

21st Sunday
August 22, 2010

“Strive to enter by the narrow door.” Luke 13:24

I would like you to call to mind your favorite family photograph. You probably like to look at it, because it brings you joy. The photo brings to mind so many joyful memories. Of course, the photo might also evoke sadness. Someone in the photo might be missing. But that underscores the joy captured by the photo at that moment in time. That joyful moment in time points to an eternal reality, eternal joy in Heaven, like the banquet that we heard about in the Gospel. The way into that banquet was through a narrow door, a door guarded by God – perhaps not all make it through.

Yes, it is true that Jesus Christ redeemed all people, but it does not mean that all peoples are saved. Each of us needs to work out his salvation and pray for the grace to find his way through that narrow door.

For most of you, that narrow door entails marriage.

Why? Not only because marriage is a sacrament, but more fundamentally, because marriage is characterized by love and life. These are joyful and holy things that give the spouses a foretaste of that eternal joy in Heaven.

The joy in marriage is seen most vividly in its fruit, the children. When the husband and wife join together in love, they become one flesh. They literally become one in the child: the father and mother each contributing half of the chromosomes that make up the child’s DNA. The new child brings great joy to the marriage. Why? For three reasons. First, the child is new life; brand new; so much more spectacular than a brand new car. The second reason why the child brings great joy is that the child manifests the spouses’ love; it proclaims the spouses’ love for all the world to hear: maybe this is why the baby screams when it is born. The third reason why the child brings great joy is that the parents suddenly realize that they have shared in the work of God. That is, they have pro-created; they have created with God, advancing God’s original creation in Adam and Eve. The spouses provided the matter; and God provided the soul. So you see, marriage characterized by love and life brings great joy.

A fruitful marriage is a very holy thing, because in that marriage, man and woman do what they were made to do, and so draw closer to God. When God created the heavens and the earth, the crown of his creation was man and woman. How so? Man and woman were the crown of God’s creation, first because they were new life, life made in His image and likeness. Second, man and woman could proclaim God’s love. By virtue of their intellects, they could celebrate life and sing: Praise be to God! And third, man and woman were given a unique command: “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.” Unlike the beasts and unlike the angels, man and woman were given a unique share in the development of creation. So you see, a fruitful marriage guides the husband and wife towards that narrow door that leads to joy with their Maker.

Now, if there is a narrow door that leads to eternal joy, there must be a wide door that leads to eternal sorrow.

The wide door would be anything that wrecks marriage. Sometimes when the husband and wife join together, they do not become one flesh, because they put gloves on. This is a shame. There is no joy in it. Oh, there might be a fleeting moment of pleasure, but there is no joy. No new life comes into being; or if it does, it is unwanted. There is no living manifestation of the spouses' love for one another; not even themselves, because they are not acting out of love, but out of lust. And they deny themselves a hand in God's creation. In fact, they actively thwart creation. Some of the gloves that come in tablet form might even destroy a nascent embryo. What I am describing is anti-love and anti-life. It is an evil.

This is a very sad thing, because it contradicts the work of our Savior. Jesus Christ suffered and died for us so that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. The Son agreed to become incarnate so as to fully manifest the Father's love for us. Is not this what Jesus shouted about, preached about? And in the Passion, Jesus won for us the resurrection, a re-creation of life, that is eternal life.

So many spouses, so many Catholic spouses, have been tricked by the evil of artificial contraception. Please pray for them. This evil actually poisons marriages. Yes, it is true: because it breeds mis-trust between the spouses, promiscuity, and divorce. Pray for an end to this evil. Pray for the broken families who suffer the consequences.

There are ways to plan a family that preserve God's design for marriage. Most notably, natural family planning. NFP for short. And yes, it works. The Missionaries of Charity (Mother's Theresa's group) teach NFP to the poor in India, who use the method with a 98% success rate. Amazing. And if you talk to couples who practice NFP – Americans – you will discover that their marriages overflow with joy. They are so alive with love. They want all their children, even the 2% surprises. The spouses, these are young spouses, develop the true virtue of charity, of self-mastery. Consequently, they are vividly aware of God's work in them and through them...

If you are parents, you should teach your children about these things. If you are Godparents, talk to your godchildren about these things. A taboo subject, I know. But as baptized and confirmed in your faith, you have been given the Gifts of the Holy Spirit that enable you to talk about these things: the beauty of marriage, the holiness of marriage, and the ugliness of all that wrecks it. These are sensitive matters, I know, but we must not remain silent about them.

May God bless your marriages, the marriages of your children, and the marriages of your children's children. May your whole families enter the narrow door into Heaven.