

May 15, 2013

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Our elected representatives in the Minnesota House and Senate have voted to redefine the meaning of marriage in our state. In light of this historically ill-advised decision, many people have asked me to offer some guidance to the Catholic faithful. I would like to respond to this development with careful reflection regarding its implications and what we Catholics can do now.

After all of the debate and tumult that have culminated in this legislative decision, one thing is very clear: pervasive misunderstanding of the meaning and purpose of marriage – the foundational building block of human society - remains. If marriage was only ever about love between consenting adults and their desires, it would have been changed centuries ago. But we know well that it is so much more. Marriage reflects truths about the human person that no human being, advocacy group or popular trend can mute or change, no matter how much one wishes reality to be shaped according to one's own making. The traditional understanding of something is often considered as such because tradition reflects unchanging truth, not because of some stubborn death grip on the past, as some may choose to judge it. Clearly, as Catholics, you and I still have much work to do to build up strong marriages as well as the proper understanding of marriage, in order to benefit the common good.

This work begins with sustained prayer. God is both the author of life and of marriage. He hears our prayers, and we must never doubt his power and love for humanity, even when we break our communion with him by our actions. In fact, I call for all Catholic faithful to participate through their parishes in a special day of prayer – and fasting – as a continued sign of our commitment to living out and proclaiming the truth

and goodness of God's plan for marriage. Details and resources to support this endeavor are forthcoming from our archdiocesan Office of Worship.

Our work also includes living out our beliefs with great joy and love, and often with courage, fortitude and patience. We can look no further than Pope Francis for a beautiful example of this. Our new pope is unequivocal about the truths of the faith, and he goes boldly into society to proclaim the truth with deep compassion and with the very love that Christ calls us to when he says, "Love one another as I have loved you." Pope Francis has never wavered on the reality of what marriage is and what it isn't. Likewise, he has never wavered on what truly sacrificial and compassionate love of neighbor must look like. They are one and the same.

With Pope Francis' example of living out the truth with love, living out our belief about God's plan for marriage means that husbands and wives must work every day to invest in their relationships with one another and their children. It means that those of us who believe in traditional marriage must redouble our efforts to walk the talk. I know of a husband and wife who recite a portion of their wedding vows to one another every evening and every morning: "I will love you and honor you all the days of my life!" They have been doing it for nearly 20 years. Not surprisingly, their Christian home abounds with love and harmony. Their children are gently formed by the love of mother and father for each other, together in communion with Christ. Expressing love surely increases love! Healthy and loving traditional marriages and families are the best possible way to demonstrate the beauty of God's plan for marriage and the dignity of every human life.

Importantly, our work also includes continuing to tell the truth, always with love, about societal trends that damage and degrade the common good, especially when these trends are sometimes, even with the best intentions, codified in civil law by legislation or

judicial fiat. The redefinition of marriage in Minnesota is only the most recent example of such destructive laws. We see plainly, with 40 years of experience since the Roe v. Wade decision, the heart-breaking impact of abortion-on-demand. It is estimated that the nascent lives of more than 55 million children have been snuffed out over these years. The terrible damage done has not only destroyed these 55 million lives, it also has wounded deeply the mothers and fathers of these lost children. Societally, we experience a sad callousness about human life that manifests itself in the extreme with increased violence. Is the Kermit Gosnell case in Philadelphia what the 1973 Supreme Court imagined would result from its collective decision? Sadly, while the details of this case are abhorrently graphic, no one can say that this situation is an isolated one. In fact, grave violence to young children in the womb is committed every day in cities across the United States. It wasn't that long ago that most politicians on both sides of the political spectrum uniformly sought measures that would make abortion "rare." And yet, we know it is far from rare; it has become a sad entitlement, vociferously protected, because the accepted norm is to think of a developing human life as a baby when we want one, and an inanimate "clump of tissue" when we don't. Here again, the desires of adults trump the truth at the expense of both children and society. Imagine how beautifully the common good and the dignity of every human person would be served if we all protected the lives of the innocent with passion and dedication!

As human persons, we have an extraordinary ability to deceive ourselves, especially when we narrow our focus to our personal desires. We are often brilliant at rationalizing just about anything. When we make decisions and establish laws that are unhinged from or even in defiance of God's moral law, we often see the gravity of our errors in judgment only in the rearview mirror of history. And even then, we sometimes choose to ignore the truth, or simply attempt to discredit those who try to tell it. It is a story that has been repeated throughout the course of human history. Today, it has

played out in our state as the wholesale redefinition of marriage meant, primarily, to assuage the desires of adults without much long-term consideration for children or how all this will affect the future of society.

In Minnesota, as in every state, the Church's public advocacy for the protection of traditional marriage has always been and remains rooted in her commitment to advance the common good for human society. This is the same spirit that guides the Church's pursuit of economic justice, healthcare and immigration reform, and the defense of human life and dignity from conception to natural death. Faithful Catholics believe they must stand up for policies that promote the common good, even when they are unpopular. We are guided by both faith and reason, ordered to the good of society, and grounded in the truth of the human person, God's clear plan for marriage, and respect for human life.

Consistent with our respect for every human life, we can never forget that our brothers and sisters with same-sex attraction must always be treated with respect and love. We offer prayerful support to families, especially parents, who often struggle with this issue when it occurs in their own homes. We cannot claim to be Christian and treat others with derision. Support for traditional marriage must never translate into lack of charity for our neighbor.

Today, my brothers and sisters in Christ, let us renew our pledge that we will continue to build up this community according to just principles, including giving voice and unwavering defense to the unborn, the poor and forgotten, the abused and the lonely. Let us vow to continue to work to strengthen marriage – with a renewed commitment to walk the talk – and defend it against all forms of its weakening, for the good of all society. We can do nothing less than continue to propose and do our best to live out what we believe. We hold dear the truth revealed by God, who is love, and who

requires us to keep his commandments, in and out of season, throughout the passing of time.

To each of you, and in accordance with Jesus Christ's exhortation to love another as he has loved us, I offer my continued dedication to these principles, in all of their manifestations, in order to protect and defend the common good. I also thank with deep personal gratitude all those who have worked so hard to defend and protect the traditional understanding of marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

Let us all move forward together, united in faith, hope and love.

With every good wish, I remain

Cordially yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt
Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

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