



On Holy Trinity Sunday

By Fr. Drew Hoffman

Homily Contest Winner – 2016

Purpose: Contraception keeps a family from fulfilling its dignity as an image of the Trinity because it does not allow for the mutual total gift of self.

A couple of weeks ago I was attempting to explain the Trinity to a 2nd Grade PSR class. We discussed the sign of the Cross, the three persons in one God, and the shamrock as a helpful image. Their receptivity to it was impressive—children have an insight into these difficult subjects that sometimes adults do not—but as you can imagine, the task was not an easy one. The Trinity is a complex and difficult issue, one full of thoughts and questions, even for the greatest theological mind. Even St. Augustine, one of the great thinkers in history, was told by an angel that attempting to fully comprehend the Trinity was as possible as putting all of the water in the ocean into a hole in the sand on the beach.

Even though it is a hard, almost impossible, concept to understand, God does want to guide us to all truth, as we heard in the Gospel, and so we have in our lives an image, an icon that reflects the Trinity and helps us to learn about it and better integrate it in our lives. That image is *the family*. How so? We get some guidance for this in our Gospel today. Jesus tells his disciples that “everything that the Father has is mine” (Jn 16:15). What does this mean? It means that God the Father and God the Son share themselves with each other. What the Father has is given to the Son and what the Son has is given to the Father. This is called a self-gift, the giving of oneself to another. And since God is love, we know that this self-gift is done out of love. In fact, it is love itself. This love is so powerful between the Father and the Son that from it comes a third person, the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. The total self-gift of love between two persons in the Trinity brings about another, each equal as God but each distinct as persons.

We see something similar in the love between a husband and wife. When a couple gives themselves to one another in love, another person comes forth, a child, from that love. Their love is so powerful that another life exists after that love. The family then, especially in the relationship between husband and wife, has a profound dignity as an image of the Trinity. What an honor to be able to reflect the greatest love there is, the love in the Trinity, and to show that love to those around us. But there is an important word used in our Gospel that impacts how the image (the family) should live in reflecting that Trinitarian love. Jesus says that “*everything* that the Father has is mine.” Everything the Father has is given to the Son and everything of the Son is given to the Father. True self-giving love does not hold back anything to the other; that would inhibit the love. The ultimate love, the love we are called to reflect, gives totally. Nothing is held back or guarded. This is where the Church’s teaching that contraception is wrong stems from; not from an archaic dogma or a desire to control or an unwillingness to change. No, in reality, its goal is to allow couples to more fully live out their dignity.

Contraception is a sin because it does not conform to the profound dignity that God has in mind for us. It holds back a part of the person; it is unwilling to give that part to the other. When love is in line with God’s plan, it is a



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total self-gift, and when love is a self-gift, it is *always* open to life, like the love between the Father and Son is always open to the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

What this means is that *every* act of this love should be open to life, not simply the times when a couple wants to have a child. All acts of love should be open to life and thus a complete gift of the self, because it is that love that is the deepest and so allows the family to emulate the Trinity. The love between the Father and the Son cannot be self-giving at some times and not others. The Trinity would not be the Trinity then. No, it is in each act for the Trinity and so it should be in each act for us as well. This is the case in all vocations, not just marriage. If there is a part of me that I am not willing to give to the Church, or to God, or to the people I minister to, then I am acting contraceptively, I am failing to acknowledge my call to love in a way that is always open to life and fruit!

What, then is an alternative, a way to live out the dignity of love and avoiding the sin of contraception while still being responsible? Natural Family Planning provides a way for couples to be open to life—and so willing to give all of themselves to their spouse—at all times while still spacing births for appropriate reasons. NFP reverences the gift of fertility by recognizing fertile and infertile times. When people hear NFP, they may think about bad science. However, developments in science over the past few decades have put Natural Family Planning, in particular the Creighton Model, on the cutting edge in this field. Effectiveness rates are usually around 99%, higher than contraceptives. Skilled doctors work with couples. Well educated and trained staffs provide year round service and instruction. All these things together put Natural Family Planning at the front of fertility care. And it is truly that: *care*. Care for the couple, care for the family, and care for the dignity that God has called us all to. These systems are easy to learn, easy to use, and allow the couple to avoid contraception and so live out their dignity.

In addition, the Creighton Model, since it is natural, respects the dignity of the woman herself. God has given women a tremendous gift in her fertility. It is not something to be suppressed or looked down upon, but rather to be celebrated and lived out. Also, the Creighton Model encourages—no, necessitates—that husband and wife work together to learn the gift of this fertility. This working together, this mutual attention to the gifts God has given us, increases and strengthens the bond and relationship between a couple, furthering their ability and willingness to give everything to the other.

These natural methods of family planning allow the couple to always be open to life and to avoid closing down the total gift of self between the couple that allows them to reflect the Trinity. Contraception is not in line with that dignity of the family. For many, this teaching is hard, be it in the change of lifestyle it will take, the inevitable struggles of those already attempting to live out this dignity, or in the willingness to believe that contraception is wrong. In all of these instances, and for those already practicing Natural Family Planning, know three things. If you have any questions, concerns, comments or complaints please feel free to come to me. I am happy to help and direct you to one of the doctors in the parish who practices fertility care. The second is that Paul tells us in the 2nd Reading that “the love of God has been poured into our hearts” (Rm 5:5). Since that love, which gives totally, is within us, it gives us the confidence to know that we can live a life that loves like God does. Finally, the Holy Spirit desires, as we heard in the Gospel to “guide you to all truth.” God wants you to come to the truth of this message; he wants to guide you there. But prayer will be vital to listen to that guide. When living this type of life is difficult, or when questions about the truth of this message arise, prayer is at the center;



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ask God for assistance, for guidance, to walk with you, to teach you to love like he loves. We have a tremendous dignity, and a tremendous call to love; let us ask God for the strength and courage to live out that call!



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