



It Is Worth It

By Fr. Edward Voltz

Homily Contest Winner – 2015

Suppose a young married couple, deeply in love, was told that their dream house was in grave danger. This was a home that reminded them of all of the joys and happiness they had formed together. They could not afford to buy another home, and on top of that, this was a home of exquisite beauty and worth. Yet they were informed one day that there was a 50% chance that it would burn to the ground at some inopportune time in the years ahead, with little to no warning. They were told there would be no loss of life involved, but still, the house would be lost.

Now suppose there was a solution for this grave danger, but there was only a single option. This couple was given a solution that required a small investment in time every week, some self-discipline and commitment as a married couple together, but they could reduce the odds of their home burning to the ground almost entirely. The 50% chance of their house burning to the ground could be reduced to something close to a 2% chance.

If given this scenario, what do you think the couple's reaction would be?

They would probably be thankful they were told this information, and I imagine they would immediately begin to make the changes needed to guarantee the safety of their house.

I give you this scenario, because it can be an apt comparison for preserving something immeasurably more valuable than a house.

Marriages, metaphorically speaking, burn down to the ground in this country with a rate of approximately 50%. There is a single lifestyle change that a married couple can make, which immediately puts them into a group of people who statistically speaking, demonstrate a divorce rate of approximately 2%.

Interestingly enough, this lifestyle change is simply to follow the Church's teachings in regard to planning one's family. In a nutshell, the Church speaks out against contraception, and calls on people to embrace one of the forms of natural family planning, which the Church approves, to help organize one's family.

Study, clinical experience, and the experience of NFP users has shown, that the divorce rates of couples who follow the Church's teaching on this matter, and practice natural family planning, have a remarkably improved track record of preserving the love that is central to a successful marriage. Divorce rates for those who follow the Church's teaching drop into the single digits. That is huge! And relatively speaking, it is such a simple change.

I think we've all got to admit, if we value marriage in general, if we value the marriages we are in, and if we value doing everything we can to ensure our children have a successful marriage, that it is at least reasonable



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to highly consider the Church's teaching on this matter. If we would do everything we could to preserve a house from burning to the ground, then how much more so should we work to preserve marriage?

Some, when they hear this talk about statistics, may think, "well, correlation does not cause effect." Not always... However, causation *always* leads to correlation – so correlation is often a clue to causation. And that should get us to consider things more closely.

With that in mind, the Church insists that this teaching related to the sanctity of marriages, comes from God Himself, who created us, and knows what acts lead to our human flourishing. God knows which human acts cause damage to human relationships. It is for this reason that *Humanae Vitae*, a document I'd encourage everyone to read, states: "*Another effect 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 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.*"

Considering the divorce rates in society have skyrocketed since the advent of hormonal contraception, is it at least not possible that these methods do indeed cause men and woman to forget the reverence that is due to each other? The Church not only says it is possible, but that this does indeed occur, and that God, who loves us so much, is calling us to something greater. And this is key here: He is calling us, *for our own good!* Just as he called Adam and Eve to avoid eating of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, lest they die, he calls us to aspire to something greater, *for our own good.*

Part of that great good, besides preserving the bond between marriage, is avoiding the physical harm that comes from using hormonal contraceptives, and many other forms of contraception. Many do not know that the World Health Organization classifies birth control pills as class one carcinogens, the same category as cigarettes. The Mayo Clinic has asserted that in some situations, hormonal contraceptives increase a woman's risk for developing breast cancer. Countless other studies have demonstrated that these methods increase the percentage of woman who develop blood clots, heart disease, infertility, cervical cancer, and a host of other physical problems.

In many ways, simple common sense tells us this is true. We all know that taking something as simple as an over the counter medication may cause adverse side effects in the human body. Imagine taking something everyday, that destroys the functioning of a perfectly healthy reproductive system. *Of course* it is going to have negative effects on other parts of the body. Treating a woman's body, and fertility as a disease, is not "pro-woman," and it is not worthy of the respect, reverence, and love that is due a daughter of God.

There are so many scientific reasons to embrace the Church's teaching on contraception and other forms of birth control. Not the least of them involves the fact that practicing a method to regulate family size that the Church approves, like natural family planning, has success rates as high as 99%. And there is a difference in these natural methods from a moral standpoint. Just as there are healthy ways of losing weight, so too are there unhealthy ways. Just as a father would be absolutely heartbroken to find out his child was struggling with bulimia in order to lose weight, so too does it break the heart of God when he sees His children choose unhealthy ways of family planning. And by unhealthy, I mean unhealthy both physically and spiritually. As God is the author of marriage, so too is He the one who teaches us how we are to live it out.



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“Married love particularly reveals its true nature and nobility when we realize that it takes its origin from God, who ‘is love,’ the Father ‘from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. Marriage, then, is far from being the effect of chance or the result of the blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design. As a consequence, husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives.’”

That is a direct quote from *Humanae Vitae* on the subject, and I think it gets at the sense of the sacredness that must always be preserved when approaching the union between a man and woman who are involved in the transmission of human life. Our actions must reflect the good, the holy, and the beautiful in all we do.

There is a way in which our actions can and should be in harmony with that. God wants our cooperation in this area. This cooperation entails trust in God, learning to love one’s spouse with a selfless love, and a recovery of the sense of sacredness that is at the heart of married life.

All of this, by the way, was taught by a person who knew something about what genuine love looked like, Blessed Mother Teresa. She ceaselessly spoke on this subject, and in her most succinct form, she said this: “The way to plan the family is natural family planning, not contraception.” There are so many more eloquent things she said regarding this subject, but I think if she were here today, and was asked about all of the challenges required to follow the Church’s on this matter, she might simply say this: “It is worth it. It is worth it!”

There is much more I could say on this subject as well, and I would welcome the opportunity to speak with anyone regarding this matter. I recognize it is a difficult one, but it is a subject I really believe needs to be addressed for the good of our own families, and the good of our children’s future. It is impossible to address everything here, so I would simply like to wrap up with the words of Christ. He says: *‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.’* The key thing in this for us, is the command to love God with “all your mind.” Think about that for a minute... we are called, by God, to use every bit of our intellect, to learn about Him, and to follow Him. Since not every issue can be addressed in this time period, I would like to simply encourage you to examine these issues deeper, to do some research on them. In short, I’d like to encourage you to love God “with all your mind,” by studying in a more in depth manner, the reasons for the Church’s teaching on these issues. The Church has always taught, and always will teach that objectively speaking, the use of contraception is a grave sin. Find out why the Church teaches what she does. God wants you to be educated. I believe if you do that, you will find behind the challenge, the voice of a loving God who is speaking to you for your own welfare.



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