Introduction:

If there is one theme that we can remember about the twentieth century it is this: 

_A century of violence and destruction._

Our nation over the last one hundred years has experienced its fair share of violence, but nothing, and I mean nothing would be as devastating to our world as what happened in the United States on January 22, 1973. On this infamous day a decision was made by the Supreme Court, now simply referred to as “Roe v Wade”, a decision which has been defended to its very core by numerous pro-choice advocates; of these well-known people—some we see every week when we watch TV—some we see when we visit the movies—some are the very people we elect to stand and speak on our behalf in public office. Now I am certainly not trying to criticize these actors, entertainers, or politicians; but, I am shocked when these people say statements like:

- “It is a woman’s right to choose what she wants to do with her body.”
- “I am not for telling people how they should live their life. I believe every American has a right to make his/her own choices.”

I believe that these people are certainly very committed to their beliefs and it is not my intention to criticize them, but after hearing stories of numerous women and the sorrow that they now experience after their abortion’s makes me wonder, “Is the truth really being told?” In this catechism class we are going to speak about the document that a man wrote five years before Roe v Wade was passed and, even though the cries he heard were so great, he did not succumb to the pressure of listening to those voices. For these reasons and more I believe, without a doubt, that Paul VI is indeed a _prophet for the twentieth century._

For either he was Don Quixote attacking the wrong targets, or he was “prophetic” in the strict sense that he correctly diagnosed his present
and thus prepared for our future. The encyclical Humane Vitae poses this problem acutely. Paul VI was generally pooh-poohed when he said that the widespread availability of contraceptives “could open the way to marital infidelity and a general lowering of standards” (Humane Vitae, no. 17)...He also warned against government intervention in this private family area... (Hebblethwaite, 8)

Humane Vitae casts glances in this direction. It defends human rights, as it denounces governments who seek to impose birth-control...This was already happening in China where women pregnant with a second child were carted off in a blanket and forcibly aborted. In opposing compulsory abortion Paul was defending human rights and defending the Third World against a neo-colonial imposition. (Ibid. 517)

In this class I am going to look at the root of all evil and that means that we are going to expose contraception for what it is, “contra-against-conception.” Now, does it not make sense that if one is against the prospect of conception it would also make sense that one could easily say, “abortion is not killing; rather, it is simply removing a body of cells.”

My friends this class is going to explore the way that the Church looks at the beginning of life issues and why She insists that all marital acts must be open to the possibility of having a child. Let’s begin by exploring the following questions:

1) When does life begin?
2) Why is life sacred?
3) What does contraception have to do with abortion?
4) What about the women who have had abortions?

**Question #1: “When does life begin?”**

According to the Catholic Church there is no clear answer to when life begins; however, the Church is very clear on what happens after conception has taken place:

*Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life. (CCC 2270)*

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you. (Jer 1:5)*

*Yet you drew me forth from the womb, made me safe at my mother’s breast. Upon you I was thrust from the womb; since birth you are my God. (Ps 22:10-11)*

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My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. (Ps 139:15)

This leaves us with a problem, “If life is to be respected from the moment of conception then that would mean that abortion, regardless of what we say about our personal choices, is always intrinsically wrong?” YES! The Catechism states further:

Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law. (CCC 2271)

Of course now we need to ask that inevitable question, “What is ‘moral law?’”

The moral law is the work of divine Wisdom. Its biblical meaning can be defined as fatherly instruction, God’s pedagogy. It prescribes for man the ways, the rules of conduct that lead to the promised beatitude; it prescribes the ways of evil which turn him away from God and his love. It is at once firm in precepts and, in its promises, worthy of love. (CCC 1950)

What the Church is telling us in this definition is that the Wisdom of God, infused on the hearts of all human beings continues to lead us to make right and good judgments. Every human being has the moral law imprinted on his heart,

“Alone among all animate beings, man can boast of having been counted worthy to receive a law from God: as an animal endowed with reason, capable of understanding and discernment, he is to govern his conduct by using his freedom and reason, in obedience to the One who has entrusted everything to him.” (Ibid.)

It is not important for us to argue when life begins; rather, it is important to remember that life, right from the moment of conception, must be respected and it must be defended from the very depths of our being.

Since it must be treated from conception as a person, the embryo must be defended in its integrity, cared for, and healed, as far as possible, like any other human being. (CCC 2274)

Question #2: “Why is life sacred?”

“Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for
himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.” (CCC 2258)

In this quote from the Catechism it is important to note that the Church makes sure that everyone realizes that all life is sacred, it is sacred because we are made in the image of our Creator, “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) Why then is life sacred? Because in each human being the divine image of God shines forth.

Of all visible creatures only man is “able to know and love his creator.” He is “the only creature on earth that God has willed for his own sake,” and he alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity. (CCC 356)

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead. (CCC 357)

Question #3: Contraception and abortion: Where is the connection?

At this point many people may be saying, “Come on Father is there really a connection between abortion and contraception?” Once again, I must say, YES! Listen to what Pope Paul VI said in his treatment on the dangers of a culture using contraception:

Responsible men can become more deeply convinced of the truth of the doctrine laid down by the Church on this issue if they reflect on the consequences of methods and plans for artificial birth control. Let them first consider how easily this course of action could open wide for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards. Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings—and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation—need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law. Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner who he should surround with care and affection.

Finally, careful consideration should be give to the danger of this power passing into the hands of those public authorities who care little for the precepts of the moral law. Who will blame a government which in its
attempt to resolve the problems affecting an entire country resorts to the
same measures as are regarded as lawful by married people in the
solution of a particular family difficulty? Who will prevent public
authorities from favoring those contraceptive methods which they consider
more effective? Should they regard this as necessary, they may even
impose their use on everyone. It could well happen, therefore, that when
people, either individually or in family or social life, experience the
inherent difficulties of the divine law and are determined to avoid them,
they may give into the hands of public authorities the power to intervene
in the most personal and intimate responsibility of husband and wife.
(Humane Vitae #17)

In a certain sense, Pope Paul VI is saying that the following trends would become more
prevalent in our society that promotes the use of contraception. 2

- **The widespread use of contraceptives** would lead to conjugal infidelity and the
general lowering of morality;

- “The man” will lose respect for “the woman” and “no longer (care) for her physical
and psychological equilibrium” and will come to “the point of considering her as a mere
instrument of selfish enjoyment, and no longer as his respected and beloved companion”;

- **The widespread acceptance of contraception** would place a dangerous weapon in the
hands of public authorities who take no heed of moral exigencies; and

- **It would lead men (and women especially) to think they had absolute and unlimited
dominion over their bodies.**

Is there any other way of saying that contraception and abortion are united in some way?
Well yes, why don’t we read paragraph #13 of the encyclical letter from Pope John Paul
II, *Evangelium vitae*?

*It is frequently asserted that contraception, if made safe and available to all, is
the most effective remedy against abortion. The Catholic Church is then accused
of actually promoting abortion, because she obstinately continues to teach the
moral unlawfulness of contraception. When looked at carefully, this objection is
clearly unfounded. It may be that many people use contraception with a view to
excluding the subsequent temptation of abortion. But the negative values inherent
in the “contraceptive mentality” –which is very different from responsible
parenthood, lived in respect for the full truth of the conjugal act—are such that
they in fact strengthen this temptation when an unwanted life is conceived.
Indeed, the pro-abortion culture is especially strong precisely where the Church’s
teaching on contraception is rejected. Certainly, from the moral point of view
contraception and abortion are specifically different evils: the former contradicts

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2 *Humanae Vitae*’ was truly prophetic: By Francisco S. Tatad Philippine Daily Inquirer
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the full truth of the sexual act as the proper expression of conjugal love, while the latter destroys the life of a human being; the former is opposed to the virtue of chastity in marriage, the latter is opposed to the virtue of justice and directly violates the commandment “You shall not kill.”

But despite their differences of nature and moral gravity, contraception and abortion are often closely connected, as fruits of the same tree. It is true that in many cases contraception and even abortion are practiced under the real – life difficulties, which nonetheless can never exonerate from striving to observe God’s law fully. Still, in very many other instances such practices are rooted in a hedonistic mentality unwilling to accept responsibility in matters of sexuality, and they imply a self-centered concept of freedom, which regards procreation as an obstacle to personal fulfillment. The life which could result from a sexual encounter thus becomes an enemy to be avoided at all costs, and abortion becomes the only possible decisive response to failed contraception.

The close connection which exists, in mentality, between the practice of contraception and that of abortion is becoming increasingly obvious. It is being demonstrated in an alarming way by the development of chemical products, intrauterine devices and vaccines which, distributed with the same ease as contraceptives, really act as abortifacients in the very early stages of the development of the life of the new human being.

In this declaration our Holy Father has made sure that people must be aware that to be truly pro-life means that one also must be “anti-contraception.” If you do not believe me then I invite you to read the following article in Sunday’s Plain Dealer from January 8, 2006, and you tell me that contraception and abortion are not closely linked. It says:

About a year after the Supreme Court issued its landmark 1973 Roe v Wade ruling, Linda had what she called an “oops” moment. She forgot to use her birth control and found herself pregnant. Linda was 25 and a student at Case Western Reserve University and had recently separated from her husband. The father was another man. With years of school and a divorce ahead, Linda did what women nation wide could for the first time do legally. She had an abortion. For her, it was as much an expression of feminism as a personal decision. “I was very much a liberated woman,” Linda said. “I felt clear that it was the right choice for me.” At the time, Linda represented the typical woman pursuing an abortion, data show: early to mid-20’s, white, unmarried, no children and most likely a student...Linda, who remains single and childless, said she has never regretted her decision. She asked that her last name be withheld because her elderly parents do not know about the abortion. Ever since the 1973 decision that gave women the right to end a pregnancy, abortion has been paradoxically both a closely guarded secret for those like Linda and a loud, passionate debate...

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My friends if we are to be a culture of life we must be willing to let others know the truth of the Gospel and not hide behind our signs and voices. May we all receive the strength to preach the Gospel of life.

**What about women who have had an abortion, what can we do for them?**

I ask that you refer to the following scripture passages to answer that question, John 4: 4-25 and John 8: 53, 1-11; and Luke 8: 40-48.

Make no mistake about what I am saying to you, I am saying that as Jesus Christ, He who was born of woman and through this woman’s faith salvation came to the world through, Him—he who was born for us to save us, and so one need never question the importance that the Church has in bestowing mercy on those who seek it. Remember the words of our dear Lord, “Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.” (Matt. 9:13)

My friends the Church has never turned Her back on any of Her children who have sought the guidance of the Church, especially when that person sought help in the confessional. When we ask for His mercy we are entitled to His Mercy through our Savior Jesus Christ; however, we must ask for it. Ask for God’s Mercy for yourself and for the whole world, and may the Merciful Father continue to guide us and lead us always to His Son’s Sacred Heart.

**Conclusion**

I may not be able to say that Pope Paul VI is a saint, but using the words of the Supreme Pontiff, “Do not be afraid,” he reportedly told Edouard Gagon on the eve of the Encyclical, (Humane vitae) “in twenty years time they’ll call me a prophet.” (Hebblethwaite, 8) I do believe that I can indeed call him a prophet for the twentieth century. In this class I hope that the words that he spoke about are ringing true for all of us. It was through his dedication and love that we are able to say, even if we are not desiring to admit it, “The Pope was right!” My friends this is a time when we need, more than ever, to implore God’s boundless Mercy on the World, and may the savior and Lord of all give us His Mercy in great abundance.