



## *Chapter Eighteen*

### BY THEIR FRUITS—OR LACK THEREOF—YOU WILL KNOW THEM

The faith and the family go together and must be defended together. An attack on one is usually an attack on the other, and the attacks, though always persistent and sometimes vicious, are not so difficult to defend against after all. It is simply a matter of being reasonable and being as persistent as those who insist on misunderstanding or misrepresenting the faith and the family, even those who are bent on destroying them.

One of the most common criticisms against the Catholic faith is that it is out of step with the modern world. That's not much of a criticism. We pretty much agree with that, only we feel that the problem is not with the faith, but with the modern world. Too often we are reactionary in our response to critics rather than taking the initiative and putting the critics on the spot. We need to become more adept at painting them into a corner where they will find themselves having to defend the mess that is the modern world.

For the last one hundred years there has been an attack on marriage and the family that began with "birth control" (contraception), continued with "choice" and "reproductive health" (abortion and infanticide), and has now arrived at the brashest oxymoron of all: "gay marriage" (the attempted normalization of the most abnormal of human acts—homosexuality). G.K.

Chesterton recommends that we show no respect for the “sentimental rhetoric” that is used by such enemies of the family. We need to point out clearly how obviously unnatural all of these things are, and more importantly, we need to hold up high the Catholic ideal for the family, not only because it is right but because it is the only defensible position.

To the common objection that our ideal of marriage is simply an ideal, that it cannot be a reality, Chesterton's response is: “It is an ideal in a diseased society, it is a reality in a healthy society. For where it is real it makes society healthy.” He readily admits that it will not make the society perfectly healthy, because Catholics also believe in other things besides marriage: sin, for instance. But the point is that the Catholic sacrament of marriage is still more reasonable, more sane, more natural, more practical than all its grotesque imitators and outright defilers. It might be more difficult because it requires something unheard of in the modern world: sacrifice. The world only wants what is easiest at the moment.

Chesterton says, “Love is subject to law because it is subject to life.” Lifeless love is not love. Though the world exalts lust as love for love's sake, it is ultimately unfulfilling. It is empty. It is barren. It is a desert not a garden. The Church teaches love for *life's* sake. Chesterton says that in marriage, “passion is purified by its own fruitfulness, when that fruitfulness is its dignified and decent end.” As a sacrament, it is a fulfillment of Christ's teaching that He, Love Incarnate, has come that we may have life and that we may have it more abundantly. We are called to be fruitful. This is no mere metaphor. It is one of the first commands of God in Genesis. It is reflected in the Gospels, in Christ's words, “By their fruits you shall know them.” All the jokes about Catholics and their large families are very recent in origin. Until the early part of the last century, all Christian

churches condemned the use of contraceptives. But one-by-one, the Protestant sects caved in to the world's desires. With the rise of contraception came a parallel rise in divorce, which had also once been universally condemned among Christians. Then came abortion. Same thing happened. Only a few Protestant churches openly condemn abortion anymore. Then came the bland acceptance of practicing homosexuals (practicing for what?). One of the Catholic Church's closest cousins, the Episcopal Church, ordained an openly homosexual bishop. Meanwhile the world sneers derisively at the Catholic Church for maintaining its teaching about the sacrament of marriage.

The practical result of Catholic teaching is that we will win the war against the Culture of Death by having babies and raising them to be faithful to the Church. Our poor misguided enemies have a very self-defeating strategy. The world has countered the Church's teaching with the false alarm of overpopulation. But the cold facts indicate that the nations that accept contraception and abortion and homosexuality simply are not replacing themselves. By their fruits you shall know them. By their lack of fruits you won't know them because they won't be there.

Chesterton points out the irony that the modern industrial states that have invoked "a nightmare of over-population" did so after having themselves "actually destroyed the monastic brotherhoods that were a voluntary and virile limitation of it. In other words, they are rather reluctantly relapsing into birth control after actually suppressing the proof that men are capable of self-control." This idea of self-control is another puzzle to the modern world. But celibacy is the accompanying ideal to marriage. And Chesterton calls it "a poetic and positive enthusiasm, where all others would make it merely a negative mutilation."

The Catholic ideal of marriage can save our society. It is the only reasonable alternative to the bizarre anarchy we are facing.

It is the only normal thing. A thing so normal will not disappear, says Chesterton, “amid the accidents of an abnormal society. The society will never be able to judge marriage. Marriage will judge that society; and may possibly condemn it.”