

- Last Sunday I spoke of the dangers of sin, and how we must do all we can to cut it out of our lives. Remember what our Lord said about sin in last Sunday's Gospel?
- He said: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off . . . . And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off . . . . And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out."
- Drastic words. But our Lord's words are drastic because, when it comes to sin, the stakes are high. Sin offends God; it alienates us from God and makes it harder for us to love and live a holy life.
- Our sins hurt others and can jeopardize our salvation. In the worst case, our sins can lead us to hell. So, we must never compromise with sin, but rather battle it with all our might.
- Yet this battle against sin is not simply a personal battle. While we must all fight against our own sins, we must also realize that there's a larger battle for souls going on all around us – a battle that has been going on since the dawn of man, a battle between good and evil.
- We are living in a time when this battle for souls is becoming all the more hostile and out in the open – even within our Church!
- We see this battle in our politics, in our media, in our entertainment. It's a battle in which man is not simply tempted to sin, but rather in which the very nature and understanding of man is called into question.
- On one side we have the historical teachings of the Church and traditional Christianity, which understands man as having an inherent dignity, a dignity derived from the fact that we are created in the image and likeness of God.
- Included in this understanding of man's dignity is the understanding that the act by which man is brought forth into the world, the marital act, is itself sacred.
- On the other side – a side most often represented by liberal politicians, the media, and the entertainment industry - is the understanding that man has no inherent value, and therefore can be used indiscriminately or collectively to achieve and wield power.
- These same people see the marital act as simply a form of recreation, not procreation; as an act that can be used and twisted into any form by anyone, as long as those involved mutually consent.
- The denial of man's inherent dignity has given rise in our society to evils such as abortion, same-sex marriage, contraception, and euthanasia – all part of what St. John Paul II called the "culture of death."
- Through the culture of death, many people refuse to recognize the God-given nature and purpose of marriage and the marital act, and they seek to redefine marriage and the marital act according to their own selfish desires and whims.
- Both our first reading and our Gospel today talk about marriage. Our first reading from Genesis speaks of how it is not good for man to be alone, and how a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two become one flesh.
- In doing so, this passage from Genesis, which is repeated by our Gospel, provides the very foundation for the Church's teaching on marriage and the conjugal act.
- As Catholics we believe that marriage and the conjugal act go hand-in-hand and are not to be separated. The marital act is sacred; it's a holy act of love. Because it is so sacred, the conjugal act is not something we can just enter into as we please and with whom we please.

- On the contrary, it's an action that carries serious responsibilities, and thus it should only be entered into by people who have accepted and vowed to live out these responsibilities together: namely a man and a woman who are married to each other.
- Ultimately marriage is about giving of oneself to another – fully, and without reserve – and of receiving the other back to oneself. Marriage is not a 50/50 proposition for spouses. Each spouse must give 100% of himself or herself in a mutual exchange of life and love.
- Of course, the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children, and the secondary purpose of marriage is the intimate, exclusive, and indissoluble unity of the couple.
- These fundamental purposes are most perfectly realized in the marital act. *Thus, neither purpose should ever be divorced from the marital act because doing so distorts the purpose of the act and breaks down the marriage.*
- Because the primary purpose of marriage and the marital act is the procreation and education of children, we can see that in God's design, the creation and protection of human life and the institution of marriage are inextricably bound up together.
- Human life is meant to be created and nurtured within the context of a family, which is naturally formed through marriage. Therefore, we must do everything we can to protect the sanctity of marriage and resist anything that corrupts a traditional understanding of marriage.
- And we must do this not simply because it is God's will, but because the proud selfishness re: marriage that has become so common in western society is leading to a demographic winter resulting from people not having enough children.
- Already, populations in many western countries are imploding, and this will have devastating social, economic, political, and moral consequences for our world if it doesn't change.
- With that being said, I would like to point out how counter-cultural our parish is. Unlike most places, we have many, very large families!
- While many are quick to point to the physical beauty of our church, there's really nothing more beautiful at St. Ann's than our large number of children.
- While the average ages in parishes throughout the western world are growing older each year, St. Ann's is bucking the trend! Our average age is now right about 29!
- I tell you this not so that we might all be proud. I tell you this because it's proof positive that we don't have to follow the wicked ways of the world. Our parish is already a witness to the goodness of God's plan for love, marriage, and family.
- And so we must humbly thank God for being so generous with His grace to us, and strive to be even more humble and generous, because it's His grace that has enabled us to be this way.
- At the same time, we need to protect the good we have in this parish, encouraging one another to holiness, and avoiding the poisonous divisions we see in our society today, especially whenever an election cycle rolls around.
- Judging, labeling, presuming another's bad intentions, gossiping, and detracting must have no place here. While disagreements and differing opinions amongst us are inevitable, let's learn to disagree with one another humbly and charitably, praying for one another.
- Folks, I've been your pastor a long time now, and I love this parish. We have a very good thing going here at St. Ann's, but honestly, it's only because of God's grace and mercy. For whatever reason, He has chosen to smile upon us.
- And as we seek to live marriage and family life amongst each other, let's be sure that we do so according to God's plan enshrined for us in the teachings of the Church, and let us do so with humility and generosity.

- May we each be like little children in God's eyes, so that we may be assured of entering the kingdom of God.