

INTERCEDE



PRAY

Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be

REFLECT

God's plan for marriage and the family is at the heart of a culture that welcomes and cherishes His gift of life. God designed the love of husband and wife to be so complete, so ordered to a lifetime of communion with Himself and each other, that it is open to creating a new human being whom they will love and care for together. Part of God's gift to husband and wife is cooperation with His creative power. And couples who cannot bear children still share in this cooperation. As St. John Paul II affirmed to such couples, "you are no less loved by God; your love for each other is complete and fruitful when it is open to others." In participating in this "great mystery" of love that is total, faithful, and fruitful, married couples become a sign of the love between Christ and his Church (Eph 5:32).

While a couple does not need to seek to have a child in every act of intercourse, they should never act to reject the life-giving power granted by God. When married couples deliberately act to suppress their fertility—such as using contraception—the couple denies part of the inherent meaning of married love and harms their unity.

For serious reasons, couples may choose to avoid pregnancy for a time or indefinitely. Natural family planning (NFP) can help married couples identify and utilize the naturally infertile times in a woman's cycle, all while respecting and cooperating with God's design.

In today's culture, living out God's plan for married love and opening our hearts to the gift of children can be difficult. It can often require great generosity and trust in the Lord. But as Christ repeatedly exhorted, "Be not afraid!" The Church's teaching on married love is an invitation to let God transform our hearts. God's plan for married life and love is far richer and more fulfilling than anything the world can offer us.

ACT (choose one)

- Offer a *Prayer for Married Couples* (usccb.org/prayers/prayer-married-couples) for this month's intention.
- If you are married, participate in this 2023 *At-Home Marriage Retreat* anytime during the month of February (bit.ly/at-home-marriage-retreat).
- Offer some other sacrifice or prayer that you feel called to do for this month's intention.

ONE STEP FURTHER

Learn more about God's plan for marriage and how husbands and wives are called to fully live out their vows in *Married Love and the Gift of Life* (bit.ly/married-love). The article also provides an introduction to the Church's teaching on Natural Family Planning (NFP).

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