

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

THE ANNIVERSARY OF "HUMAN LIFE."

A couple of weeks ago, I happened to see a documentary on CNN which was quite good. It was all about the year 1968 which was a very turbulent year in the history of America and in the world. Here in the United States in 1968, there were two terrible assassinations - that of Doctor Martin Luther King and also Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Riots occurred in many cities and there was a great deal of opposition to the Vietnam War on college campuses with students leading the protests. The President at that time, Lyndon B. Johnson, was vilified as being a murderer. The CNN documentary brought all those events to light again.

1968 was also a controversial year in the Catholic Church as well. It was in that year that Pope Paul VI promulgated a very controversial encyclical letter that was entitled "Humanae Vitae", Latin for "On Human Life." In this letter, Pope Paul stated that each sexual act between a husband and a wife had to remain open to the procreation of life.

During the early 1960's "the pill" as it had come to be known, was developed and became readily available. There was a lot of pressure at that time for the Church to reconsider its teaching on contraception. But the Holy Father as Vicar of Christ decreed otherwise.

When the Pope issued his letter fifty years ago, it was like a bomb going off. Many priests opposed it and some were suspended from their office. A good number of the Catholic faithful for all practical purposes just ignored the teaching of Paul VI and did their own thing. Clergy did not preach about it too often and the result is that according to one recent poll, 89% of Catholics say that using artificial contraception is morally acceptable and not really an issue.

Well, the church considers it an issue because we believe in life! Today quite a few people in our society consider pregnancy something like a disease. There is a phrase, "guard against pregnancy." Why? To have a child, to be a co-creator with God in bringing forth a human life is the greatest thing that one could possibly imagine. Children in our materialistic and hedonistic world are often considered a burden and a limitation on our own pleasure.

The Church of course does not teach that couples should have as many children as physically possible. For good reason, a couple may decide to postpone a pregnancy by using the natural family planning method. I often speak about NFP to couples who are preparing for marriage. Although it requires some discipline, couples who practice natural family planning report that it has strengthened their marital relationship.

Pope Paul VI was a prophetic voice when he penned his letter fifty years ago this month - July 25, 1968. The Holy Father predicted that if the Church's teaching was not followed, there would be a general lowering of morality. I think that we have seen that come to pass in the years since. For instance, there are so many divorces, children born out of wedlock, legalized abortion, homosexual "marriage" and so on.

When the sexual act is devoid of its essential meaning (unity and procreation) then we are on a slippery slope morally speaking and anything is possible. As Catholics, we should not be ashamed of our Church and its teachings, for they represent essentially the teaching of its founder, Jesus Christ. Fifty years is a long time, but time will prove where wisdom lies!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Jerome