

Humanae vitae is prophetic 'blueprint' for society, bishop says Lincoln, Neb., [Oct 11, 2018](#)

Couple holding hands at sunset. Credit: Marko Aliksandr/Shutterstock

The message of *Humanae vitae* is "good news" and a guide for rebuilding family and society Bishop James Wall of Gallup, New Mexico, has said. He made the remarks during a talk on the famous encyclical and the legacy of Pope Paul VI.



Humanae vitae presents a "blueprint" for a happy marriage, the bishop told listeners, and that ignoring it had led to the breakdown of the family seen in recent decades.

Wall said the Church could not be silent about the lessons of the last fifty years, and what the Church had to teach about them. "When we speak about human life, it means it's addressed to everyone," he said.

Wall delivered his talk, entitled *Humanae vitae* and the Wisdom of Pope Paul VI, Oct. 3 as part of an ongoing series organized by the Diocese of Lincoln. "A society where contraceptive mentality is the norm, we know, is not a society based on love," Wall said. "And we know that that will eventually implode on itself, because we know that that is a selfish society." *Humanae vitae* was promulgated July 25, 1968, by Blessed Pope Paul VI, who will be canonized in Rome Oct. 14. The landmark encyclical was a central part of the Church's response to the cultural changes in the West during the 1960s, and particularly the widespread liberalization of sexual mores. While it presented the Church's consistent ethic of life and human sexuality, it has become most closely associated with its affirmation of the Church's teaching against the use of artificial contraception.

Wall noted the many symptoms of cultural decline which had been foreseen by Pope Paul, including large increases in cohabitation, divorce, and infidelity, and underscored the fundamental damage done to relations between men and women over the last fifty years. Men had been given license to use women to "feed their selfish pleasure," he said, both in personal relationships but also across popular culture, most especially in the multi-billion dollar pornography industry. "This one we have seen in spades, over and over and over again," Wall said. "If I am looking at the other, who is created in the image and likeness of God...and I am looking at her and I see her as purely an object, then I am going to use her for my own selfish purpose, my own selfish reasons."

Wall said that *Humanae vitae* was first and foremost "good news," and the "remedy for us to help to overcome the culture of death." "This is really where we see the prophetic wisdom of Paul VI," Wall said. "When a couple is using contraception, it becomes the husband, the wife, and the pharmaceutical company," he said. "And what we do when we include the pharmaceutical company is we push God out."

Wall said during his time doing marriage prep as a parochial vicar, couples would often be reluctant to pray together, even if they were receiving the sacraments. He said he would teach the couples a simple form of prayer, in which one of the members of the couple prays for the intentions of the other, and vice versa. This helps to develop the "spiritual personalities" of a husband and wife, and makes prayer an integral part of marriage.

"The greatest way that a husband and wife can love their children is by first loving each other," Wall told the audience. "Couples who are faithful to the Church's teaching, couples that are faithful to their own vocation, it spills out onto their children, so their children have a greater understanding of discerning their own vocation."

Paul VI wrote *Humanae vitae* following the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s. The advent of oral contraceptives for women, 'the pill,' caused many to wonder if the Church would reconsider its traditional opposition to artificial contraception, even among married couples. Paul VI established a commission, made up of both clergy and laypeople, to examine the issue. The conclusion of many of the commission's members was to recommend that the Church declare it licit for married Catholics to use contraception in some circumstances. Subsequent leaks to the press built public expectations of a change, Wall said.

Many were surprised by the eventual contents of the encyclical, which disappointed those who wanted to see the Church adapt to the morals of the era. But, Bishop Wall suggested, no other conclusion was possible for the pope since it would have meant leading the Church into error. Wall reminded listeners that the authority Christ invested in the Church, and in the popes, protects the Church from error in the areas of faith and morals. "It's not the Church of St. Peter, it's not the Church of the Apostles, it's not your Church, it's not my Church, but Jesus says this is my Church, I will establish my Church," Wall said. "And so no matter how dark or difficult things can become, we always want to make sure we remain in the Barque of St. Peter, that we remain in the Church that Jesus Christ founded."