

Billings Ovulation Method® and deepening unity, respect, communication, trust and intimacy between the couple

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*"Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."
(Redemptor Hominis, 10).*

Some might argue that nobody lives just on love, that love is not enough to have a fulfilling life, that we should concentrate on producing; love would be the luxury of some, something beautiful, but which would not go beyond a romantic ideal. However, John Paul II, in his first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*, showed us that a life without love is meaningless. In love, man finds his fullness and accomplishes his vocation. Jesus Christ summarizes all the law in the love of God and thy neighbour (Mk 12, 29-31), and St. Paul reminds us that "he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled all the law" (Rm 13, 8).

Most of us, in some way, have experienced love, have lived it; We have seen how it can transform us, just as it can take us out of this world, it can also make us forget our miseries, we have seen how love makes us better, as it makes us strive for the good of the beloved.

But just as we experience that our vocation is linked to love, we have also seen the pain of so many who are suffering, many that have put their hopes in human love and have been disappointed; who live as **if their existence is broken. It's because human love is fragile,** that it needs to be purified and healed.

Pope Benedict XVI expressed in his first encyclical: "Does the Church with its precepts and obligations, make bitter the most beautiful of life? Perhaps it puts prohibition signs precisely where there should be the joy predisposed in us by the Creator, offering us a happiness that will only be realized in heaven?"

Many believe the Church has a negative view about sexuality - which is far from being the truth - but how do we harmonize what we experience with the teachings of the Magisterium? How do we know the truth about the body, about a body that is also fiercely marked as masculine or feminine? Should we be inventing everything or is it in our being that we find the orientation on how to live well and experience the happiness that sex promises us?

To answer these questions, we will follow John Paul II's teachings, drawn from revelation, coupled with the analysis of the essential human experience. For five years, from 1979 to 1984, in the general audiences on Wednesdays, the Pope, through his Catechesis, undertook the task of discovering the divine plan of the body, human love and marriage. These teachings are known as the "Theology of the body", or more accurately, "Catechesis on the redemption of the body and the Sacramentality of marriage", which we will briefly review.

The created man is a corporeal and spiritual being, an incarnate spirit, a unity of body and spirit, so intrinsically linked that if these two co-principles are separated, we are left with a cadaver, but no longer a man. In this sense, the body reveals the man, who lives in the world and is manifested through the body.

"It is not good that the man should be alone. I'll make him an adequate helper/companion (Gn 2: 18).

Man experiences loneliness, "does not find an adequate helper/companion". This experience of feeling lonely has great importance for man to discover his vocation. Firstly this is solitude of man, not the male, because only will the male appear when the woman is created. That man is alone, is a fact prior to being male and female, previous not so much in the chronological sense, but rather in an ontological sense. This solitude has two meanings; on the one hand, feeling lonely tells the man that he is aware of his reality, a reality that animals cannot experience because they are not intelligent. Through his loneliness man experiences that he possess self-consciousness, that he is different from the other creatures. Solitude means subjectivity, primarily because it is a body, he knows that he belongs to the world of creatures, but at the same time, because of his body, he knows he is not like them, he feels lonely, because he cannot fulfill his vocation, he cannot give himself to someone who is like him.

This man is confronted with the decision to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which adds another feature, intelligence, he realizes he is free. Through the experience of loneliness he realizes that he is an intelligent and free being - that is a

person. On the other hand, he also feels lonely with respect to God, he realizes that, although God loves him, he is different, God is the Lord of life and death, and that on Him he depends to continue living, there is a gap between them.

Before being sexed, man is a body – corporeality and sexuality are not the same, first there is the experience of loneliness, being aware of self and at the same time a person, different from everything created and different from God, then comes the experience of the original plan for unity .

*“So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the **man’s ribs** and then **closed up the place with flesh**. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called **‘woman,’** for she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”(Gn 2: 21-24).*

Before God’s Covenant with man, comes the most solemn moment of creation. The man is not yet completely in the image of God; and will only be with the creation of the woman. The definitive creation of man consists in the creation of the unity of two beings.

“This time it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gn 2: 23), with these words the male for the first time manifests joy and exaltation, for which he had had no reason before, due to the lack of a being similar to him. The joy for another human being – **the second ‘I’**. For the Hebrews, Yves Semen reminds us, flesh represents the complete personality. Therefore, you can read it “being of my being, my alter ego – the other me”. The first song of love **celebrates the body’s dimension in the** signs of femininity and masculinity. [1]

“For that reason man leaves his father and his mother and joins his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gn 2: 24). Through their bodies, the male and the female form a single being, and also form a community of persons, leaving original solitude, and completing creation. The man cannot fulfill his vocation alone, from the beginning he has been created as a unity of two people, who have, by their bodies the capacity to give and receive each other completely.

The true image of God, which is a community of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, manifested on Earth through the community of people that form the male and the female, that is why John Paul II teaches us that “man becomes **‘image and likeness’** of God not only through his own humanity”, but also through the communion of persons, which male and the female form from the beginning. The function of the image is to reflect the model – to produce the prototype. Man becomes the image of God not so much at the moment of solitude as at the time of communion. “He, indeed, is from the “beginning” not only the image which reflects the solitude of a person who governs the world, but also, and essentially, the image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons”. [2]

It is through their bodies that they become one flesh, through sexual intercourse they overcome original loneliness and form a community of people: one body, one being, two people. It is the sexual differences that allow this. Semen sums it up in his book on sexuality, according to John Paul: “when man and woman, in this original state of purity and innocence, which is forever inaccessible to us, give themselves totally to each other

through the joy of the union of their bodies, they become **God's image**. **Only when they** become one flesh can it be said that creation is finished and that the image of God is fully inscribed, embodied in the matter". [3]

Above all, from the beginning, the blessing of fertility has descended, in the union of the male **and the female**. **In this way, they complete God's image**: the Father gives himself to the Son, the Son receives all from the Father and gives himself to Him and it is through the love between them that the fecundity of the Holy Spirit flows as one Person. Likewise, the male gives himself to his wife and she receives him and gives herself to him, and from that union a child is born, which is **the crystallization of the parent's love, forming a** community of life and love. First is the union and then, as an overabundance of their love, fertility.

With Jesus, we discover that the body has a spousal meaning – it is made to give, to be given. This capability is what our dignity as persons allows us, only the person can give himself to another person freely and thus can fulfill his vocation. This total gift of self takes place through the body, a manifestation of the person, with all that this means.

The human body is not made for procreation, as if it were a biological imperative that was imposed on it, as is the case with animals. It is through the body that a community of people can be established – the blessing of fertility is an over abundance of their love. The fruit of this communion is the child born of that fertility. It is not possible, without betraying **the meaning of the body's spousal vocation**, to reduce sexuality to the reproductive function. The first thing is the communion: procreation comes later, as the fruit of the communion. [4]

Religious marriage is not to 'put in order' a situation, it is not to 'give permission', to allow us to give ourselves to each other with our bodies, it is above all, a sacrament. The sacrament of matrimony communicates (imparts) the grace of marriage for the proper works of marriage, to regenerate man in his deepest being. This grace is for all, but often it cannot produce all the fruits, not because of some defect in the grace, but because it is not adequately embraced.

The sacrament is a visible and effective sign that connects us with divine grace. Marriage, in terms of nature is already a sacrament, John Paul II points out that it is a "primordial Sacrament", as it is a "sign that effectively transmits in the visible world, the hidden invisible mystery in God from eternity". [5] This mystery reveals creation in marriage – it is the sign of uncreated love, that love with which God has loved mankind from the beginning. The **union of husband and wife is God's most perfect** expression of love in all of creation. [6] However, because of sin, the man and his wife cease to be this sign.

The grace of marriage makes us again able to be "icons of the Trinity". If this were all, marriage would be a huge sacrament, but there is still more. [7]

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.[a] In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself"(Eph 5, 25-28)

Paul points out that the relationship between the spouses in marriage must be the image **of Christ's relationship with the Church. Conversely, Christ's** relationship with the Church reflects the image of the relationship between the spouses when they live in fidelity to the sacramental grace of their marriage. [8] John Paul II also says: "that marriage corresponds to the vocation of Christians only when it **reflects Christ's bridegroom's gift of love** for the Church, his bride, and that the Church [...] attempts to return that gift of love to Christ".[9] Outside this perspective, there is, properly speaking, no Christian marriage.

Humanity, invited by God to manifest, through marriage, this hidden mystery, using the **Old Testament's terms, has betrayed him, has become** an adulteress, has prostituted the mystery. But God has not forsaken his bride, he has again crowned her with Glory and Majesty, choosing his people **among the Nations, through God's Covenant** with Israel. It is a nuptial Alliance, which is marked in the flesh, in the organs of procreation. [10] "You shall have no other God than me", "I will be your God, you shall be my people", "I set you aside, I will return your virginity, you will be my bride," these are the words of the Husband who wants to rescue his beloved, who wants to recreate her with His love. Words that are fulfilled in the incarnation the Word: "for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven"[11]. In this way, through the **incarnation, does God's most complete betrothal** with humanity take place. To restore the virginity of his wife, the Lamb without blemish, gives Himself completely to her, with his body and his blood, with a total gift of self. Christian marriages, through the sacrament, become a sign of that gift, become a **reflection of Christ's total betrothal** to His Church.

Yves Semen summarizes the Pope's teachings saying that: "for marriage, to attain this sublime degree of **the analogy of Christ's love for his Church-Bride**, obviously requires that the spouses have the same attitude as Christ, i.e., of accepting to crucify their flesh with its **passions and lusts'** (Gal 5, 24)." The role of the sacramental grace is to, little by little burn in us the roots of lust, to be able to signify, in all dimensions of our conjugal life, the betrothal of the immolation of Christ and his Church". [12] The author continues: "the meaning of Christian marriage is to identify ourselves, as much as possible and more every day, in a climate of fidelity to the grace of the sacrament - with the betrothal of Christ and the Church, waiting for the resurrection, which will completely signify that for which our body is made". [13] With the resurrection **we will fulfill the body's spousal meaning**, because we will participate with Christ in the communion of the divine persons, will be children in the Son. The gift in love will be with God.

John Paul II ends his great catechesis on the human body with the conditions that make it possible to live the redemption of the body, especially when it comes to fertility and its regulation, as given in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. If I call more attention specifically to these latest catechesis, I do so not only because the topic addressed in them is more closely linked to our contemporary world, but above all because these are the questions that surface in our reflections. Therefore, this part placed at the end, has not been artificially added to the mix, but it has been bound organically and homogeneously. In a sense, the part placed at the end in a global disposition, is at the same time at the beginning of this mix". [14]

The Pope points out, in his hearing on 11 July 1984, that "*Humanae Vitae* leads us to search for the basis of the fundamentals of the norm which determines the morality of the

actions of man and woman in the conjugal act, in the nature of that same Act and, even more deeply, in the nature of the same subjects that act.” In this sense, for the conjugal act to be an act of personal love has some demands, which are not extrinsic, but spring forth from the most intimate part of this reality. First, true love between a man and a woman is faithful and exclusive, does not accept more than two. It is a love that does not have time limits, that is why it is forever; true love is a public love, seeks to be known by others and takes them as witnesses of themselves. It is fruitful, it makes us grow, leads us to consider what makes the other as my own, is so fertile that it can lead to creating a person- the child - who is the crystallization of the love that the male and the female share. Lastly true love requires that it be a total gift of self, as we have analyzed before: a gift of the body and the soul, a gift that aims to search for the good of the other, through the construction of a “unity of two”, a communion of persons.

All these conditions, that true love requires, are found in marriage, it is the institution created by God to bring the spouses to a marriage based on the gift of self and renewed by grace. It is the minimum condition which allows us to ensure that there is true love, it is, on the one hand, the moment I freely decide to totally give and receive another, forever, until death do us part and, at the same time, the institution that takes care of that love, perfects it and keeps it until the end. For this gift of the bodies to be a total gift of the person, it can only take place in this context.

It is through sexual intercourse that spouses can mutually give themselves to each other, how they can become one flesh, how they can, in the state of purity which is given by grace, be the image of God, **One and triune and the image of Jesus Christ's gift of self to mankind**, and so take the spouses to the fullness of their beings. Therefore, everything that tends to dissociate the gift, everything one does to **keep back a part of one's being** and not give to the other, is undermining and destroying love.

Paul VI teaches us in his great encyclical, that it is not possible to separate the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive and the procreative meanings, because it would no longer be an act of mutual and true love. If we remove one of these meanings, it ceases to be what it was, to become the union of two bodies, but not a total gift of persons. It cannot be separated, because to do so, the whole act would be destroyed, transforming it into something that is not an act of true love. Contraception does this – it removes from the total gift, a very important part, which is fertility. It is as if saying: “I give you much of me, but there is one that I keep, **which I don't want you to have**”.

The norm of *Humanae Vitae*, is based in a demand of the truth of the conjugal act, and is the condition to make it a true act of love. John Paul II expresses it by saying that “according to the discretion of this truth, the conjugal act which must be expressed with **the ‘body language’, ‘means’ not only love, but** also the potential of fecundity, and therefore may not be deprived of the full and proper meaning through artificial interventions. In the conjugal act, it is not permitted to artificially separate the meaning of unity from the procreative meaning, because one and the other belong to the intimate truth of the conjugal act: one is done together with the other and, in a sense, the one through the other. Thus the Encyclical teaches that in this case the conjugal act, deprived of its inner truth by artificially being deprived of its reproductive capacity, it also ceases to be an act of love”. [15]

It is therefore necessary to exclude any action that seeks to deprive this act of its procreative capacity. It is not important the artificiality of the method – that something is artificial does not imply that is bad – it is the intention: a voluntary action that seeks to remove that meaning. It must also exclude any action which seeks only for a means of procreation in the conjugal act, because it would remove its Unitive meaning.

“This norm is the minimum condition for the gift of self to each other, which enables them to achieve, through the conjugal act, this true communion, which is the most fundamental aspiration of the human being, because the person is made for the gift of self in communion. The sexual act, lived authentically as a communion of persons, leads the spouses to communion with God, while the simple union of their bodies would lead them away from it. [16]

This does not mean that fertility cannot be regulated, but that, in that decision of the spouses to limit their offspring, for just reasons, and in **accordance with God’s plan, it is** not morally acceptable to destroy the meaning of the conjugal act. Today there are modern forms of regulating fertility that are effective and reliable, but which, above all, do not destroy the conjugal act.

Human sexuality has nothing to do with the animal, it is of divine essence, it is not something that should be invented, it has been revealed. It is the path to become one flesh, it is the way to communion and Holiness within marriage.

Faithfulness, exclusivity, fertility, but above all, a total gift of self: these are the characteristics of true love, as we are reminded by the Magisterium of the Church. Contraception means the gift of self of the spouses is not a total gift of each other and, therefore, it ceases to be an act of love.

“Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it”(Redemptor Hominis, 10).

[1] Cf. Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. p. 79

[2] John Paul II. Hearing on 14 November 1979-General

[3] Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. p. 80

[4] Cf. Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. p. 93

[5] John Paul II. Hearing on February 20, 1980 General

[6] Cf. Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. ed. pp. 128-9

[7] Cf. Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. p 132

[8] Ibid. p. 134

[9] John Paul II. On August 18, 1982 General audience

[10] Cf. Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. P 135

[11] Symbol of the Apostles

[12] Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. p 136

[13] Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. p 152

[14] John Paul II. Hearing on 28 November 1984-General

[15] John Paul II. Hearing of August 22, 1984-General

[16] Semen, y. (2005) sexuality according to Juan Pablo II. 2 ed. Desclée de Brouwer, Bilbao. p. 169