

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Fr. Brian Kennedy, C. S. s. R., is the pastor at St. Matthew Parish in Windham. You remember that he came during the Year of Mercy to speak about the work he and others were doing in the Dominican Republic. Recently, he wrote a bulletin article about the Papal Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* which I found to be quite good. 2018 is the 50th Anniversary of this encyclical by Pope Blessed Paul VI. With his permission, I am re-printing his article below.

The most ridiculed and then forgotten Papal Encyclical of the last century was: *Humanae Vitae*. Priests who usually backed the Pope were embarrassed to talk about it; fearing to be branded as old fogeys. Universities with the name "Catholic" hastened to agree with other academic institutions that the document went backwards rather than forwards. If you tried to envision a bigger public relations snafu with the Pope's magisterium, you'd be hard pressed to find anything "worse" than the teaching in *Humanae Vitae*. Pope Paul VI delivered his gift to the world from St. Peter's Rome on July 25th, the feast of St. James the Apostle, in the year 1968. "No member of the faithful could possibly deny that the Church is competent in her magisterium to interpret the natural moral law" wrote Paul VI. Did he know that this competency would not be challenged... so much as the very existence of a "natural moral law"? *Humanae Vitae*... is it a jewel or a piece of junk?

The history of God's People in the Bible is full of references to both "false" and "true" prophets. The false ones get good press. They march in step to the national aspirations of their people and are quick to say that things are moving along just as they should be. For the false prophets, God is blessing everything just as it is. The true prophets, by contrast, live in an unsafe environment. They get booed a hundred times more than they get praised. Judge *Humanae Vitae* not by what the media and the academy said about it during the sexual revolution, but on its own merits... especially in the light of all the "me too" revelations in 2017 of degrading treatment and humiliation... in the light of entire cultures on the way to extinction from low birth numbers.

17. "Responsible men can become more deeply convinced of the truth of the doctrine laid down by the Church on this issue if they reflect on the consequences of methods and plans for artificial birth control. Let them first consider how easily this course of action could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards. Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings—and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation—need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law. Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection."

We are 50 years out from the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. Most countries have instituted policies and judicial frameworks opposed to its teaching. Is family life better off? Are marriages stronger and happier? Are children safer because their world is populated with contraceptive rather than chaste couples? Paul VI was told to his face a thousand times that he was "hurting people with his teaching." He simply replied: "it comes as no surprise to the Church that she, no less than her divine Founder, is destined to be a 'sign of contradiction.' She does not, because of this, evade the duty imposed on her of proclaiming humbly but firmly the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical."

- Father Brian Kennedy