

Victor Feltes

PA 883—Marriage and Family

Dr. Perry Cahall

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Advent and Christmas (Year A) Marriage and Family Homily Series Guide

This guide is intended as an aid to homilists in presenting a series of homilies on important topics of marriage and family during the Advent and Christmas seasons of Lectionary Year A. (Advent and Christmas fall on Year A in 2010, 2013, 2016...) Homily resources are provided here for various Sundays and feasts of Advent and Christmas.

Each homily outline follows this format: immediately below the title and primary topic of the Mass being celebrated, the "major aims," or goals of the homily are listed. Though every homily should be tailored to be of some benefit to all of its hearers, each homily's "primary audience," or target audience, is given. A collection of "scripture connections" related to the topic for the homily is gleaned from each reading from the Liturgy of the Word. ("R1" = the 1st reading, "Ps" = the responsorial psalm, "R2" = the 2nd reading, and "Gos" = the Gospel.) "Illustrations" are narratives or interesting insights employed to draw hearers into the homily. The "marriage and family virtue" is a particular cornerstone of married, family life to highlight in the homily. "Personal applications" are suggestions for how the hearers can actively live out the homily's teachings in their lives.

The primary topics for these homilies are:

1st Sunday of Advent:	Focusing on Marriage and Family
2nd Sunday of Advent:	Christian Parenting
3rd Sunday of Advent:	Chastity
4th Sunday of Advent:	Openness to Children / NFP
Christmas:	The Calling to Holiness / Mass
The Holy Family:	Caring for Parents / the Aged
Mary, the Mother of God:	Vocations to Religious Life / Priesthood

This resource is provided only as a guide for composing homilies. Anything in these outlines may be taken up or left behind. All of the illustrations, personal applications, and scriptures connections are only given as suggestions. A homilist may decide to supply his own illustrations or applications, and he certainly does not need to include every scriptural connection. These outlines are not finished homilies. The homilist will need to prayerfully integrate these ideas with his own to create an effective, Christ-inspired homily for his people.

These are some additional homily topic suggestions for Advent and Christmas feasts which are *not* outlined in this guide:

Immaculate Conception:	The Glory of Womanhood
The Holy Innocents:	Defending Infants / the Unborn
The Epiphany:	The Precious Gift of Family
The Baptism of the Lord:	True Manhood

1st Sunday of Advent (Year A) - Focusing on Marriage and Family

Major Aims: Motivate hearers to focus on improving their marriages and family lives
Introduce the upcoming homily series on marriage and family

Primary Audience: Married couples and parents

Scripture Connections:

R1: From the house of God, the Church, God's teaching is given.

R1: The Jews believed there would be peace if all learned God's ways, so too among us.

R1: Like guarding against a thief, be vigilant in guarding your house(hold).

Ps: "Peace be to your homes," that is, in your families.

R2: "Wake from sleep," the care of our marriages and families demand vigilance.

R2: "Not in sexual excess... lust... quarreling... jealousy." Repent and be healed of these.

Gos: "People were... marrying and being married." There are threats to marriage/family today.

Gos: There are two people, but only one is taken. Pray that you be one taken into conversion.

Gos: The Son of Man comes into marriage/children/family when and where you least expect—
Be open to God and His grace.

Gos: Marriage/children/family crises come when and where you least expect—Prepare.

Gos: Noah and Lot lost everything else, but they preserved their families.

Illustrations:

Tell the personal story of a family of refugees with whom the parish can identify. Note that refugees may leave everything else they have behind them, but they hold on to their families.

"The institution of marriage is in serious trouble," says David Popenoe, report co-author and co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers. "Americans are now less likely to marry than ever before, and those who do marry seem to be less happy than in previous decades. And despite a modest decline in the divorce rate, nearly 50 percent of all marriages are projected to end in divorce or permanent separation."¹

Marriage and Family Virtue:

Fidelity/Permanence—"I, N., take you, N., to be my husband/wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life."²

Personal Applications:

Advent is a time of examination/conversion: recommit yourself to your wedding vows.

Consider: "What am I doing, and what more can I do, to strengthen my marriage?"

Pray to be receptive to Christ's teachings for you and your family.

Keep your family coming to Church every week to learn God's ways.

Offer your personal Mass intention(s) for your spouse/children/family.

¹ Sheri Stritof, and Bob Stritof, "The State of Our Unions: From the Rutgers National Marriage Project,"

About.com: Marriage, 4 Dec. 2008, <<http://marriage.about.com/od/newsandviews/a/stateunions.htm>>.

² Catholic Church, Rite of Marriage (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 1970) 12.

2nd Sunday of Advent (Year A) - Christian Parenting

Major Aim: Instruct in Christian parenting

Primary Audience: Parents

Scripture Connections:

R1: Judge children fairly, "not by appearance."

R1: Correct children, "slay" wickedness in them.

R1: Protect children, there are "cobras" and "adders" in our world.

R1: Teach children "knowledge of the Lord."

Ps: Teach children love for "the helpless... weak... poor."

Ps: Good children, like the Son of God, are a blessing to "all nations."

R2: Form children as God treats us, with "patience" and "encouragement."

R2: "Accept [your children], as Christ accepted you."

Gos: "Reform your lives!" There are no perfect parents, we all have room to grow.

Gos: To say "Abraham is our father," isn't enough. Being the best parent you can be does not come automatically.

Gos: "Prepare the way of the Lord" for your children.

Illustrations:

Prior to the homily, survey children with questions about God, such as what they think God looks like. Draw from these cute and amusing answers how we can project our own ideas and personal experiences accurately or falsely onto God.

The wisdom of proverbs: "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," and "Like father, like son; like mother like daughter." Likewise: "Whoever sees me, sees the one who sent me."³

Present on the analogy of being, or how earthly things can reflect God. "The divine fatherhood is the source of human fatherhood."⁴

You might need to focus on some key aspects of fatherhood, and then also point out how motherly love also has its origin in God.

Marriage and Family Virtue:

Total Self-Gift/Commitment—"N. and N. have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?"⁵ Your love and care for your children is the fruit and an extension of your self-gifting love for each other.

Personal Applications:

Do not make God a projection of our sinful selves or our less than perfect parents. Yet, we *do* especially image Him to our children. We are likenesses of God at our best.⁶

Make God the model of your own parenting—image God to your children.

Ask the intercession of Joseph and Mary to be as good of parents as they and model yourselves as parents after them.

perhaps provide some illustrations

Ask Christ to heal the brokenness of your parent-relationships so as not to repeat their mistakes.

³ Catholic Church, New American Bible (Washington, DC: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Inc., 1991) John 12:45, John 14:9. [All following Bible references are from the NAB.]

⁴ Catholic Church, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed., (New York: Doubleday, 2003) #2214. NAB Ephesians 3:14.

⁵ Rite 12.

⁶ Catechism #239.

3rd Sunday of Advent, Gaudate Sunday (Year A) - Chastity

Major Aim: Show that chastity (and modesty) are beautiful and possible

Primary Audience: Teens and adults

Scripture Connections:

R1: "Take courage, fear not." "Deserts" can "bloom."

R1: The chaste person's 'eyes are open, ears are clear, legs can leap, tongue can sing.'

R1: The chaste person "will meet with joy and gladness, sorrow and mourning will flee."

R1: God intends to fulfill our deep longings—He gives them to us to draw us to goodness.

Ps: The Lord "keeps faith forever," He strengthens the "oppressed," "sets prisoners free."

Ps: Be 'just toward those oppressed,' who accept lies about themselves—never exploit them.

Ps: Modesty and chastity, respects and "protects the stranger."

R2: "Be patient. Steady your hearts" in the cultivation of chastity.

R2: Like cultivating plants, growing virtue takes time, our efforts, and God's gifts.

Gos: Like John we live in a wasteland: a culture without the true meaning of love/sexuality.

Gos: Why is John so "great?" Because passions sway him like a reed? Because he wears attractive clothes? No: integrity.

Gos: "Blest is the man who finds no stumbling block in me." Receive His teachings humbly.

Illustrations:

A man living a hedonistic life (yet drawn to God) once said, "Give me chastity and

continence, but not quite yet".⁷ He had fornicated for years, and had a son outside of marriage. Sitting in a garden one day he heard a child's voice singing, "Take up and read" ("*Tolle, lege*" in Latin). Opening the Bible there, he read the first thing he saw: "Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and licentiousness, not in rivalry and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh."⁸ This man went on to become a great saint: St. Augustine, 354–430 AD.

It is Gaudate Sunday ("rejoice")—The chaste have joy; can know/find true love.

You will want to provide adequate catechesis on chastity in this homily. Perhaps cite the CCC.

Marriage and Family Virtue:

Faithfulness—Some are called to celibacy, but everyone, including the married person, is called to chastity in thought, word, and deed.

Personal Applications:

Honor your dignity and others' through your appearance, words, and actions.

Cast out whatever habits or things lead you to sin.⁹

Be thoroughly pure, even in secret.¹⁰

Married people must model chastity to their children.

Pray for your future spouse.

⁷ St. Augustine, *St. Augustine Confessions* (Oxford World's Classics), trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford UP, 1998) VIII, 7.

⁸ NAB Romans 13:13-14.

⁹ NAB Matthew 18:8-9.

¹⁰ NAB Matthew 5:28.

4th Sunday of Advent (Year A) - Openness to Children / NFP

Major Aims: Encourage an openness to children

Promote natural family planning

Primary Audience: Contracepting married couples who are not open to children

Scripture Connections:

R1: "I will not ask! I will not tempt the Lord!" Ahaz's asking nothing, while refusing to do God's will, is a false piety.

R1: "Must you weary my God?" God wishes to bless you, why refuse Him?

R1: God's great sign of love and care for His people, was a child—The sign "God is with us."

Ps: "The world and all its people" are the creation and possession of God.

Ps: "Who shall stand...? The man... who desires not worthless things." Do we value things (like children) rightly, as God does?

Ps: The generous "receive blessings" from God, "...such are the men who seek Him."

Ps: Jacob struggled with "the God of Jacob" and was renamed "Israel." Do we struggle with God's will for us or do we just ignore Him?

R2: God's will in sending Paul to the Gentiles was to populate Heaven.

R2: Paul's mission, "to spread [Christ's] name and bring to obedient faith." We need to be obedient to receive *all* the good things Christ and His Church wish to give us.

Gos: Joseph, judging with the common sense of his times, judged wrongly.

Gos: What if Mary had said no to God's plan for her? What a blessing missed!

Gos: God sends angels/messengers to help his people make the right choices.

Illustrations:

In 1927, the writer G. K. Chesterton observed, "The Catholic Church is the only thing which saves a man from the degrading slavery of being a child of his age."¹¹ In his day, all Christian denominations condemned a particular (sexual) practice; that is, until the Anglican's Lambeth Conference in 1930. Since then all Protestant denominations have adopted the secularist position. Today not one of them stands with the Catholic Church in maintaining the ancient Christian faith on this subject. Most young people today do not even realize it is an issue, it just seems normal to them. The issue I speak of is (not homosexuality, but) contraception.

Tell the stories of one or more couples who benefited from NFP.

Discuss how contraception impedes and poisons total, self-giving love.

Explain the essential moral differences between contraception and NFP.

Marriage and Family Virtue:

Fruitfulness— "Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?"¹²

Personal Applications:

Prayerfully discern if God is calling you to a deeper generosity, to raise up more young souls for Him. Honestly assess if you have truly serious reasons not to have children now or even indefinitely.¹³

Enroll in our parish/diocesan NFP program.

¹¹ G. K. Chesterton, The Catholic Church and Conversion (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006) 113.

¹² Rite 12.

¹³ Pope Paul VI, "Humanae Vitae," (New York: Paulist Press, 1970) #10, #16.

Christmas (December 25th) - The Calling to Holiness / Mass

Major Aims: Proclaim the universal call to holiness

Encourage weekly Mass attendance

Primary Audience: Couples who are infrequent church-goers

Scripture Connections (Note: Readings taken from the Christmas Mass at midnight):

R1: Is your life a 'walk in darkness,' 'a burdensome yoke'?

R1: "A child is born for us." Does this truth impact your life?

R1: Saints have "abundant joy" because they know what gifts we've received.

R1: Saints "divide the spoils" of grace Christ has won for us in battle.

Ps: At Mass, "Sing to the Lord, bless his name."

Ps: God wants to enter our everyday lives, so we can "proclaim His help day by day."

Ps: God wants to work "wonders" for us. Do we have an expectant, hoping faith?

R2: "Offering salvation to all men" now, in this life, not just the next.

R2: Christ "sacrificed himself for us," what do we give back in gratitude?

R2: "Live temperately, justly, and devoutly," with "hope."

Gos: The census-ordeal was like the hassles of our modern life—holiness is lived here.

Gos: The people of Bethlehem had no place for Christ in their busy lives.

Gos: Our sins can make us afraid, but "You have nothing to fear," in coming.

Gos: How could the shepherds stay away?

Illustrations:

Tell the story of Justin and Regina (not their real names), a newly married couple, who had to move away from their hometown. As their first Christmas together approached, they were poor, unemployed, homeless, and she was pregnant with their first child—imagine their emotions. Then reveal that that this is Joseph and Mary. The point is that saints live in the struggles of life just like us, which means that we can be saints just like them with God's help.

Marriage and Family Virtue:

Holiness (“*The Universal Call to, in the Church*”)¹⁴ —“Furthermore, married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should imbue their offspring, lovingly welcomed as God's gift, with Christian doctrine and the evangelical virtues...”¹⁵

Personal Applications:

Pray daily: by yourself, with your children, and with your spouse.

Come to see and worship Jesus in gratitude every Sunday and holy day of obligation.

Answer God's call to live as a joyful saint in your ordinary life; as a spouse, parent, friend, neighbor, and co-worker.

¹⁴ Catholic Church, “Lumen Gentium,” Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1986) #41.

¹⁵ Lumen chap. V.

The Holy Family, Sunday in the Christmas Octave (Year A) –

Caring for Parents / the Aged

Major Aims: Stress the duty to love and care for our aging parents

Proclaim the dignity of human life until natural death

Primary Audience: Adult children of aging parents

Scripture Connections:

R1: God blesses those who honor their father and mother.

R1: "Take care of your father when he is old," for we owe a great debt to our parents.

R1: "Grieve him not as long as he lives," for we may be "independent" adults, but we are forever their children and they are always our parents.

R1: "Even if his mind fail, be considerate with him...." Jesus knows that loving sometimes means carrying a painful cross for love's sake.

R2: "Clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience" toward parents.

R2: "Forgive... as the Lord has forgiven you." Forgive your parents their wrongs.

Gos: Like Joseph and Mary, (most) parents sacrifice a lot for their children and deserve their children's gratitude.

Gos: Joseph made decisions with God's help. So we should do in caring for our parents.

Gos: King Herod led with an mindset much like our culture's, he saw killing others as the answer to his problems.

Gos: Would Mary and Joseph ever regard Jesus as "a burden?"

Illustrations:

Who are the poorest of the poor among us? Blessed Mother Teresa said: "I never forget an opportunity I had in visiting a home where they had all these old parents of sons and daughters who had just put them in an institution and forgotten maybe. And I went there, and I saw in that home they had everything, beautiful things, but everybody was looking towards the door. And I did not see a single one with their smile on their face. And I turned to the Sister and I asked: How is that? How is it that the people they have everything here, why are they all looking towards the door, why are they not smiling? I am so used to see the smile on our people, even the dying ones smile, and she said: This is nearly every day, they are expecting, they are hoping that a son or daughter will come to visit them. They are hurt because they are forgotten.... Are we there, are we there to receive them...?"¹⁶

Marriage and Family Virtue:

Filial Piety-- The 4th Commandment.¹⁷ We tend to think of this commandment in reference to young children, but it is intended particularly for adults as their parents grow old.

It also cuts both ways, b/c it requires parents to behave in a way that is worthy of their children's respect and honor.

Personal Applications:

Do not see death as the solution to our problems—The old/dying want/need our love.

Prayerfully discern the best, loving way to care for your parents, given your resources.

Pray for the elderly, especially the lonely. Visit a nursing home with your children.

¹⁶ Blessed Mother Teresa, "1979 Nobel Peace Prize Lecture," 4 Dec. 2008,

<http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1979/teresa-lecture.html>.

¹⁷ NAB Exodus 20:12, Deuteronomy 5:16.

Mary, Mother of God (January 1st) - Vocations to Religious Life / Priesthood

Major Aims: Promote religious and priestly vocations
Promote the identities of motherhood/fatherhood

Primary Audience: Those discerning vocations

Scripture Connections:

R1: The Lord set Moses and Aaron apart to bless His people.

R1: Mary/Religious/Priests ‘bless, keep, grace, look kindly with face shining, and give peace’ to God’s people.

Ps: Mary/Religious/Priests bear Christ to, “guide,” and teach “all the peoples.”

R2: God “designates” persons and times according to His design.

R2: Love led Jesus to become a slave to set others free and lived the greatest life, similarly, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord...”

R2: Those called to religious life/priesthood demonstrate the presence of the Spirit in their total gift of self to the Father.

Gos: Christ is glorified through his servants.

Gos: “And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart”—the contemplative life of prayer is powerful.

Illustrations:

Mary is virgin and mother, a biological mother to one, but a spiritual mother to all Christians. Every Christian is called to be an icon of Christ, but in a special way the religious

sister ~~religious~~ is an icon of Mary/the Church, and the male religious/priest is an icon of Christ.

I think you need some more suggestions here.

Marriage and Family Virtue:

Parenthood / Motherhood and Fatherhood—Some people have biological children, some will not, but every person is called to be ^{*a spouse and*} a mother or a father, even priests and religious.

Personal Applications:

Prayerfully discern whether Christ is calling you to religious life/priesthood.

Deepen your Marian devotion and model your Christian discipleship after hers.

Contemplate to whom you are already a non-biological father or mother. Who are your spiritual children?

Works Cited / Annotated Bibliography

Augustine, St. St. Augustine Confessions (Oxford World's Classics). trans. Henry

Chadwick, New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

Considered the first western autobiography, *The Confessions* presents a sinner's struggle for saintliness. St. Augustine could serve as an eye-opener for today's young people who tend to think of saints as naïve of the world and its temptations.

Catholic Church. Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2nd ed., New York: Doubleday, 2003.

It is hard to overestimate the value of this work as a catechetical reference and as a tool in the new evangelization. I am so grateful for this catechism of the Catholic Faith. I wish they had put something this good together years ago.

Catholic Church. "Lumen Gentium." Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents. ed. Austin Flannery, Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1986.

The Second Vatican Council's "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" is referenced in this guide in regards to its passages on parenthood in the chapter on "The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church" (Chapter V, #39-42). I consider this topic to be one of the most important emphasizes of the council.

Catholic Church. New American Bible. Washington, DC: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Inc., 1991.

This Catholic Bible version is the source for the lectionary scripture readings heard in the Mass.

Catholic Church. Rite of Marriage. New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp, 1970.

This is the ritual used for the Catholic marriage sacrament. It should not only be read as a "how-to" liturgical book—it should also be considered through the lens of theology: What do these vows and statements of consent reveal about the nature, purposes, and beauty of marriage?

Chesterton, G. K. The Catholic Church and Conversion. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006.

The witty, penetrating, and often humorous insights of Chesterton remain timely even today. How many Catholics have there been who are more quoteable than him?

Mother Teresa, Blessed. "1979 Nobel Peace Prize Lecture." 4 Dec. 2008,

<http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1979/teresa-lecture.html>.

Blessed Mother Teresa (1910-1997) always stayed on message. Whenever the world turned its spotlight toward her, on occasions such as this one, she always shined the light upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the needs of the poor. Her words and example of life retain their power to convict us toward a greater, active love for neighbor still today.

Paul VI, Pope. "Humanae Vitae." New York: Paulist Press, 1970.

In this encyclical, Pope Paul VI (reigning 1963-1978) condemned contraception, teaching that "the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children" (#14). His reasoning behind this, and his accurate predictions of what contraceptive and abortive practices would do to societies, make this work essential reading before preaching on contraception and/or NFP.

Stritof, Sheri and Bob. "The State of Our Unions: From the Rutgers National Marriage

Project." About.com: Marriage, 4 Dec. 2008,

<<http://marriage.about.com/od/newsandviews/a/stateunions.htm>>.

This web article reports on the release and findings of the Rutgers National Marriage Project's 1999 document "The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America." This article was tapped only for its striking quote and statistic from David Popenoe, but the "State of Our Unions" report merits further reading. *A new report is issued annually.*

Worship: A Hymnal and Service Book for Roman Catholics. Chicago: G.I.A.

Publications, 1986.

This worship-aid contains the readings for the Sundays and major feasts of Advent and Christmas for all years: A, B, and C. Using such a book is a convenient way to survey the lectionary readings when preparing a homily series. This is so because the weekday readings (found included in a full missal) are an obstacle to research and preparation.

Matera, Frank J. Strategies for Preaching Paul. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001.

Though this work is not cited within the homily guide, Matera's book provided me the inspiration that a themed, multi-week homily series was both desirable and possible. Matera presents exegesis and topics to preach on out of the Sunday readings of St. Paul in the lectionary.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. National Directory for Catechesis.

Washington, DC: USCCB, 2005.

This document is a useful aid to American catechists in comprehensively and effectively teaching the Catholic Faith. It presents the circumstances and trends found among American Catholics, provides lists on what doctrines should be taught, and gives advice for how to teach these doctrines well. A homilist should read it to learn his audience and to find catechetical topics.

Victor,
This is a great project! One general suggestion I have is that you provide links from one homily to the next, so the parishioners are clued into the theme running through the homilies and how each topic builds on the previous one.

A