

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)**

Genesis 1:28 says: *“God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.”*

This past Wednesday, the Catholic Church in the U.S. observed, as it does each year on January 22, a Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children. On Friday, the National March for Life in Washington DC took place, and yesterday the March for Life in our state capital took place.

January is often associated with defending the sanctity of human life, largely due to January 22, 1973 being when the decision for Roe v Wade was declared. Glory to God, Roe v Wade was overturned in 2022. Given all of that, January lends itself to speaking to the sanctity of human life, and against those things that destroy human life, resulting in not just human beings destroyed, but also the wounding of those who take part in those acts. Most readily this refers to abortion; yet, there is another readily accepted assault on the dignity of the human person and the God-given gift of sexuality: contraception. Contraception both interrupts conception, an act directly opposed to one of the primary goods of marriage, but also, if it is chemical contraception, murders the embryo. And an embryo is a unique, unrepeatable human being.

Abortion and contraception are fruits of the same tree, and they are the most upfront assaults on human life and its dignity. The purpose of the sexual act, hereafter referred to as the marital act, is both procreative and unitive. **Both** of those purposes are the fullness of the act - either one without the other is an impoverishment.

Put simply, babies and bonding. Abortion and contraception eradicate half the meaning and value of the marital act, intentionally making it bonding without the babies.

If the marital act is babies and bonding, and abortion and contraception is bonding without babies, is there also babies without bonding?

There is, and it is falsely praised because the damage it does is far more hidden: In Vitro Fertilization, or IVF.

IVF dissociates the sexual act from the procreative act. The act that brings the child into existence is no longer an act by which two persons give themselves fully to one another, but instead it “entrusts the life and identity

of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists” (*Donum Vitae*). The co-founder of IVF, Robert Edwards declared this to be true in his own way, (quote): “I wanted to find out exactly who was in charge, whether it was God himself or whether it was scientists in the laboratory—it was us!”

Last year, there was publicity about an IVF case in Alabama - and it followed that some on the political spectrum touted it as a pro-life victory. But, despite it seeming to be, it isn't, and here is why.

### **1. Kill to create**

The industry markets its procedures as “family building,” yet it must kill to create. Assessment of data shows that only ~4% of the human embryos (human children) conceived will survive to birth.

IVF entails fertilizing more eggs than the parents intend to have because the success rate of implantation is low. In addition, large numbers of embryos (human beings) are created in order to allow genetic testing, to weed out the embryos judged genetically inferior or undesirable. The embryos are graded like agricultural products with designations such as 4AA or 5AB, and those embryos, those human beings, that are labeled “not good enough” are immediately taken aside, killed, and thrown away as waste.

I went searching for some numbers for this.

IVF clinics normally extract between 10 and 15 eggs for one treatment. According to the IVF clinic chain Illume Fertility, about 80% of eggs extracted will be viable to be fertilized to create embryos — making about seven or eight embryos per patient on the low end.

The CDC estimates that more than 238,000 patients attempted IVF in 2021. If clinics created between seven and eight embryos for every patient, that would yield about 1.6 million to 1.9 million human beings created by IVF in a year. Despite these high numbers, fewer than 100,000 embryos were brought to term, which suggests that somewhere between 1.5 million and 1.8 million human beings created through IVF were never born.

What is done with these millions of embryos? As many as 96% of the children conceived by IVF are intentionally discarded as trash, sold as research material for scientific experimentation, or placed in cryogenic

freezers. None of these options afford a baby the dignity and respect he or she deserves as a child in the image and likeness of God.

Which points to the next harmful characteristic of IVF...

## **2. Treating a class of humans as property**

Slavery is one human being treating another as property; a person pays money to another, and is given a human being in exchange for the money. Slavery makes human beings into a commodity, something to be traded for.

When children are created within the confines of a petri dish, they become a commodity. Those desiring a child by technological means pay money in exchange for a human being to be given to them. And yes, you may not be having that human being work in fields, but you are still making human beings into a commodity; you are still placing a monetary value, a dollar sign amount, on a human being. As human beings created in the image and likeness of God, we are never to be something bought or sold.

But this is not the only way it makes people into property. Embryos not implanted can be frozen, stored. How do we treat the things we own? When I'm not using a thing, I put it on the shelf, or in the closet, or in a box. I store it away because it is a thing, its property. But a human being isn't a thing, are they?

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While the Church teaches that the only moral way to conceive a child is through the loving embrace of the marital act - that the dignity of the child and mother and father requires this of us, it does not ignore or dismiss the void in a mother's or father's life – and in their hearts – when they are unable to conceive.

The Church understands the anxiety and the grief that come with infertility. Catholic ministries like Springs in the Desert and The Fruitful Hollow are available to offer solace and peace.

There are also places that offer ethical treatment for infertile couples, such as the Pope Paul VI Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction. The mission of the institute is to help couples achieve fertility through morally licit means. The institute explains that many infertility conditions *can* be treated so that the couple can conceive a child naturally rather than having

to resort to IVF. The Saint Paul VI Institute's success rate with patients is also greater than the success rate of IVF.

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### **Final Thoughts**

It is natural that couples long to have children. Children are blessings and give us hope for the future. But embryos are human beings, babies created in IVF labs are human beings. They have souls and infinite value and dignity that does not allow them to be discarded, used for research, or left frozen indefinitely.

At the heart of all of this is God's vision of human sexuality within marriage, and God's vision for us is never demeaning.

The devastation, the loneliness, and the sadness that couples feel when they cannot conceive a child is real, and they should be supported and prayed for daily. But we must remember that the desire to have a child cannot take precedence over the life of a human being. Our faith calls us to cherish and respect life—at all stages—even in its tiniest form.

If you are suffering, know that Christ carries you through your difficulties and will help heal your pain. Know that there are groups and doctors out there who want to help you and who can help you. Prayerfully seek them out.

But know also that the Church must remain adamant in its teaching about IVF because all human beings matter, and all have value. We are all created in the image and likeness of God, and not a single one of us is expendable.