



WEEK THREE: “A DIFFERENT KIND OF FRUIT”

“How many kids do you have?”. There it was, the dreaded question. My usual answer that would likely follow, “Well, um...none...yet.”. An honest answer to a well-meaning question, but one that always cut a bit deep. See, my husband and I had been married for a decade and had been unable to conceive a child of our own. The cross of infertility had become ours, and the journey one that would transform us forever.

At first the years went by with not too much concern or worry. After learning the Sympto-Thermal method of NFP during our period of marriage formation, we were always open to life and felt that it would happen, in God’s time. Being in our 20’s then our lives were filled with new careers, travel, and enjoying the early years of marriage. We had lots to focus on.

As the years progressed, the concern became a bit more real and an exercise in deeper trust in our Lord. “When the Lord is ready, we’ll be blessed with a child.” we’d say.

The years continued to tick on and friend after friend, relative after relative, would call with the good news that they were pregnant, again. It felt as though everyone we knew was having babies, and yet we remained without. It would have been very easy to lose hope, to give up or, to take matters into our own hands. But we both felt that that wasn’t God’s will for us so, we remained hopeful. We had to make the decision to consciously focus on all the blessings the Lord had given us – a good marriage (I had married my best friend), wonderful parents and siblings, great jobs, a beautiful home in a wonderful town.

But being human, that hope and trust would fail at times turning into self-pity and desperate pleas. I spent many hours in our little Chapel in Adoration where the tears would flow freely in the privacy of that space. I began to question God. “Lord, don’t you want us to co-create with you?” or “Do you not think we’d be good parents?”. There were so many questions and emotions – sadness, doubt, despair, anger. Over these difficult years, the Lord was so gentle with me. He would speak to me in the quiet of my heart and I would feel His love and the reassurance of His Spirit. I was like a child who just needed her Daddy to know she was in pain and to be comforted. “You see my hurt right, Jesus? I just need to know that you see me.” And He did. I knew He did.

During this time, our beautiful new church was undergoing construction and mass was in the Hall. Often my thoughts would linger over the large icon that hung over the temporary altar. “I am the vine, you are the branches, if you remain in me you will bear much fruit.” John 15:5. Of course, my thought was that that “fruit” was supposed to be a child, since that was the desire of my heart as a woman called to the vocation of marriage. But the Lord began to open my heart up to what fruitfulness alternatively

looked like, what a fertile marriage looked like, and it didn't necessarily mean a house full of little ones (although that is an amazing gift). He began to show me the fruit I was bearing as a wife, daughter, sister, aunt, friend and employee—many of these ways impossible had I been the one thing I wanted to be, a mother. We were being “Called to the Joy of Love”, like this month's theme, to all those God HAD placed in our lives. I just needed to step back and gain a new perspective to see it.

I was working in ministry at the time, a job I would have been unable to do with children due to its demanding hours and emotional toll. My husband and I were able to volunteer, travel to see family, help our parents out, make it to our nieces' dance recitals, our nephews' baseball games, and all those cute school plays. We were proud and happy to be sitting in the stands or the audience cheering them on, and we realized what our presence meant to them. Again, something we would not have been able to do if we had our own kids' plays and activities to attend to. We have had the amazing opportunity to love, spoil, kiss, and hold those little ones, and that has been a true gift to us. I remember holding one of my nieces just 5 days after she was born for the entirety of a mass. I can't tell you the peace that hour brought to my soul, to feel the warmth of her little frame in my arms as I went through the liturgy, it was one of the greatest gifts, and yet seemingly so small. But it was as if the Lord was saying to me, “You have babies to love, my daughter.” How precious a gift

anhood is, and how fruitful it is for the whole family.

Also, my marriage was growing stronger, not only because this was a cross we carried together, but because we had so much quality time together. We would joke that every night was a date night. Of course, we knew having a child would bring us into an even deeper union but, that was just not God's will for us. Our marriage was indeed fertile ground, being plowed by God on a daily basis, seeds being planted, and yes, fruit was surely growing.

I wish I could tell you that our story ends with a miraculous conception, but it does not...yet. But how it does stand now is that we have grown in trust and faith in so many ways that would have never been possible if we would have gotten pregnant in our first years as a married couple. Our lives are rich and full of the blessings of our Father, who loves us and cares for us so tenderly. We are on a path unforeseen to us, but we trust that He is working all things out for our good, because we love him and are called to HIS purpose, not our own (Romans 8:28).

For all those in the pews who may be carrying a similar cross of infertility, or even secondary infertility, my heart and prayers are with you. Together let us remember Christ's promise to us, that He is the vine and we are the branches and if we remain in him we will bear much fruit. The fruit may just look a little different than how we originally hoped it would.

Yours in Christ,

A parishioner

I have worked intensely in my family medicine practice helping couples with infertility, secondary infertility (meaning they have had successful pregnancy in the past but now have difficulties to achieve another) and recurrent miscarriage. As much as I think I can understand the journey of these couples, this story makes me realize I can never really know the depth of their struggle. Each of us has his or her unique cross, and this one can be extremely challenging.

In working with both Catholic and non-Catholic couples, both groups frequently have questions about what their options are, what is allowed, what isn't allowed, and why the Church teaches as it does. They may wonder out loud why I won't refer them to in vitro fertilization (IVF), intrauterine insemination (IUI) or other procedures if it seems the window of opportunity is closing for them. If children are such a gift, why can't a couple do whatever it takes? Would it make a difference if they promise to use all the embryos created and not freeze any?

The answer is simply and eloquently stated by our parishioner--not to “take matters into our own

hands.” In their marriage vows, couples promise to accept children lovingly from God. Accept means to receive them, if they are given. I know this is a hard truth to process but, at times, for mysterious reasons, a couple may be asked to carry the cross of infertility, for a few years, or for a lifetime.

I work with these couples using a Fertility Awareness Based Method, to attempt to find and treat the medical concerns that may be underlying their inability to become, or remain, pregnant. I look at their cycle charts for underlying hormonal issues, and other problems in either or both, and by working hard to have both the spouses be as healthy as they can, to understand the nuances of their unique fertility, the possibility of not just achieving pregnancy, but ultimately holding a child in their arms is increased. It’s wonderful for them (and for me) to witness this blessing. At other times, despite everyone’s best efforts, it doesn’t happen, and we’re walking a different journey. Either way, ultimately the gift of children is received through the loving embrace of the spouses, never separating love from life, as happens with artificial means with IVF or IUI.

Our parishioner who opened this article did an amazing job poignantly sharing her and her husband’s journey, the heartbreak, and the joy of love. I’m so grateful for her witness and for the witness of the many couples with whom I’ve worked with over the years. Their courage and faith have influenced both my vocation as a physician and my faith journey.

As with each of these topics we are presenting this month, for those who have questions about how this might apply to them or their families, I encourage you to reach out to me and I’ll answer as best I can. Also, if you are interested in learning about charting and tracking your fertility, please join us on Tuesday, July 26th from 7pm-9pm for a special virtual training open to all parishioners. Register at stauva.org/family-fertility to receive the link.

In Christ,
Dr. Karen Poehailos

NEXT WEEK, PART FOUR: “The Methods”.

Upcoming FREE Virtual Training:
Catholic Teaching on Fertility & FEMM Model Introduction
Tuesday, July 26th at 7PM.

Register at
stauva.org/fertility-family
to receive Zoom link

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