

33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time Cathedral November 16, 2008 Defending Marriage

Every so often, it happens to a preacher. You have worked and reworked a homily to the point where you're satisfied with it, and then something comes up and you have to start over. That is my story this week. While in Baltimore for the annual fall assembly of the USCCB, I received an email from my office alerting me to a coalition formed by a group of Protestant ministers to urge support for the legalization of so-called "same sex" marriage here in Maine. One of them declared that they felt a "moral obligation" to call for "same sex" marriage. I feel a moral obligation to address it with you and with all of our Catholic faithful today...and in the weeks ahead.

Forgive me for a bit of Marriage 101. Throughout the Bible from beginning to end, marriage is always and only understood as the exclusive union of one man and one woman. In sacred Scripture, God is revealed as the author of marriage. Marriage is a gift of the Creator who, in Genesis, declares that "it is not good that the man should be alone," so he is given a partner, his equal, a helpmate. And so, we are told, "therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." The first reading assigned for today's liturgy picks up on the marriage theme as it extols "a worthy wife, her value far beyond pearls. Her husband, entrusting his heart to her, has an unfailing prize." (Remember that, you husbands!) In the writings of St. Paul, the marriage of man and woman is used as a primary image of the union of Christ and his Church.

The tradition of the Church for 2000 years has given witness to biblical teaching on marriage without compromise. Let's look at the liturgy of Christian marriage. In theology, there is the expression "lex orandi, lex credendi." It simply means that if one looks at the way we celebrate the liturgy—the words and actions—one can see something of what we hold true as Catholics. Listen to the opening prayer of the Nuptial Mass: "Father, when you created mankind you willed that man and wife should be one. Bind N. and N. in the loving union of marriage; and make their love fruitful so that they may be living witnesses to your divine love in the world."

One need not go to Scripture or Church teaching to understand that is the union of man and woman—not man and man or woman and woman—that is the essence of marriage. All of the great civilizations of the world have held to this truth. Christian ministers have, too, until fairly recently, in the same way that Christian ministers had always repudiated abortion...until recently. Pope John Paul's theology of the body is a beautiful explication of the truth that the very design of the male and female bodies celebrates the complementarity of man and woman, and reveals that the fulfillment of their longing for intimacy is in union with one another, a union designed by God to bring new life into the world. Providentially, we witness today the fruitfulness of married love as we celebrate the baptism of little May Florence. Thank you for allowing us to share in this celebration with you and your family. Our prayers surround you as you commit yourselves publicly to nurture, educate and form your child in the love of God and in the Gospel values that you hold dear. You are what the Second Vatican Council called a domestic Church, a Church of the home and family. We rejoice with you!

As I noted in my letter to Maine Catholics this weekend, "Marriage, as we know it, has been preserved, rewarded and recognized by the state in numerous ways because the state has

long recognized the foundational nature of traditional marriage to the good of the nation and entire civilizations. To support and encourage strong families is to support the building of a healthy and productive societal structure that is best equipped to raise and rear children.”

Marriage, as it has been known and lived for millennia, is under attack in our country, and now, in our own state. Much of the argument to legalize so-called “same sex” marriage is motivated by a concern, and a sincere one, I am sure, to secure certain legal benefits for people in same sex relationships. The Diocese of Portland has been unwavering in its support of hospital visitation rights or the sharing of health insurance benefits between household members, people choosing to live together whatever their sexual orientation. That only seems fair. However, to insist that complementarity of sexes is a fundamental prerequisite for marriage is not to be unfair.

Marriage is being challenged throughout the country. Recent elections in California, Florida and Arizona all resisted efforts to change the definition of marriage. Many more challenges are expected in the days ahead, including a same sex initiative in Maine. We must work together to preserve marriage for the good of our society. The Diocese will also continue working to strengthen the preparation we offer couples preparing for marriage.

At the same time, let’s be clear that the Diocese of Portland will not hesitate to speak out on issues that threaten the basic dignity and human rights of any individuals, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. In particular, I call your attention to these words from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, stating the Church’s authoritative teaching when it declares that homosexual persons “...must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided.”

Today’s Gospel celebrates two servants who were faithful in the way they used what the master had entrusted to their care. Our Master is the Lord, and He is asking us now to stand faithfully together in order to preserve, protect and strengthen marriage as the gift of conjugal, life-giving love between man and woman that our Creator ordained it to be for the good of the world. May we hear the words of St. Paul to the Thessalonians as words spoken also to us here and now: “...you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness for that day to overtake you like a thief. For all of you are children of the light and of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep as the rest do, but let us stay alert and sober.”

Most Rev. Richard J. Malone  
11<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Portland

