existential dynamic to this sacramental union or, as some might describe it, “a work in progress.” Every relationship has peaks and valleys, times when the romance or adventure waxes and wanes. But love that is rooted in God’s grace does not die. As my mother said, one gets up each morning and lives the commitment. And what keeps that routine from becoming a forced march is prayer, both personal/private and communal/liturgical prayer. Years ago, Fr. Peyton sounded the mantra that the couple who prays together, stays together. And I believe that is so true. And it is true because if husband and wife are addressing God together in heartfelt adoration or petition then again the presence of the marital grace that rests in each spouse will be stimulated to new growth. And just to be absolutely clear here: Sunday Mass is a non-negotiable. Nothing short of sickness**

or death should keep you away. And by all means, rearrange your schedules, and go to Mass together.

The sacrament of marriage inserts your married relationship into the Paschal Mystery of Christ's suffering, dying and rising. This is what you ought to be living out on a day-to-day basis. But the ability and strength to do so becomes all the clearer when it is joined to and helped by participation in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. After all, the laity, according to Gaudium et Spes, is called to be the Church's leaven in society, a force for transforming society and the world.

#### **IV. Understanding the Link Between the Unitive and the Procreative.**

Those of us who were raised on the Baltimore Catechism remember memorizing that the primary end of marriage is the procreation and education of children, while the secondary end or purpose was the mutual support of husband and wife. Ranking

**this order of preference allowed for a clear message that, all things being equal, marriage ought to result in the procreation of children.**

**The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council chose not to use this language of “primary” and “secondary.” Some commentators saw in this variance a change in the Church’s understanding of the relationship between the unitive and procreative ends of marriage. Personally, I do not believe that any such change was intended.**

**Let’s read what the Council Fathers actually did say:**

**“The institution of marriage and married love are, of their nature, directed to the begetting and upbringing of children and they find their culmination in this. Thus, it is that a man and woman, who “are no longer two but one flesh” (Mt. 19, 6) in their marital covenant,**

**help and serve each other in their intimate union of persons and activities, and from day-to-day experience and increase their sense of oneness.” (G.S. 48)**

**Interestingly, the first sentence places emphasis on the begetting and upbringing of children which is the “culmination” of marriage, while the second emphasis is placed on the intimate union of the spouses in everyday life.**

**Again those commentators who detected a change in meaning here argue that the lack of a clear priority has made both ends of equal moral weight, thus setting up the possibility of a moral conflict between the two in which one end (i.e., the unitive) would have to be chosen over the other (i.e., the procreative).**

**On the contrary, I believe that, just as we saw in the philosophical section of this paper, the bishops were attempting to**

**describe the inherent link between these two ends, arguing that both are inseparably bound together and both are meant to be realized in union together. Indeed, they are joined together just as the spouses are joined together.**

**This, then, explains the continuity of the teaching of Pope Paul VI with his predecessors in stating that every act of marital, sexual intercourse must be open to the possibility of new life.**

**While it is certainly understood that not every marital act will result in the creation of new life, it must necessarily be open to that possibility if it is to reflect the purpose intended by the Creator. In other words, such acts, as was said before, must be reproductive-in-type.**

**This, then, describes the responsibility that parents have to the conception of children, but what about their upbringing?**

**The person who, in my opinion, has made the greatest contribution in researching the positive benefits that accrue to children who grow up in an intact, married biological family unit is Maggie Gallagher, President of the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy. She first cites the research of social scientists in measuring how much better children on average do when their parents are married in a stable, non-violent relationship.**

**She points to the following conclusions that have been established by the research of twelve leading family scholars:**

- 1) Marriage increases the likelihood that children enjoy warm, close relationships with parents.**
- 2) Cohabitation is not the functional equivalent of marriage in terms of measurable results in a child's productivity or their stability as adult citizens.**

- 3) **Children raised outside of intact married homes are more likely to divorce or become unwed parents themselves.**
- 4) **Marriage reduces child poverty.**
- 5) **Divorce increases the risk of school failure for children, and reduces the likelihood that they will graduate from college and achieve high status jobs.**
- 6) **Children in intact married homes are healthier, on average, than children in other family forms.**
- 7) **Babies born to married parents have sharply lower rates of infant mortality.**
- 8) **Children from intact married homes have lower rates of substance abuse.**
- 9) **Divorce increases rates of mental illness and distress in children, including the risk of suicide.**

- 10) Boys and young men from intact married homes are less likely to commit crimes.**
- 11) Married women are less likely to experience domestic violence than cohabiting and serially dating women.**
- 12) Children raised outside of intact marriages are more likely to be victims of both sexual and physical child abuse.**

**These twelve researchers conclude,**

**“Marriage is more than a private emotional relationship. It is also a social good. Not every person can or should marry. And not every child raised outside of marriage is damaged as a result. But communities where good-enough marriages are common have better outcomes for children, women, and men than do communities suffering from high**

**rates of divorce, unmarried childbearing, and high-conflict or violent marriages.”**

**From such research, it can be demonstrated that family structure does matter for children and the intact, low-conflict marriage of two biological parents is proven to be the most helpful for the raising of healthy productive children.**

**At the heart of the so-called “gay marriage” debate, according to Gallagher, is the question of how children fare when raised by same-sex couples.**

**She acknowledges several studies that have been done on this issue, most of which report favorably on gay parenting.**

**Gallagher challenges those findings on four counts:**

- 1. None of the studies were based on random, representative samples;**

2. **Many of the outcomes used were unrelated to standard measures used to evaluate families of two biological parents;**
3. **Few or more of the studies follow children of unisex parents into adulthood.**
4. **Most of the studies compare children with divorced lesbian mother-headed families with children in divorced heterosexual mother-headed families, ignoring the influence on a son or daughter by the father in an intact, low conflict marriage of two biological parents.**

**Gallagher admits that:**

**“Marriage provides children not just with any two adults, but with their own parents: the mother and father who made them biologically are expected to maintain that parenting union socially, economically,**

**sexually and psychologically as well. The social science evidence we have establishes fairly powerfully that this family structure is best for children (at least of all the family structures that have been well-studied), but it does not tell us as clearly why or how.”**

**(p. 209)**

**There is, however, strong evidence to suggest that the intact family structure works better for children because fathers and mothers parent differently, in ways that complement one another and boost a child’s well-being. And this difference is not limited to the differentiation in tasks, but also in the area of gender identity through which a child begins to understand his or her own sexual embodiment, both from the mother as well as the father.**

**I urge you to read Gallagher’s arguments which are found in Robert George’s edited work which I cited above. She argues**

**convincingly that the benefits of marriage as it has traditionally been defined “offer to the child the natural benefits that flow from being raised by his or her own mother and father united in one loving family.”**

**My friends, I hope this survey of the biblical, philosophical and sacramental meanings of marriage, as well as my brief reflection on what best serves our children, has been helpful to you. We are reminded by the Second Vatican Council that all of us who have been baptized and confirmed in our Catholic faith share in the Church’s mission of salvation. Therefore, we all have a specific vocation to make the Church present and active as salt and light in and to the world. (L.G. 33) But to do so in a credible way, we must be knowledgeable of what we believe as Catholics and why we believe it. We must be prepared and willing to enter the civic debate confident that society needs to know and embrace the truth that ultimately comes from God.**

**Each of us is his or her brother's keeper. We are obliged to protect and foster the common good. We are ultimately called to be those instruments through which Jesus will reconcile all things in himself.**

**The same Second Vatican Council reminds us that the well-being of each person and of human and Christian society as a whole is intimately connected with the healthy state of marriage and the family within the community. (G.S. 47) Therefore, we cannot stand by and see the human and sacred supports for marriage and family life be knocked down by false ideologies and a wrong headed egalitarianism.**

**“As Aristotle explained in his account of moral formation and human flourishing, culture humanizes us by demanding our obedience. Happiness does not come from living according to one's desires. It comes**

**from desiring to live according to demanding and disciplinary social norms that transcend individual desires.” (R.R. Reno, *Marriage, Morality and Culture*)**

**My friends, we must join together to make our voices of reason and faith be heard in a way that fosters a culture of life based on marriage as a “two-in-one flesh bodily” union. We must challenge those who believe that they can make of marriage whatever they desire. And with the special sacramental grace of the Holy Spirit, we ourselves must be able to witness to the noble vocation of marriage, by just getting up each morning and living out our commitment.**

**Thank you!**