

# “MARRIAGE: ONE FLESH, GIVEN AND RECEIVED”

## NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

*Supporting God’s gifts of love and life in marriage.*

National Natural Family Planning Awareness Week

July 23–29, 2023

Homily Notes

*Janet McLaughlin*

The sacrament of marriage symbolizes Christ’s relationship with His Church. What is this relationship but one of generous, self-sacrificing, passion-filled, and fruitful love! When married couples live their vocation according to Church teachings, especially regarding the transmission of life, many benefits can be reaped. Indeed, married couples who use Natural Family Planning (NFP) report that the benefits include growth in: understanding and appreciation of their fertility; emotional maturity—especially in their spousal communication; holiness; and respect for God’s gifts for married love.

The following notes are meant to aid the priest or deacon in planning his homily during NFP Awareness Week. The homily is not the place where details of NFP methodology are provided. The homily should include the core of the Church’s teachings that support NFP use in marriage with possibly some basic NFP information added.

We ask that pastors have NFP resources available in the church vestibule during NFP Awareness Week. Please contact your diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life Ministry or the USCCB’s NFP Program ([nfp@usccb.org](mailto:nfp@usccb.org)) for assistance. It would also be helpful to ask NFP teachers or promoters to staff information tables after Mass. Again, contact your diocesan marriage ministry or faith formation staff for assistance.

For free resources, including short articles and two-page bulletin inserts for your parish, see [usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/national-nfp-awareness-week](http://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/national-nfp-awareness-week). See also [usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/new-nfp-resources](http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/new-nfp-resources) for a complete list of USCCB NFP resources. If you have a parish e-mail list, consider inserting NFP information with a link to the USCCB NFP page ([usccb.org/nfp](http://usccb.org/nfp)) and your diocese’s website ([usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/directory-diocesan-marriage-family-life-directors-and-nfp](http://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/directory-diocesan-marriage-family-life-directors-and-nfp)). And be sure to include the NFP Week bulletin insert for your Sunday bulletin (see [usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/nfp-bulletin-inserts](http://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/nfp-bulletin-inserts)).

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NOTE: Natural Family Planning (NFP) is the umbrella title for those methods of family planning that are based on fertility education. NFP methods can be used to either attempt or postpone conception. For avoiding conception, the use of NFP requires the married couple’s integration of periodic sexual abstinence into their lives. No devices or drugs are used to harm God’s design for married love. NFP methods call for husband and wife to learn, understand, and apply the information in their conjugal life. NFP methods are the only methods of family planning that support the married couple’s relationship and the child who may come from them. NFP methods respect God’s design for married love. Read more at [usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/what-natural-family-planning](http://usccb.org/topics/natural-family-planning/what-natural-family-planning).

# HOMILY NOTES

Sunday, July 23, 2023

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year A)

## What Seeds are You Planting in Your Life?

Lectionary: 106

Reading 1: Wisdom 12:13, 16–19

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 86:5–6, 9–10, 15–16

Reading 2: Rom 8:26–27

Gospel: Mt 13:24–43

Maybe you have had the experience of getting ready to plant a garden and accidentally spilled several kinds of seeds together. As you started to sort them, you were able to identify some easily, but others looked so much alike that it was hard to sort one kind of seed or another. It is the same way in life.

Each of us makes many choices each day, and some of our choices are grains of wheat and others are weeds. What seeds are you planting in your life? You are here at Mass. A good seed. Maybe you saw someone's need for help, and you offered, even before being asked! A good seed. But you also know that there are things that would not be characterized as good seed. Maybe you skipped saying grace when having lunch with a friend or maybe you kept watching television even though you heard your spouse or your mom or dad struggling with a chore. As the *Catechism* says, "In everyone, the weeds of sin will still be mixed with the good wheat of the Gospel until the end of time." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 827). It can sometimes be difficult to identify what kind of seeds we are planting through our thoughts and our choices.

As we begin National Natural Family Planning Awareness Week, we can look back at a particular seed: the birth control pill and, with it, the explosion of contraceptive technology. This development, this seed, seemed to promise so much good for married couples. It was anticipated that marriages would be happier and more stable, and there was great expectation that the Church would change its perennial teaching and, for the first time, accept contraception as licit. However, through the wisdom of the Church's tradition, Pope St. Paul VI was able to identify contraception, not as a seed that would bear good fruit, but as a weed.

With great love for the Church and couples, Pope St. Paul VI promulgated *Humanae vitae* (his encyclical on God's plan for married love, human sexuality, the gift of fertility and responsible parenthood). In it, he warned that widespread acceptance of contraception would have serious consequences, not only for couples but also for society. The Holy Father predicted that the result would be:

1. Increased marital infidelity.
2. A general lowering of morality.
3. Husbands objectifying their wives. And,
4. Governments enacting coercive birth control programs.

Now that 55 years have passed since Pope St. Paul VI made these predictions, we can see the negative effects of wide-spread contraceptive use. While we could quantify the reality of each prediction with social science data, we can also simply look at the evidence around us and acknowledge the truth of his prophetic insight. For

example: *(Please use one of two of the examples below. Each of the examples can be validated by social science research.)*

- Currently most developed nations have widespread non-marital sexual activity among their population that is facilitated by contraception. This has yielded many negative outcomes including: fewer people marrying and more men and women cohabiting; higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases; children born outside of marriage (because all contraceptives have failure rates); the legalization of abortion since it is used as contraceptive back-up; and fewer couples choosing to have children.
- High rates of divorce are prevalent among contraceptive users as opposed to those who follow Catholic teaching and use natural methods to space births in their families.
- The nature of marriage is being questioned. One of the reasons that facilitates this is the notion that procreation is not an essential part of marriage and that men and women do not possess unique gifts that are needed to form the marital union.
- Some question not only why marriage must be between a man and a woman but why it should be limited to just two people. The promotion of polyamory (the sexual unions of a group of people) is becoming more prevalent.
- Premarital chastity is seen as something unrealistic, and parents are encouraged to procure birth control for their teenagers.
- Men and women have devalued the place of children in marriage with more choosing to not have children and those who eventually do, often find that they have to resort to assisted reproductive technologies.
- Due to the choice to have children at later ages, assisted reproductive technologies have grown. Many of these technologies such as IVF (“test-tube-babies”), are immoral and surrogacy has been added to those choices.
- Pornography has been mainstreamed in many developed nations and addiction to pornography is now destroying marriages and harming families.
- The rapid rise of so-called “gender affirming procedures and treatments” are another example of the misguided "triumph of technology" over nature where there are no limits to the manipulation of the human body.
- Governments have enacted unjust population and so-called reproductive health legislation: e.g., China’s one-child policy and history of forced abortion; the U.S. federal government’s HHS Contraceptive mandate that insisted religious organizations such as the Little Sisters of the Poor provide contraceptive coverage for employees.

As in today’s parable of the weeds and the wheat, contraception, and Natural Family Planning (NFP) can seem very similar. Contraception seems like an easy, efficient solution to support marriage, but rather than good fruit, it is a weed that bears thorns as already mentioned. Another thorn is misinformation about NFP that dissuades couples embracing it in their marriages. Few people know that modern NFP is highly effective. Few

people know that NFP enriches both the marital relationship and the spiritual lives of husband and wives. The good seed is the Lord God's beautiful truth of marital love that the Church offers. Openness to that knowledge that with good instruction and personal follow-up and then faithful use of one of the various NFP methods are good seeds that bear fruit in the lives of couples. NFP can be used confidently throughout a woman's child-bearing years, allowing a couple to live out their call to responsible parenthood and harmonizing both the unitive and procreative aspects of the conjugal embrace. NFP is also true family planning in that it helps a couple achieve as well as avoid a pregnancy.

NFP can be likened to the mustard seed or yeast—small things that have a big impact! By coming to learn NFP and understand their shared fertility, through discerning together whether or not God is calling them to have a child, and in exercising the virtues of marital chastity and temperance, the couple's relationship is blessed. Couples using NFP often speak of feeling closer to one another or having better communication as well as feeling closer to God. When reflecting on love, life, and responsible parenthood, we are reflecting on something that cannot be measured or evaluated only in terms of this world alone but that always has a bearing on eternity, on the eternal destiny of man (see *Gaudium et spes*, 51).

The Lord does not want just part of our lives. He wants all of our lives, all of our hearts. There is no aspect of our lives that is outside his loving concern, his "care of all." We are all called to holiness and to seek it according to our state in life. Following the Church's teaching regarding marriage, conjugal love and responsible parenthood is a path to holiness. It is a good seed that bears much fruit.

In the second reading, St. Paul assures us that the Spirit will come to aid us in our weakness. If you have not yet been able to embrace the Church's teaching, ask the Holy Spirit to help and guide you, regardless of choices you have made in the past. Take time to understand the teaching. To help you, *Married Love and the Gift of Life* is a document from the U.S. bishops available on their website. It explains this teaching in an easy question and answer format (see [usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/upload/Married-Love-and-the-Gift-of-Life-English-version.pdf](http://usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/catholic-teaching/upload/Married-Love-and-the-Gift-of-Life-English-version.pdf)). It is worth a prayerful reading.

Remember the response from today's Psalm: "Lord, you are good and forgiving." Trust His love. Open your heart as He knocks.

*Please add the intention below in the Sunday Prayers of the Faithful:*

**That husbands and wives will open their hearts to God's truth about the sacred transmission of life and embrace Natural Family Planning as the authentic way to honor God's plan in their marriages, let us pray to the Lord.**

*For additional intercessory prayers see [usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf](http://usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf).*

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## DAILY READINGS, July 24–29

THE SIXTEENTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

### Monday, July 24, 2023 / What is Truth?

Lectionary: 395

Reading 1: Ex 14:5-18

Responsorial: Ex 15:1bc-2, 3-4, 5-6

Gospel: Mt 12:38-42

Despite having many opportunities to see miracles and hear Jesus preach, the scribes and the Pharisees ask Jesus to prove himself to them. No matter what they have seen or what they have heard, they do not want to believe. Today, we often hear of people rejecting various Church teachings because they do not feel something has been proven to their satisfaction or when something does not make sense to them. The question they ask is not whether or not something is true but whether it is something with which they feel comfortable or whether a teaching conforms to their personal belief or understanding.

It has oft been said, “For those who believe, no explanation is necessary. For those who do not, no explanation will suffice.” (*Song of Bernadette*, Franz Werfel). This popular phrase speaks of our disposition toward the Church’s teaching: Do we want to believe? Are we willing to give the Church the benefit of the doubt and study the teachings we find challenging? Are our hearts open to change our lives in order to conform them more closely to Christ?

In today’s culture, any of the Church’s teachings regarding sexuality meet resistance. Certainly, the Church’s teaching regarding contraception is challenging. Many consider this teaching to be outdated, unrealistic, or to be a heavy burden for married couples, and it is often rejected without giving it more than cursory consideration, if even that. However, when a couple takes the initiative to learn about NFP they are often surprised about how different it is than they expected. They are surprised at what couples using NFP have to say about how it has helped them grow—as individuals and as a couple—how their marriages have been enriched.

While we commonly speak of “the Church’s teaching,” as Catholics, we believe that it is Jesus himself teaching through the Church—the same Jesus who answered Pilate, “For this I was born, and for this, I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice” (John 18:37), and “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). As disciples, we want to hear and follow our Lord in all he asks, trusting that he desires that we live abundantly (John 10:10).

Pilate responded to Jesus’ words by asking “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Today some doubt whether objective truth exists. However, we know that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). If we are well disposed, if we want to know and embrace his truth, the Lord will give us the grace to follow him in that truth and that will bring us joy.

*Please add the petition below to the Prayer of the Faithful:*

**Loving Father, help us to rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us to proclaim Your truth always. Inspire Christian spouses to always speak the truth of married love through their bodies, by respecting your design for the marital embrace, let us pray to the Lord.**

*For additional intercessory prayers see [usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf).*

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## **Tuesday, July 25, 2023 / Treasure in Earthen Vessels**

Feast of Saint James, Apostle. Anniversary of *Humanae vitae*

Lectionary: 605

Reading 1: 2 Cor 4:7–15

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 126:1bc–2ab, 2cd–3, 4–5, 6

Gospel: Mt 20:20–28

In today's first reading, we are told that we hold the treasure of the light and light of Christ in our very being—Christ's life manifested in our bodies, in our mortal flesh. St. James, whose feast day we celebrate today, manifested his love of Christ, his adherence to the Lord, in martyrdom. He gave his life for Christ. As it says in Acts 12:1–2: "About that time, Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the Church. He killed James, the brother of John, with the sword..."

Today we also celebrate the anniversary of the encyclical *Humane vitae (Of Human Life)*. This papal letter speaks about so much more than family planning. It is a beautiful reflection on married love and the gift of life. In it, Pope St. Paul VI reminds husbands and wives to "be mindful of their vocation to the Christian life...made explicit by the Sacrament of Matrimony" by which "they are strengthened and, one might almost say, consecrated to the fulfillment of their duties" (*Humanae vitae*, 25). They, as a couple, are called to manifest Christ in their bodies:

For the Lord has entrusted to them the task of making visible to men and women the holiness and joy of the law which united inseparably their love for one another and the cooperation they give to God's love, God who is the author of human life. (*Humanae vitae*, 25)

The joy and holiness that are fruits of the practice of NFP are a living testimony, a carrying of the light of Christ in the body. Pope Benedict called matrimony a "Good News for the world of today, especially the dechristianized world" (Homily, 10/7/12). Married couples living the fullness of Matrimony bear the light of Christ within their families and to those around them with force and eloquence (ibid).

In his homily for the canonization of Pope St. Paul VI, Pope Francis emphasized both Pope Paul's fidelity to teaching the truth and his reminder that we are all called to holiness saying,

Even in the midst of tiredness and misunderstanding, Paul VI bore witness in a passionate way to the beauty and the joy of following Christ totally. Today he still urges us... to live our common vocation: the universal call to holiness. Not to half measures, but to holiness.

(Pope Francis, Homily, 10/14/2018)

Respecting God's design for marital love and responsible parenthood is an important part of how the Lord calls married couples to grow in holiness in their marriage!

*Please add the petition below to the Prayer of the Faithful:*

**For married couples, that they might always give witness to the truth and beauty of God's design for married love and the gift of life, and in doing so, be instruments for the conversion of others, let us pray to the Lord.**

*For additional intercessory prayers see [usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf](http://usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf).*

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**Wednesday, July 26, 2023 / Rich Soil**  
**Memorial of Saints Joachim and Anne**

Lectionary: 397

Reading 1: Ex 16:1–5, 9–15

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 78:18–19, 23–24, 25–26, 27–28

Gospel: Mt 13:1–9

The family is the basic cell of both society and the Church. The well-being of both individuals and the larger world depend on the health of marriage and family life (see *Gaudium et spes*, 47 §1). Today we have the opportunity to reflect on family life as we celebrate the lives of Saints Joachim and Anne, the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary—and Jesus’ grandparents. It was their family life, their instruction of Mary, which prepared her, with St. Joseph, to teach Jesus so that he “grew and became strong, filled with wisdom...” (Luke 2:40) and then “increased in wisdom” (Luke 2:52).

In today’s world, the challenges to live an active faith and pass it on to one’s children and grandchildren are so great that it can be tempting to feel hopeless, to even feel that it is impossible, but we recall the words of the angel Gabriel to the Blessed Mother: “Nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37).

How do parents prepare their children to be rich soil where the seed of faith can grow and produce fruit? Perhaps the starting point is to recognize that children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of parents themselves (see *Gaudium et spes*, 50 §1). Though there are challenges and sacrifices entailed in parenting, children are a gift and can be a means for mothers and fathers to grow in virtue.

Responsible parenthood asks couples to actively discern God’s will in their lives and to live in harmony with God’s design through natural means of family planning. Natural Family Planning (NFP) depends upon the virtues of chastity and temperance as well as patience and generosity. It is itself a means of preparing rich soil in the lives of parents. Pope St. Paul VI wrote that the self-discipline required with NFP brings “abundant fruits of tranquility and peace” to family life and fosters “thoughtfulness and loving consideration” between husband and wife (*Humanae vitae*, 21).

Children, thus, grow up in an environment which encourages them to develop “a right sense of values and achieve a serene and harmonious use of their mental and physical powers” (*Humanae vitae*, 21). This environment arising from the marital spirituality of the parents and undergirds the role of the family as the first school of Christian life, of which prayer is essential.

Rev. Patrick Peyton, C.S.C., popularized the phrase, “The family that prays together stays together.” Through celebrations of the various feasts and fasts of the liturgical year, grace at meals, bedtime prayers, prayers for the needs of family and friends, the family invites the Lord into their daily life. Reading Scripture as a family, praying a family rosary (or decade), attending Mass together, and confession as a family are all ways where children grow up in an environment of a living faith and prepare them to open their hearts to Christ.

*Please add the petition below to the Prayer of the Faithful:*

**During this celebration of National NFP Awareness Week, that families may always live in the love of the Holy Trinity, and by doing so, be light to the world, let us pray to the Lord.**

*For additional intercessory prayers see [usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf).*

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## Thursday, July 27, 2023 / Hearing the Truth

Lectionary: 398

Reading 1: Ex 19:1–2, 9–11, 16–20b

Responsorial: Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56

Gospel: Mt 13:10–17

Jesus wants us to know, love, and follow him. He wants us to hear and embrace his will for our lives. However, Jesus does not force himself on anyone. It has been said that “Jesus is a gentleman.” Through the great gift of free will, the Lord allows us both the freedom to embrace his teaching and the freedom to reject it.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that they are blessed because they see and hear him. They are open to his teaching and are willing to follow him. This attitude of obedience is contrasted with those who are unwilling to hear and see “lest they...understand with their hearts and be converted...” (Mt 13:15). They resist the Lord’s invitation! They do not want to hear his voice and follow him more closely.

It is a sad truth that we can become complacent in our walk with the Lord. We can see how far we have come, what we have embraced, what we do, and pat ourselves on the back. But with the Lord, there is always more. We can always love Him more deeply and follow Him more fully and faithfully. The *Catechism* states, “Christ’s call to conversion continues to resound in the lives of Christians... It is the movement of a ‘contrite heart,’ drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first” (*Catechism*, 1428).

During this Natural Family Planning Awareness Week, it is important to reflect on what it is that spouses are called to live in marriage. In this sacrament, spouses freely commit themselves to loving one another with a love that is fully human, respecting God’s design for marriage and sexuality, total, faithful, and exclusive, and fruitful (*Humanae vitae*, 9). While the world tells us that artificial means to avoid a pregnancy are morally neutral, our faith teaches us that “It is the whole man and the whole mission to which he is called that must be considered: both its natural, earthly aspects, and its supernatural, eternal aspects” (*Humanae vitae*, 7).

In God’s plan, the marital act both unites husband and wife in the closest intimacy and includes the possibility of new life; each quality, the unitive and the procreative, is essential to the meaning of the conjugal embrace. Experiencing “the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the sources of life but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator” (*Humane vitae*, 13) and to “accept that there are certain limits to the power of man over his body and its functions out of reverence for God’s creation (see *Humanae vitae*, 17).

May we all grow in this respect and appreciation for our creation as male and female in the image and likeness of God. May our hearts be open to ever deeper conversion.

*Please add the petition below to the Prayer of the Faithful:*

**For young adults, that they will learn and embrace Church teachings on chastity, marriage and family life, and the ethical methods of Natural Family Planning, let us pray to the Lord.**

*For additional intercessory prayers see [uscgb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf](https://uscgb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf).*

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## **Friday, July 28, 2023 / Abundant Fruit**

Lectionary: 399

Reading 1: Ex 20:1–17

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

Gospel: Mt 13:18–23

The third section of the *Catechism* is entitled “Life in Christ.” It covers the Ten Commandments. As the Commandments are introduced, Jesus is quoted: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). This teaching dovetails with today’s gospel about the Lord’s explanation of the different soils on which the seed of God’s truth falls. We can look at the Lord’s teaching and consider what kind of soil we are, especially as we consider various teachings of the Church that we may not understand, struggle with, or even reject. Are we fertile or infertile soil? Are our hearts open to God’s truth as expressed in Church teaching? No matter what the subject is that challenges us, we must ask ourselves how receptive we are to God’s word. As we are still celebrating National NFP Awareness Week, let us consider whether we are receptive to supporting and embracing the countercultural but faithful decision to reject contraception and support the use of Natural Family Planning in married life.

If you do not know or understand the Church’s teaching about the moral prohibition regarding contraception, it would be helpful to seek help from a priest. Or visit the bishops’ website at [usccb.org/nfp](http://usccb.org/nfp). The website provides information about Church teaching and the science and methods of Natural Family Planning. Of course, the truth of the teaching can best be witnessed by the married couple who live these truths. They are like the rich soil that bears abundant fruit. Couples who use NFP often speak of how their relationship has grown with deeper love, better communication, and stronger trust—and even more meaningful and satisfying conjugal relations. As the Psalm teaches us, following the teachings of the Lord brings us wisdom and brings rejoicing to our hearts.

What kind of soil is your heart? Are you willing to truly hear Christ’s teachings, to strive to understand them, and to bear fruit? Are you willing to open your heart to hear and understand the teaching of Christ and the demands of following him?

*Please add the petition below to the Prayer of the Faithful:*

**That married couples will open their minds and hearts to God’s invitation to trust Him and how he designed married love and the gift of life and the ethical methods of Natural Family Planning to support their marriages, let us pray to the Lord.**

*For additional intercessory prayers see [usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf](http://usccb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf).*

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## **Saturday, July 29, 2023 / Sitting at the Feet of Jesus**

**Memorial of Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus**

Lectionary: 400/607

Reading 1: Ex 24:3–8

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 50:1b–2, 5–6, 14–15

Gospel: Jn 11:19–27 or Lk 10:38–42

Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were the Lord’s friends. Scripture tells us, “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus (John 11:5). And in Luke’s gospel, we see Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, taking the posture of a disciple, and listening to our Lord speak. She is eager to hear the Lord and embrace all He has to

say. We can see in her the echo of the Israelites listening to Moses and responding, “We will do everything that the Lord has told us... all that the Lord has said, we will heed and do.” (Exodus 24:3, 7)

At the same moment Mary is sitting at Jesus’ feet, Martha is distracted with the demands of hospitality. We can imagine what she might have felt. She just wanted to have everything as nice as possible for Jesus while he was visiting and at the same time wanting to finish the work and be able to sit with Him. Martha seeks to enlist Jesus’ support in getting Mary to help her. However, Jesus gently points out the importance of prioritizing time with him and his teaching above all else. This reminder bore fruit. When Lazarus dies, it is Martha who greets Jesus when he arrives and she affirms her belief in him saying, “I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world” (John 11:27). Martha’s faith has grown.

The demands of daily life can make it difficult for us to prioritize time with our Lord, and these same demands can also challenge us in our family relationships. Several years ago, Pope Francis told parents to “waste time with their children,” ([romereports.com/en/2013/10/28/pope-francis-to-married-couples-you-must-waste-time-with-your-children/](http://romereports.com/en/2013/10/28/pope-francis-to-married-couples-you-must-waste-time-with-your-children/)) commenting that it is the most valuable way we can spend our time. No less important is “wasted time” between spouses. Spouses need to make time to, figuratively, sit at one another’s feet and grow in their understanding of and love for their spouse. Indeed, this time together also puts them at the feet of Christ, as “neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be irrelevant to their spiritual life” (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, 4). All that makes up marriage and family life is part of the path of holiness in the vocation to marriage, and married couples have an important responsibility in witnessing to the sacredness of marriage through their lives and testimony.

One way a couple can explicitly invite the Lord into their marriage relationship is by embracing the gift of Natural Family Planning (NFP) in their marriage. NFP helps the couple sit at the feet of Christ together, growing in their understanding and appreciation of being created as man and woman with their shared gift of fertility. They are called to ongoing discernment regarding the size of their family. Their bodies are respected as temples of the Holy Spirit, and the couple grows in the practice of virtue and in tenderness with one another. This most intimate aspect of life is no longer seen as irrelevant to their spiritual life but as part of their shared path to holiness in their marriage. Through NFP, the couple sits at the Lord’s feet and listens to him speak to them about their spousal life with each other and with him.

*Please add the petition below to the Prayer of the Faithful:*

**As we end national NFP Awareness Week, let us pray for physicians, nurses, and scientists, that the Holy Spirit may lead them to a deeper understanding of human fertility so that they may better articulate “the conditions favorable to a lawful regulation of procreation” (*Humanae vitae*, 24), let us pray to the Lord.**

*For additional intercessory prayers see [uscgb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf](http://uscgb.org/resources/Generic-NFP-Week-Petitions.pdf).*