



Day 5

ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE

A positive pregnancy test...now what? Each day, hundreds of thousands of women learn that they are pregnant, and our culture tells them that they have two choices: keep and parent the child, or have an abortion.

However, people so often fail to talk about the third option--adoption! For many women, adoption never even occurs to them, or, it is seen as distasteful or worse than abortion. For many women, the thought of "giving their child away" is the deepest form of betrayal--an unthinkable option worse even than ending the child's life through abortion. And there is still some social stigma around women who place their children for adoption--shame that they are unable to care for their children or guilt that they became pregnant in the first place.

WE ARE ALL ADOPTED

Yet, these stereotypes couldn't be further from the truth! Adoption is not only a heroic and selfless act, it is also a Christian concept. Remember that the Sacraments are not just symbols, they are signs which actually confer the grace that they signify (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1126). As a result, our Baptism, which is one of the sacraments, "not only purifies from all sins, but also makes [us] 'a new

creature,' an adopted son of God" (CCC 1265). We are all adopted sons and daughters of God, not just symbolically, but literally, through the Sacrament of Baptism!

This adoption makes us worthy of obtaining "the promised inheritance of eternal life" (CCC 2009). God, in an utterly free decision, adopts us into His divine life through an

outpouring of grace, thus making us worthy of eternal life despite our complete lack of deserving it. This outpouring of grace is accomplished in the Sacraments.

For Christians, adoption is never a foreign concept or something unnatural. On the contrary, because we have first been adopted through baptism, we know the joy of being loved just for who we are.



Many times, when women consider abortion, they believe the child to be the “problem.” But, a person

is never a problem! Every person, from the first instant at conception, is a perfect creation of God! God has a plan for each and every person. No one is an “accident” to God, even though a pregnancy may be unplanned or accidental to us. For this reason, adoption is such a beautiful gift!

If a woman (or a family) realizes that she is not able now to care for her child as that child deserves, creating an adoption plan is the most courageous and generous thing she can do. It is not easy. And, it does not magically make the pregnancy

“go away,” but it is a responsible, loving way to thank God for his amazing gift of new life and to be a mother in the truest sense of giving life and love to a child.

A woman or a family may have a number of reasons for not being able to care for a child at the present moment. Maybe the mom is too young or not ready to care for a child. Maybe she is sick or disabled or has problems with addiction. Maybe the family is struggling with the children they already have. Or, maybe the child is born with a condition the parents don't feel able to provide the proper care for. Whatever the reason, if the right solution is adoption, there are no shortage of loving families ready to open their arms to welcome any child no matter their age, race, special needs, or any other circumstances.

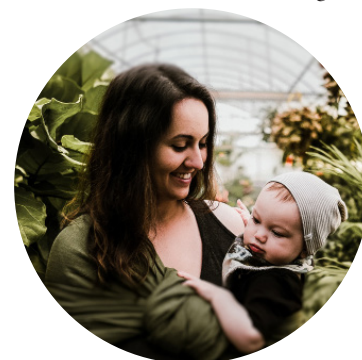
Still, countless women each year choose abortion rather than adoption. It may be that many of these women have no idea that couples and families are eagerly waiting to adopt their babies. In the US, according to available statistics, there are up to 36 couples waiting to adopt for every one baby placed for adoption. At any given time, there are approximately two million couples on waiting lists to adopt infants—even those with special needs.

WHY DON'T MORE WOMEN CHOOSE ADOPTION?

Women may feel that the choice to place their children for adoption is a betrayal. They are “giving up” their babies. “Giving up” is a terrible phrase that ought never to be used in this situation. It implies that the woman does not care about what happens to her child. Women are also concerned that they are being selfish if they place a baby for adoption—they feel they should “take care of” the child themselves—either quickly through abortion or raising the child on their own—rather than making it someone else's problem.

However, these two stereotypes are just wrong. Women who place their children for adoption do so precisely because they care about their child. In fact, they care so deeply about their child that they relinquish their own right to raise the child so that he or she might have a better life. Two incredible goods can come out of adoption: the child is given abundant life, and a couple, who has extra resources or may not have been able to have children of their own, is given a precious gift on whom they can pour out their love.

And, women who pursue adoption are anything but selfish. Many women choose abortion to “undo” a pregnancy—to either conceal it or end it quickly to get back to normal life. Continuing with a pregnancy, particularly when you know you will be placing your child with an adoptive family, can be very difficult. The lure of a “quick fix” through abortion tempts women with the belief that very quickly their lives will be back to normal and no one will ever know. But, the pain following abortion can last a lifetime, and the grief of knowing she ended the life of her child can leave a woman unable to continue the activities and pursue the dreams that made her want to end the pregnancy in the first place. By giving a child life, a woman engages in a great act of self-sacrifice,



which is what Jesus calls us to do: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). Self-sacrifice is incredibly difficult, but ultimately it is what makes us truly happy. Giving a child life is never as painful as the grief and guilt following abortion.

Additionally, today many more adoptions are “open adoptions” in which the birthmom and the adoptive parents

keep in touch so that the birthmom and baby can get to know each other. These families often include birthmoms at birthday parties and holidays so that she is part of the family too. It allows the adopted child to know where he comes from and not wonder why his parents didn’t “want” him. The result can be a joyful family situation that far exceeds anything that either the birth mom/parents and the adoptive family could have imagined.

FOSTER CHILDREN NEED FOREVER FAMILIES

Adoptive parents step in to offer help to birthparents who are unable to care for a child. Many adoptive parents adopt newborns, but many more adopt older children who are in the foster care system. For these children, life is most often a series of foster homes— sometimes several a year— resulting in instability and isolation. Children who move often have difficulty making friends in all of their new schools. Very often their grades suffer because they do not have continuity of teachers and classes.

Children able to be adopted are looking for forever families —someone to adopt them and make them members of a family not just for a time, but forever.

Research shows that on any single day, there are 440,000 children in foster care in the U.S., with nearly 690,000 children having spent time in foster care in any given year, over 125,000 of whom are waiting for adoption. 69,000 youth in foster care live in group homes, and are not placed with foster families. For these kids, life in foster care is difficult.

Despite the desire for continued higher education, only about 50% of foster youth graduate from high school and



only 6% graduate from 2 or 4 year college programs. Half of all youth who turn 18 in foster care end up homeless or incarcerated, and they are at greater risk of being trafficked or victimized in some other way. However, if more families were willing to welcome a child in need

into their homes, we could reverse this trend immediately. Children in foster care have done nothing wrong to deserve the poor treatment they sometimes receive. Loving families can change everything for these kids by offering stability, a peaceful home environment and unconditional love--whether they are eventually reunified with their own families or stay with or are adopted by their foster families.



In his encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II tells us that “the first and fundamental structure for “human ecology” is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person” (39).

All children have a natural right to know and be cared for by a mother and father. However, sometimes circumstances do not allow for a child’s birth parents to raise him or her. In those instances, adoptive parents can provide a family—a “sanctuary of life” in which children “can develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity, and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny.”

Our culture has a problem when women think that abortion is the only choice for them if they are unable to parent their children. We must promote a culture of life by not only wholeheartedly supporting women who choose to parent their child, but also by lovingly promoting adoption, not abortion, as a courageous, responsible, and loving option.