



Session 4

God's body talk

AIM

To appreciate that being created by the God of love, our bodies reflect their origin in his loving purpose. This purpose informs what is the right and wrong use of our bodies.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning and purpose God has given sexual love
- State why contraception and IVF contradict the meaning of marital love
- State why the marriage vows of unity, indissolubility, faithfulness and openness to life are vital to the success of a marriage
- Explain why the Church advocates natural fertility awareness

'The human person: with our openness to truth and beauty, our sense of moral goodness, our freedom and the voice of our conscience, with our longings for the infinite and for happiness, we question ourselves about God's existence. In all this we discern signs of our spiritual soul. The soul, the 'seed of eternity we bear in ourselves, irreducible to the merely material' can have its origin only in God.'

(CCC 33)



Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones. Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your cries are continually before me.

(Isaiah 49:13, 15-16)

Made in the image of God

As a couple, read the accounts of creation below and answer the three questions. (Take about 10 minutes). We will then discuss the questions as a group.

- What do these extracts tell us about human beings being different from animals?
- What do these extracts tell us about the relationship between men and women?
- What do these extracts tell us about the purpose and meaning of sexual love?

First account of creation

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth”.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.

(Genesis 1:26-28)

Second account of creation

Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed...

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

(Genesis 2:7-8, 18-25)



Why contraception and IVF are wrong?

True or false

Read the statements below and decide as a couple whether they are true or false, giving reasons. (Take about 5 minutes).¹

We will then discuss the questions as a group.

Statements	True	False
1. The Church is against contraception because sex is something bad and dirty.		
2. The Church is against contraception because it wants every act of sexual love to result in a baby.		
3. The Church is against contraception because it makes a lie out of God's language of love.		
4. The Church is for couples spacing the number of children using Natural Fertility Awareness.		
5. The Church allows couples to use Natural Fertility Awareness to permanently avoid pregnancy.		
6. The Church is against IVF because children conceived in a test tube are not really human.		
7. The Church is against IVF because she doesn't want the marriage bed to be replaced by the laboratory.		
8. The Church is against IVF because she doesn't care about the suffering of infertile couples.		

Natural Fertility Awareness is a method of working out the natural periods of fertility and infertility that are present in every woman's monthly cycle. This is not to be confused with older, less reliable methods such as the Rhythm Method, but is based on observations of natural changes to the woman's body.

God created human beings to be a union of body and soul. The fact that human beings are created as a union of body and soul means the body is never 'something' but always 'someone' who shares in the dignity of the 'image of God'. One of the reasons why God made us a union of body and soul is so we could form loving relationships with each other, create children to love, and could be capable of knowing and loving him.

We can see signs of God's design and purpose in nature.

The Church teaches that we can come to know God in two ways:

- through our reason observing nature and ourselves, and
- through God's Word in the Bible and the life of the Church

¹ This activity is based on Dr C O'Donnell's *Questions & Answers on Sex and Marriage*.

Scripture would not wish to inform us about how the different species of plant life gradually appeared or how the sun and moon and the stars were established. Its purpose ultimately would be to say one thing: God created the world... all of this comes from one power, from God's eternal Reason, which became – in the Word – the power of creation. (Cardinal Ratzinger, *In the Beginning*, p.5)

God created masculinity and femininity to reveal our spiritual nature and share in his creation of new life. The Church teaches that sexual love expresses in a profound way our nature as beings created to be a union of body and soul, made in the image of God.

Jesus reveals and heals our capacity for self-giving love. We can only know our true dignity and the depth of our ability to love through Jesus Christ.

Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God?

As a couple take some time to discuss the following questions: (5 mins).

- What do we mean when we say that children are a gift from God?
- Would you want your children to be brought up in the Catholic faith? Why?
- The Church understands that ‘new life is not the result of each and every act of sexual intercourse’ due to the woman’s God-given, natural cycle of monthly fertility and infertility. Furthermore, the Church also teaches that where there are ‘well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances’ (Pope Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*), married couples may then take advantage of Natural Fertility Awareness to abstain from sexual relations during the woman’s fertile period, and have sexual intercourse during the infertile period. This does not go against God’s will for our fertility because the couple are using the natural, God-given cycles for their correct purpose.
- God, in his wisdom, has given us a natural, simple way of being responsible parents that involves our intelligence, self-control and loving consideration. However, the couple must ensure that their motivation is the good of the family and not some selfish desire.

However, the Church is against both contraception and IVF as they artificially break the inseparable bond between the act of sexual love and openness to fertility. In addition, contraception also makes the act of love a ‘lie’ by withholding one of the essential qualities of marriage: openness to fertility. The most important and special message that the body language between wife and husband communicates is, “I love every aspect of you so much” – it does not add “except for your fertility”.

Action Planning

As a couple consider what you will do as a result of this session. You might like to consider the following:

- Discuss together God’s meaning and purpose for sexual love and your approach to having children.
- Find out about Natural Fertility Awareness. Practitioner teachers of the ‘ovulation method’ or ‘multiple-indicators’ can be found on the web.

A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfilment... called to give life, spouses share in the creative power and fatherhood of God... they are co-operating with the love of God the Creator. (CCC 2366-7)