

Last month, you talked about contraception always being wrong. In fact, you called it "evil." Isn't that a little much?

To begin, our bodies mean something. What we do with our bodies means something. If there is anything that the Incarnation (God becoming one of us) proves, it is that what we do with our bodies matters. How did God save us? He took on a body. He lived, suffered, died and rose in his body! What he did in his body is the very thing that redeems the world.

Sometimes we like to overemphasize our intentions over what we actually do. We say things like, "My heart was in the right place." That isn't always wrong, but a good intention can't take a bad action and make it right. A good intention can't take a lie and make it true.

The body has a "language." I remember reading somewhere that more than 80 percent of human communication is nonverbal. This means that we "speak" to each other with our bodies. If we speak to each other with our bodies, it follows that we can either speak the truth or speak lies with our bodies.

We take this for granted. Suppose a guy and a girl start spending more time with each other. It looks like they are dating. They are exclusive about the time they spend with each other. They are always together. I can imagine a time when they are walking out of the movie theater, and the young man just wants to hold the girl's hand.

There is nothing wrong with holding someone's hand. But if they have not yet had the conversation that "defines the relationship" ("I would like to date you"), then he is not free to hold her hand. She might be open to it, too (it feels good when someone you like holds your hand), but that action of handholding means something. It means (at least in our culture) "we are dating."

If he reaches out to hold her hand, not because he desires to re-define the relationship but only because he happens to feel affectionate at the moment and it feels good, then he is lying to her because even if they haven't had the conversation, at least he might be trying to tell her that he is interested in dating. If he has no intention of dating her, holding her hand says something that he doesn't mean. It is a lie.

While hand-holding is a minor thing and means different things in different cultures, the sexual act has clear-cut meanings. It always means, "I am here freely, totally, faithfully and open to the life that

comes from this union.”

If a couple enters into the sexual act with the intention “I do not mean to be saying what this action means,” then it is a lie. Each and every sexual act always means, “I am with you freely (not forced or manipulated), totally (I’m giving my whole self to you), faithfully (this act means you and none other), and fruitfully (I will raise whatever child comes from this union with you).”

If a person intentionally chooses to work against any one of these elements, the act becomes a lie. I am merely using the other person to get what I want. Sometimes this use is mutual. Nevertheless, every time a couple contracepts, they are removing truth from love and find themselves lying through their bodies to the person they love most.

Of course, it goes without saying that no priest or bishop has the authority to give a couple permission to contracept. No priest or bishop can give a couple permission to lie to each other; he cannot call evil “good” in the name of compassion.

A couple that is contracepting must cease the action and go to confession before they may approach Holy Communion. If they purposely continue to contracept while knowing the church’s teachings, they may not receive Holy Communion.

I know that this is a hard teaching. And I also know that many people will continue to struggle with it. In my work with couples who practice natural family planning, there are some serious sacrifices they have to make.

But isn’t your marriage worth it? Isn’t loving your spouse in truth worth any sacrifice and any demand?

If you struggle with this, take heart. It may seem impossible, but I invite you to take a first step. Pray about it and talk with your spouse about it. Learn about natural family planning and remind yourself that, on your wedding day, you vowed to love your spouse no matter what the cost. I invite you to embrace that challenge in this area.