

THE UNCHANGEABLE TRUTH OF MARRIAGE

"Working Together For Good in His Name"

By Bishop Curtis J. Guillery, SVD

On Friday, June 26, 2015, in a 5-4 ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court extended marital rights to same-sex couples. This ruling is contrary to the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the essence of marriage as the union of one man and one woman -- a teaching which is based on divine Revelation in Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (#1601) states: "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; the covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus raised marriage between a man and a woman to the level of a sacrament. However, holding up marriage as between a man and a woman goes back to every civilization and generation from antiquity. Civil law should only reflect a desire for marriage to continue to exist.

The Supreme Court decision redefining civil marriage has no bearing on the Catholic Sacrament of Marriage, nor does it require the Church to change its teaching. The Church retains the right to think, say, and teach what it believes about marriage. Thus, priests and deacons will not be required to witness same-sex "marriages" in the Church, nor will they be permitted by the Church to do so. Religious freedom is protected by the First Amendment. However, this cannot be taken for granted, because it is possible in the future that this freedom will come before the courts.

The Supreme Court decision gives us an opportunity to continue to pray and work to strengthen, promote, and defend marriage as God has destined. Every Catholic, especially married couples, should witness the truth of marriage. That includes learning more about marriage and speaking about its spiritual, cultural, and societal benefits. At the same time, we must be prepared for false charges of discrimination, but our responses must always be in charity. There are great challenges ahead. Today, we must make a conscious choice to live our lives as Christian Catholics. Thirty to forty years ago married couples had the example and support of family and community, and also of the government, in as much as it did not get involved. That is not the case today.

Our Holy Father and the whole Church are aware that family life is struggling. It is for that reason there will be a World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia September 22-25 and also a Synod on the Family in Rome October 4-25. I ask you to follow the deliberations of both of these important gatherings, which will be inspiring, informative and, hopefully, transformative.

In our diocese we have programs such as "Marriage Enrichment" to help strengthen married life. For enriching resources and videos on marriage, you can visit www.MarriageUniqueforareason.org or www.foryourmarriage.org, both initiatives of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. In 1997, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also put out a Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children: "Always our Children." This pastoral message recognizes the struggles of many parents who have a homosexual child, and it offers support and a loving presence in those difficult circumstances.

On the trip back to Rome from the World Youth Day in Brazil, Pope Francis was asked what he thought of gay persons. His response was, "Who am I to judge?" Some have interpreted that statement as meaning the Pope would change the teaching of the Church. Rather, he meant that we should treat our gay brothers and sisters with respect, sensitivity, and compassion, as we are called to do with everyone. Showing respect and compassion toward a person is not the same as condoning the behaviors and lifestyle of that person. If one has compassion for and respects a woman who had an abortion, it does not mean one agrees that abortion is acceptable. Pope Francis went on to say that gay persons have gifts and qualities to offer the Christian community.

I encourage Catholics to have faith in the unchanging truth about marriage, and I hope that marriage between a man and a woman will once again prevail. I also hope that love will be our guiding light in dialogue and respect for those who have differing opinions about marriage.