

ONE FLESH

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The desire to love and be loved is the deepest need of our being. We long to be known, accepted, and cherished by another. Yet, the ability to fully give or receive this love is unattainable on our own. As Catholics we believe Jesus Christ has entered our broken world to conquer sin and restore us to new life. Throughout every age he continues to invite all women and men to follow him through his Church, to whom he has entrusted his teaching authority, so that all can know and follow him.

Only God can give us the unconditional love and acceptance that we desire. Yet, he has created marriage, a holy union, to mirror this supreme love on earth. At the heart of their married love is the total gift of self that husband and wife freely offer to each other. Because of their sexual difference, husband and wife can truly become “one flesh.” Through the language of their bodies, their sexual union recalls their vows: giving themselves to one another in love that is total, faithful, and life-giving.

This call to love is to follow Christ himself, who handed himself totally over for his bride, the Church. Spouses imitate him by giving the entirety of themselves to one another, including the gift of their fertility and their openness to new life. Contraception and sterilization, which deliberately suppress fertility, reduce the sexual act so that

husband and wife withhold the completeness of their total gift to each other. This changes the meaning of their sexual union so that it no longer expresses the fullness of their love.

God our Father loves us and wants our lives to be full and rich! He has given his Church the task of bringing women and men to the fullness of truth which leads to our happiness in this life and in the life to come. Jesus gives us the power and strength of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Love—so that we, particularly husbands and wives, can truly love one another.

The teaching on the use of contraception and sterilization may seem challenging, but it is to preserve the true, complete self-gift between husband and wife, the kind of love that brings real, lasting joy and peace. If we have failed to live this in the past, we need not be discouraged. Our loving Father is always calling us back through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and wanting to strengthen us in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

When we embrace the Church’s teaching on human sexuality and marriage and follow Jesus, we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives in a powerful way. When we trust in the Lord’s desire for our happiness, he can transform our love in a way that can transform the world.

There has been much news lately about the Church’s teaching on contraception and sterilization. As Catholics, we may be asking thoughtful questions or struggling to understand this teaching.



To learn more, or to see questions others have asked, visit www.usccb.org/love-and-sexuality.