



Conduct Your Affairs With Humility

By Fr. Charles Samson

Homily Contest Winner – 2013

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Two weeks ago, I ran in my high school cross country team’s annual Alumni Race. It’s an occasion to which I look forward every year; the current SLUH cross country team invites its alumni back to Forest Park for a day of camaraderie, reminiscing and, well, competition (we’re guys!). It always humors me to see how we alumni have changed over the years, but it always humors me even more to note that one thing which doesn’t ever seem to change among the alumni: some are still convinced that they are in the same shape that they were in high school. These fellas take off like a shot out of a gun and burn a way-too-fast first mile, only to crater in the then quite painful second mile. That 2nd mile makes these alumni face the facts, own up to the truth, about themselves; they are not in high school anymore.

Actually, to be honest, one of ‘those alumni’ that weekend was *this* guy, and that’s exactly what my dad said to me before the race: “Charlie, you’re going to be slow; you’re not 18 anymore.” Not exactly the kind of pep-talk I was looking for, but it was the truth that I wish I had accepted. I went out too fast, way too fast; the disastrous mile that followed became for me a painful reminder that the truth can be, at times, a tough pill to swallow.

But yet, swallow it we must.

What makes truth hard to face is that its acceptance presupposes a certain attitude that we often are not inclined to take. It requires humility. “My child,” our First Reading from Sirach tells us today, “conduct your affairs with humility.” Or, in the frank, though to-me-endearing language of my father: “c’mon, you’re not 18 anymore!” In order to own up to the truth—in order to face the facts—we have to be humble. That’s why Scholastic philosophers defined humility in a simple way: *humilitas est veritas*—humility IS the truth!

“Be humble,” Holy Mother Church invites us today. “Own up to truth,” our readings encourage us, who hear Our Lord calling us in the Gospel to embrace the virtue of humility.

It’s to that virtue that I also invite you to open your minds and hearts today. I, whom you salute as ‘father’—who laid down my body and life on the marble of the cathedral three months ago at my priestly ordination *for you*, who begets in you the supernatural life of faith at the womb of the baptismal font, who provide you with gift of finest wheat from this altar by the work of and from my very hands...I have recently heard, in prayer and through conversation with some of our young faithful, the call *to me* that Pope Paul VI made in his watershed encyclical in 1968 on human life (*Humanae Vitae*): “you who are priests,” the pope writes: “it is your principal duty to spell out clearly and completely the Church’s teaching” on the dignity of the transmission of human life and, specifically, the grave evil done and threatened to it by contraception, the practice of which is alarmingly widespread.



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That's what I would like to do today. I am your spiritual father, and I love you; I have given everything for you, and I want only what is good for you—that is, I just want you to be humble and to embrace truth, which our Lord promises “will set you free.” Today, let us seek the truth about contraception in all of its forms (the Pill, barriers, intra-uterine devices (IUD's), etc.); in humility, let us expose the mechanisms by which contraception operates within and among us. In short, let us face the fact that contraception is one big lie.

Actually, a series of lies. The first is that: “the Pill” is healthcare, insofar as it is medicine that a woman takes to protect her and/or her partner's interest in inhibiting the possibility of conception as a result of intercourse. Fact: it is a lie that the Pill is healthcare. The World Health Organization, in cataloguing different medicines, labeled the Pill as a class-one carcinogen—that is, a cancer causing agent—because of the dangerous chemicals that it introduces into a woman's body. In fact, research shows that the Pill increases the risk of breast cancer by over 40% for a woman who takes it before she delivers her first baby; the risk increases to 70% if it is used for four or more years before the woman's first child is born. That doesn't sound like healthcare to me! It sounds, actually, rather unhealthy.

Here's the truth that's underneath the lie that the Pill is healthcare: fertility is not a disease! Think about it: medicinal pills are taken for illnesses—that is, to fix something unhealthy. Yet, THE Pill is taken when nothing in the woman's body is unhealthy. Pregnancy as the result of intercourse means that a woman's body is functioning as it should! Fertility is not something that needs to be treated! Using the Pill, however, implies that it is.

Second lie: “The Pill is a good thing for society,” insofar as it can help with population control and can eliminate difficult scenarios, etc. Fact: the Pill has destabilized society. Birth control's separation of sexual intercourse from procreation supports relationships that are objectively weaker (in terms of, among other things, duration and the level of commitment to, and investment in, each other) than traditional marriage—that is: hooking up, cohabitation, adultery, and serial monogamy. These relationships in fact chip away at the stability of society by replacing the very *bond* that glues society together—that is, marriage, and hence that basic building block of society that results from marriage between man and woman: the family. In the place of this relationship, the Pill fosters ones that cannot and do not provide for society the stability of marriage; evidence: among couples that use the Pill, the percentage rates of divorce, single parent households, abuse and poverty go WAY up.

Here's the truth behind the lie that the Pill is a good thing for society: it's not good for marriages, on which society is built. When a spouse uses the pill or a condom and engages in the marital embrace—that noble act, the highest and fullest human expression of love for another person, to whom one gives one's *whole* self: mind, heart, and even body...when one uses contraception, he/she effectively lies to his/her spouse. The language of the act itself says: “I give myself completely to you,” but when contraception is used, one in fact *doesn't* give his or her whole self completely, because he or she withholds a part of him/herself that is so special to his/her identity: that is, his or her fertility.

This is perhaps the most sinister aspect of contraception: it literally writes a lie into the very act of the marital embrace, which is by nature BOTH unitive (that is, an expression of mutual love and affection) and procreative (that is, open to the transmission of new life). In so distorting the natural order, contraception deeply frustrates the very design + intentions of our Creator; for this reason, its use is considered to be a serious, or mortal, sin.



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Third lie: “The Pill protects women,” insofar as it prevents a potentially distressing, if not dangerous, post-partem family situation from the woman’s point of view. No, in fact it doesn’t! As Paul VI himself wrote: “Another effect of contraception that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.”

Amen! The truth behind the lie that the Pill protects women is this: the Pill in fact endangers women—for one—by tempting men towards irresponsibility. I use the word “irresponsible” deliberately; contraception is not a responsible expression of love, because by it, one does not respond to the *whole* person, but only to a *part*...and this can exclude, and hence endanger, the physical, spiritual, and emotional integrity of women (and, for that matter, of men too...both become victims of contraception’s lies).

Fourth and final lie: “There is no other way” to reasonable child-bearing and family planning. Fact: there is! It’s called Natural Family Planning, which teaches spouses to exercise **true humility** in expressing their love to each other. In accepting the patterns of fertility that God wrote into human nature—namely, into the woman’s body—couples are encouraged, in the words of Paul VI, to see man not as the *master* of the sources of life, but rather the *minister* of the design established by the Creator. To that end, a couple observes when, based on the woman’s cycles, conception is least likely to occur, and engages in the marital embrace at those moments, as best as they can be determined. The couples are challenged to not use this method with a contraceptive mentality, which they jettison by always remaining open to life should conception result.

So, finally, the truth behind the lie that there is no way other than the Pill to reasonable parenting is this: Natural Family Planning, with its unintended pregnancy rate of between .3% and 3%, and with the doors of dialogue, trust, respect, and self-control that it opens, is a truly responsible method by which a couple can **manage** its fertility.

These, then, are the truths behind the lies of contraception—which is not healthcare, not a good thing for our society, does not protect women, and is not the way to responsible parenting. In short, contraception is not good for our souls.

It takes a great deal of—perhaps even, in these days, heroic—humility to swallow this truth. As your spiritual father, whose ultimate concern in this life is the salvation of your souls, it is my job to echo frankly, though I hope not bluntly, the words of Sirach in our First Reading: “My child, conduct your affairs with humility.” Today, let us face the facts: let us own up to the truth that contraception is a big lie, and its use a serious sin.

Come...come, I invite you: if you or anyone you know has practiced contraception, come, or invite them to come, to the sacrament of Confession: be free of this grave deception, be *free* of the baggage it brings you and your relationships, and be *healthy* in soul. Hear out the vision of responsible transmission of life espoused by the Catholic faith; open your heart to the plan of God, who created man and women in His image, and gave them this blessed task: be fruitful, and multiply.



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