
The Key to Saving Our Youth

Homily 2nd Sunday Ordinary time Year C

January 16, 2022

For Christmas the Archbishop gave all the priests the book, *Endgame*. The book is written by John Van Epp an evangelical Protestant and JP De Gance a devout Catholic. These two successful businessmen set out to understand why so many our youth are abandoning the faith.

Here's the reality: Approximately 1/3 of young adults under 30 say they have no faith. Sherry Waddell in her book, *"Forming Intentional Disciples"* says that only 11% of millennials are going to church.

Why is this happening? These two authors crunched the data and found a single correlation that explains this: marriage. It's all about marriage. Children today who are growing up in a home with a mother and father who are married are still going to church at about the same rates as the baby boomers and generation X. But children growing up in broken homes are widely abandoning the faith.

Now, don't read into this some sort of fatalism: that if you're divorced somehow your children are doomed for failure. Remember our own Archbishop grew up in a single parent home. We probably all know someone divorced. My own sister is divorced, and her two sons are practicing their faith. The authors are not condemning anyone, but merely suggesting that if we want to help our children, we have to invest in supporting marriage. Nationwide, the Catholic church spends billions on youth ministry. All that's important. Yes, our youth conferences and retreats are important, but more important than all of that is providing a stable home for our children with a mom and dad who love each other. Marriage is the foundation of the family.

Before she died, Sr. Lucia, one of Fatima Visionaries, said, "the final battle between Christ and Satan will be over marriage and the family." Listen to the sobering statistics about the state of marriage today:

- Households containing a married man and woman are a minority of American households. 45.5% of Adult Americans are unmarried. Since 1970 the number of Catholics getting married in the church has declined 73%. And this is not just in the Catholic church. Nationwide, we are at an all-time low of marriages per capita. People are not getting married. They are Cohabiting.
- A recent Nielson Survey revealed "getting married" and "having children" were the least desirable goals among millennials.

How did we get to this point where more babies are born to unmarried moms than married? Where a third of all kids will see mom living with two or more unmarried partners by their mid-teen years? (Where fathers are largely absent). Where loneliness, depression and anxiety have reached all-time highs? (p. 43 *Endgame*)

The authors of *Endgame* say this all primarily the result of the decoupling of sex from marriage which became especially widespread during the sexual revolution thanks to the advent of the birth control pill.

God made us as sexual beings and so our sexuality is something sacred and holy. St. Pope John Paul II taught beautifully that sex is the language of the body that is meant to speak the truth of the wedding vows. When a marriage couple engages in marital relations, they are speaking their wedding vows with their bodies. They are saying, "I give myself totally to you." Their one-flesh union is a sign of the commitment and communion that's then open to life and procreation. In traditional Catholic moral theology, we talk about the 2 primary ends of our sexuality: the unitive and procreative; Sex is for bonding and babies. Sex is meant to be an expression of love and commitment and a way that a couple actually participates in God's creative power through procreation.

What happened in the sexual revolution? Sex was decoupled from marriage. Many today do not see sex so much as a way to express commitment and communion and love and life, but rather it is seen as something that I do for my own gratification and pleasure, devoid of lasting commitment and the responsibility of parenthood.

As one headline put it – it's Sex without strings and relationships without rings. We are in the hook-up-culture. Sex is just for fun, no strings attached. Here's the logic: no commitment, then no obligations, no obligations, no disappointments, no disappointments, no hurt, no hurt, then no risks. But we this isn't true. It is a violation of our human dignity to be used or to use others and sin does leaves us wounded and hurt. No commitment and no obligations sounds liberating, but the human heart is left feeling lonely, without meaning and purpose, used and discarded. Interestingly, the happiest people are people in long term lasting commitments: whether marriage or religious life. That's why strengthening marriage and family is one of the super priorities of our parish.

What are the solutions? We want to implement what the authors of Endgame are talking about. We want to invest in supporting marriage. We know it's not enough to bring an engaged couple through a 3-6 months of marriage prep and then say: OK, good luck with marriage! We are actually trying to develop a full life cycle of support for marriage. So, beginning K-12, we want to form our children in Theology of the Body. We want to share the good news about what true love means, why commitment is important and how to have healthy relationships. Then we've revamped our marriage prep program. Our new marriage prep program, called Witness to love, centers on couple-to-couple mentorship. Each engaged couple is paired up with a married couple. And here's the interesting twist: the engaged couple gets to choose their mentor couple. You could be chosen to be a mentor couple. Don't worry you won't be asked to teach theology, but you will be asked to share your experience marriage – we'll teach the theology. Then after marriage, we are going to provide formation for newlyweds. In fact, Deacon John & Zena Weist just kicked off a 12-week formation program for newlyweds. They have 12-couples in formation. Finally, we want to offer on-going marriage enrichment and we want to form marriage mentor couples to help with crisis marriages. If you are in your golden years and have 40 or 50 years of marriage or more, now is not the time to retire and spend your days on the golf course. We need your experience in marriage to mentor others. If you feel inspired to help with any of these marriage initiatives, please reach out to me.

Finally, Archbishop Naumann has invited JP De Gance, one of the authors of this book to come speak to all the priests of the Archdiocese and share information about a new marriage initiative that they've created called Communio. The Archbishop would like to bring Communio to our Archdiocese – more information to follow.

Let me just close with a brief tie-in to the gospel. Remember the interpretive key of the Sunday gospel is found in the first reading. What did we hear from Isaiah? -That God's whole plan of salvation is to

wed his people: As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder – Your Maker – Your creator shall marry you. Now, what is the gospel about? Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophesy. Jesus is the bridegroom. How do we know? Because it was the primary responsibility of the bridegroom to provide the wine for the wedding feast. That's why the head waiter goes to the bridegroom to compliment him on the choice wine. But it was Jesus who had provided the superabundant choice wine. Jesus is the bridegroom, and the church is his bride.

Isaiah's prophesy that God will wed his people is fulfilled right here in the Mass. It's here that our bridegroom, Jesus, unites his body with ours. We enter into Holy Communion – we are wed to Jesus right here in the Eucharist and what is the fruit of Communion? Life. Life flows from Communion – Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood will live forever.

Why is marriage so important? Because it is the most visible sign we have in the world of God's love for us. It is no accident that Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding. Jesus has elevated Marriage to be a sacrament – to be an outward visible sign of Christ's love for his bride the church.