

Two Universal Spheres from the Lord

A sermon for Mothers' Day by Rev. Michael Gladish
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“Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or else I die!’” ~ Genesis 30:1

This morning, as most of us are thinking about Mothers' Day, appreciating what mothers do, it is worth noticing that possibly one of the most under-appreciated occupations in the western world right now is that of the stay-at-home mom. As many have observed this is a serious profession requiring a wide range of skills including those of a nurse, dietician, hygienist, psychologist, mathematician, financial manager, engineer, chauffeur, and a whole lot more. But popular wisdom these days tends to focus more on one specific career outside the home.

It wasn't always this way. A number of Biblical stories, for example, feature women like Rachel who despair over not having children of their own and who would have done anything to be mothers at home. In fact some of them actually did some pretty deplorable things in order to get pregnant so that they could feel fulfilled in that way. Of course they also worked hard along with their men to provide for the children, since they were for the most part small family farmers and shepherds. So they certainly did not spend all day in the house – or tent, as the case may be, but they had the children with them at home.

Even in modern times the idea of women putting their kids in day-care and going “out” to work is a fairly recent phenomenon. In America the practice began most significantly during World War II when women were actively recruited for war-time careers to fill the roles of men who had gone overseas. This, combined with the focus on women's rights, naturally led to the idea that women should be able – and *are* able – to do pretty much anything that men do, including the pursuit of careers apart from the care of children.

Now it is much more common than not for women to maintain careers outside the home, taking a relatively small amount of time off in the first months after the birth of a child and then returning to that outside work. For many, this is a necessity; for others it is a preference for that other work and the special satisfaction it can bring; and no doubt for some it is the result of a conviction that someone else might actually do a better job with the children than they themselves would. So this is not necessarily good or bad; it's just the way it is. But whatever way it is, the heavenly doctrine is clear about one thing concerning children, and that is this: there are two universal spheres – or atmospheres – from the Lord looking to the preservation of the universe in its created state. One is the sphere of procreating and the other is the sphere of protecting the things that are procreated (CL #386). This applies to every form of life.

So what is a “sphere,” and to what extent is it something that affects everyone?

Well, think of it as an aura, or as an emanation of some kind flowing out from a particular source – like the heat or light of a fire, radio waves from a transmitter, a magnetic force field, or the aroma of a flower or a bakery. If people get close enough to the source *and have the appropriate qualities or characteristics to receive it* they will see or feel or otherwise sense this sphere, but this doesn't mean that it will affect everybody equally. Some might really appreciate it and feel

drawn to it; others might not even be aware of it, or perhaps find it annoying, and still others might actually be allergic to it – as many are to the pollen in the air these days.

In any case the doctrine goes on to say that these two “universal” spheres make one with the sphere of what we call *conjugal* love and with the sphere of the love of infants (CL #387). So again we might ask, does this mean that every married couple will or should want to have children? And again the answer is, *not necessarily*: it depends on the state of the couple – and their marriage! The sphere is with us and in keeping with the Lord’s providence it is pervasive, but our response to it may be mixed.

In fact, as in ancient times, there are many among us who very urgently want to be parents, but there are also many who for any number of reasons have no such desire. Are they therefore wrong or bad? Again, no. But here’s the catch. Because these two spheres having to do with procreation are essential for the preservation of the universe (not to mention for the population of the heavens) it is incumbent on every one of us, whether young or old, male or female, married or single, to be mindful of and committed to the birth, protection and support of children. They are, after all, the hope and future of the civilized and spiritual world.

So it is right for us to honor those who choose to be mothers – whether stay-at-home or not – and to support them in every way possible, whether at home or through appropriate agencies that enhance their work.

Curiously, but not surprisingly, as many of you know there is a clinical psychological phenomenon today known as “reactive attachment disorder.” This general term is used to describe various “disorders of mood, behavior, and social relationships arising from a failure to form normal attachments to primary care giving figures in early childhood.” As we read, such a failure often results from “unusual early experiences of neglect, abuse, abrupt separation from caregivers between 6 months and three years of age, frequent change or excessive numbers of caregivers, or lack of caregiver responsiveness to child communicative efforts resulting in a lack of basic trust” (Wikipedia). These problems can last well into adulthood, and may account for a good deal of dysfunction and crime.

Please note: this is not a criticism of women who have careers outside the home. On the other hand it could be a criticism of *fathers* who neglect to bond with their children. And viewed through still another lens it could be an *affirmation* of early childhood teachers and caregivers who build confidence and the ability to trust among children whose needs for whatever reason cannot be met at home. The point is that children are important, and they need attention, especially in the early years, because their basic nature is one of innocence, that is, a willingness to be led, and it is critical that this innocence be nourished with appropriate care.

This is why we have church schools. And it’s why in our schools we strive every day to work *together with the parents* to develop and nurture a common set of civil, moral *and spiritual* standards that assure every child of the Lord’s love, wisdom and providence in his or her life.

Now as you know, there has been a concern among so-called progressives in developing countries all over the world about the growth of the human population. For at least 40 years now the idea of “zero population growth,” or ZPG, has been a rallying cry for those who believe the world cannot reasonably sustain any more significant growth. But in fact the concern goes back

hundreds of years and has almost always been based on the limitations of resources and productivity *projected by the science of the day*. Of course it's true that unmitigated, exponential population growth would quickly overwhelm the world's ability to provide even the space we need to exist. But what we tend to forget is that every human being is endowed by the Creator with unique talents and perspectives that have the potential to expand our knowledge and understanding of how to provide for and sustain a growing population. For example, we now know how to do much more with much less than at any time in world history, thanks to advances in science, technology and engineering, all of which is due entirely to the enhanced research and commitment of specific individuals who were created by the Lord to build on the research and commitment of others before them. As a result the planet can now support billions more than was thought just a few centuries ago. And what will the future bring? Who knows!

We also tend to forget that the real purpose of life in this world is to provide for eternal life in heaven. So, for example, while we are obsessed with perfecting the quality of our lives on a material level, which involves the allocation of a huge percentage of the world's resources to a relatively small percentage of the people, we continue to struggle with understanding how to get along with one another. It is an undeniable fact, for example, that for the most part sickness and starvation are not about any lack of food or medicine world-wide, but rather about a lack of adequate distribution, which is a result of international social, political and economic policies. Did you know that over 55 million children under the age of 5 die every year from nearly 100% preventable causes? Fortunately we know that these little children all grow up in heaven, but that is no reason to neglect them and the potential good they could have done for themselves and for others in this world. Likewise draught, famine, smog and any number of other worldly disasters are not so much the result of population growth as they are of the abuse of resources to serve our insatiable desire for cost cutting, comfort and convenience.

Even in simple economic terms, one of the problems many countries face with slow-growing or *declining* populations is a reduced tax base to support their infrastructure, health care and other public services, not to mention the reduced labor force to produce needed goods and services.

This is not intended to be a social commentary. After all, it's Mothers' Day. But we are focusing on the heavenly spheres of love and wisdom that flow out from the Lord and provide for the birth of children and the protection and support of those who are born. This is an amazing and wonderful thing, and something we mess with at our peril. As the teaching (in *Divine Providence*) goes, "If a person saw clearly the Divine Providence he would interpose in the order and tenor of its course, and would pervert and destroy that order" (#180). This statement may not seem to be precisely on topic, but the passage is referring to the fact that the Lord works with us inwardly exactly to the extent that we co-operate with him outwardly, and it goes on to illustrate this by making the point that if we knew the internal workings of the human body – including the organs of generation specifically – we would pervert and destroy their proper use.

Really? Well, yes, but again, *not necessarily!* It's only an illustration. Knowledge of the internal workings of the body has, as you know, led to incredible life-saving medical treatments and procedures! But the potential for interfering in the orderly process of procreation is great, and we see it in spades throughout the western world. Of course the teaching does *not* say that birth control is evil or out of the question in the context of marriage (though it has been taken that way by some); on the other hand if birth control *or abortion* is used to provide for disorderly relationships, surely we can see that this is a perversion of the knowledge involved.

It is significant that the very first chapter of the Lord's Word, at the end of the story of creation, includes the admonition to the first people that they should "be fruitful and multiply," and "fill the earth." It is also significant that in His covenant with Abraham God repeatedly promised him that his descendants would be as the stars of heavens and the sand of the seashore for multitude, and that He would make him "exceedingly fruitful" (Gen 15 & 17). All this is just the beginning. Many other stories – and Psalms – speak to the same promise.

Now of course we know that in the spiritual sense of the Word this is not about having natural offspring; it's about spiritual offspring, which are the USES that flow from the proper conjunction of love and wisdom in the heavenly marriage of the human will and understanding. Sons represent the truths that are propagated from that marriage and daughters represent the affections, both of which provide for the spiritual life of every human being.

Even so, this kind of propagation is directly connected to the spheres of biological procreation and protection because both are essential uses of marriage, one on the spiritual level and the other on the natural, and so they correspond (see CL #222). In addition, the sphere of innocence in a spiritual marriage is such that it finds perfect expression in the care of little children, who are themselves forms of innocence, and who by their nature call out the best in us, since their lives depend on it.

Not every woman can be a mother, and not every man can be a father, but one thing's for sure, we are all children of mothers and fathers and we have all been deeply affected by our parents, either genetically or by example, or both. We know, or should know, how important and lasting those influences can be – for better or for worse – and so we can know what an important responsibility we have been given to encourage and support parents, especially mothers, everywhere. It's a tough, demanding job under any circumstances, but especially when other work is necessary, too. So what can we do to be helpful?

Well, if we want to promote safe and healthy spiritual life at any level our first job is to secure this for ourselves so that we have it to share. As they say on airplanes, put on your own oxygen mask first. This means striving for innocence and understanding in our own minds, especially when it comes to our assessments of the people and situations around us. There is always more than meets the eye.

When in doubt, ask, don't tell. When a situation calls for action, be sure to qualify that action with love. Who knows what lasting effect a simple helping hand can have, or how it may enhance and reinforce the positive spheres that are constantly, forever flowing from the Lord into every created person and thing?

Amen.

Lessons: *I Samuel* 1: selections
 Children's talk about Mothers in ancient Israel

Psalms 127 and *Conjugal Love* #385: headings I - X