

- Since for the past two weeks I've noticed an awful lot of you admiring our beautiful, new stained glass windows during my homily, I've decided this week to give a homily about one of the stained glass windows in the hopes of capturing your attention!
- As Providence would have it, our Gospel today details a scene represented by one of our windows, that of Jesus and the little children. It's the first window on the right side of the church. As you can see, it's truly a magnificent piece of art that we are blessed to have.
- This passage reminds us of the very particular love that our Lord has for children, for children possess an innocence and a sense of humble wonder and awe that actually make them great models for how we are to love our Lord and embrace His kingdom.
- Jesus also has a particular love for children because they are the weakest and most vulnerable segment of our society. In following our Lord's example, the Church has always had a special love, a "preferential option," for the weakest and poorest members of our human family.
- This past summer while a group of us from St. Ann's were serving in Uganda, we met a group of street children who were living in perhaps the worst slum in the city of Kampala.
- The more fortunate kids in the slum lived in these very hastily-built 8' x 10' shacks with earthen floors that they shared with as many as 20-25 other people. The poorer ones lived in man-made caves dug out underneath mounds of trash and garbage.
- The younger children were sent out daily to beg in the streets and scavenge for food, while the older children were often turned into prostitutes in order to earn money for food.
- Certainly, it is a very difficult thing for any of us to see innocent children abused or exploited. But as terrible as it was to see the suffering of these kids, there is a far worse abuse against children in our own country, i.e., the sin of abortion.
- Since 1973 when abortion was legalized in our country, more than 45 million babies have been aborted in the U.S., and currently 22% of all pregnancies in the U.S. end in abortion (cf. Guttmacher Institute, July 2008 report). Truly, this is the greatest shame of our country.
- Thus, abortion is something we must fight! We do this through our prayer, through our fasting, through peaceful demonstration and protest, and through voting for pro-life officials.
- In fact, just this past week our parish participated in the 40 Days for Life Campaign by having members of our parish pray outside of a local abortion mill throughout an entire day.
- And today at 2 p.m. we will also have our annual Life Chain, in which we will gather as a parish along Park Road to peacefully protest against the horrors of abortion, and I certainly invite all of you to attend this important event.
- But there's another very fundamental way that we, as Catholics, must fight the culture of death that pervades our society: it's by embracing and living out the Church's teachings on marriage and family.
- Both our first reading and our Gospel today talk about marriage. Our first reading from Genesis speaks of how it is not good for man to be alone, and how a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two become one flesh.
- In doing so, this passage from Genesis, which is repeated by our Gospel, provides the very foundation for the Church's teaching on marriage and the conjugal act.
- As Catholics we believe that marriage and the conjugal act go hand-in-hand and are not to be separated. The marital act is sacred; it's a holy act of love. Because it is so sacred, the conjugal act is not something we can just enter into as we please and with whom we please.

- On the contrary, it's an action that carries serious responsibilities, and thus it should only be entered into by people who have accepted and vowed to live out these responsibilities: namely a man and a woman who are married to each other.
- Thus, premarital relations and adultery are very terrible sins that must be avoided at all cost.
- You see, the primary purpose of marriage is the procreation of children, and the secondary purpose of marriage is the intimate, exclusive, and indissoluble unity of the couple.
- These fundamental purposes are most perfectly realized in the marital act. *Thus, neither purpose should ever be divorced from the marital act because doing so distorts the purpose of the act and breaks down the marriage.*
- Because the primary purpose of marriage and the marital act is the procreation and education of children, we can see that in God's design, the creation and protection of human life and the institution of marriage are inextricably bound up together.
- Human life is meant to be created and nurtured within the context of a family, which is naturally formed through marriage. Therefore, we must do everything we can to protect the sanctity of marriage and resist anything that corrupts a traditional understanding of marriage.
- Today, one of the gravest threats to the sanctity of marriage is contraception. Contraception and sterilization willfully undermine the marital act by suppressing or destroying one's fertility. Contraception divorces the procreative purpose of marriage from the marital act.
- By eliminating the possibility of procreation, we distort the nature of the conjugal act and of marriage itself because we take away part of that gift of self that is fundamental to marriage and the marital act, for by its nature marital love is meant to be fruitful and boundless.
- Understanding that marriage is fundamentally oriented toward the creation of new life also helps us to understand why same-sex unions are wrong. By their very nature these types of unions can never be procreative, and therefore they can never be a true marriage.
- Because same-sex unions lack the fundamental complementarity that makes the procreative and unitive purposes of marriage possible, because same-sex unions are contrary to the natural law, and because same-sex unions close the conjugal act to life, the Church has always taught that these unions are gravely sinful.
- By legalizing same-sex unions, many of our state governments in this country are distorting the true purpose of marriage, and are thereby undermining its value and purpose in society.
- As Christians we are called to oppose same-sex marriages. But let's be very clear about something: Opposing same-sex marriages is not a matter of denying anyone their civil rights, as the proponents of same-sex unions would have us believe. It's a matter of defending the purpose and integrity of marriage, which is the very building block of any human society.
- My dear friends, I know that some of you find what I just said difficult to accept. But please know that I say these things not to judge or condemn anyone. I love all of you.
- And because I am your pastor and I love you like a father, I want you to know the beautiful truths of our Catholic faith so that you can live these truths with integrity, for it is only in embracing the truths of our faith that we can hope to be saved.
- My dear friends, on this Respect Life Sunday, let us seek to defend and protect all human life by protecting and defending the institution of marriage, which by God's design is meant to be the origin and nurturer of human life.
- Let us all joyfully embrace the Church's teachings on marriage and the family and thereby courageously proclaim the Gospel of Life, which alone can defeat the culture of death that so afflicts our society.

- May Jesus Christ be praised, now and forever. Amen.