



Christian Marriage

Dear Friends in Christ,

Now that the postal survey about changing the legal definition of Marriage is underway, I repeat my call for all Catholics to consider their vote and its consequences carefully and conscientiously.

Whatever the outcome, the Church's teaching on Marriage will not change. It is important, in the midst of many voices and opinions, that we remain clear about this teaching. Here is an updated version of what I sent to you more than two years ago:

Christian Marriage is a miracle. It's a miracle because it brings health and happiness to human life. It's a miracle because it shows God at work, making possible what otherwise might look impossible.

We do not thank God for an abstract idea: Christian Marriage is real in the experience of the women and men who live it out. Without their generous and practical witness, my words would be empty rhetoric.

There are two vital elements in this understanding of Marriage. First, it is a commitment for life: "In good times and bad, in sickness and in health...". Second, it is a commitment to receive the blessing of children and nourish them in body and soul. It is "for " life in both senses of the word.

These elements were once generally understood in our society, but are no longer believed in by everyone. However, those who do believe and live that way shine a light on the path of becoming fully human, fully alive.

Within the commitment of belonging to one another for life: the daily acts of love and forgiveness, the cooling and warming of affections, the learning of the intricacies of another person (and yourself): can weave the strongest bonds. In the mystery of human sexual difference, man and woman can become one flesh.

Couples who are truly open to receiving the children God sends them find freedom from the ancient idols of money and instant gratification. Those who listen to the teaching of the Church about natural family planning discover, not irksome rules, but a way to richer relationships.

Of course, it is an enormous undertaking, which needs a man and a woman to make happen. To those who are not yet married, I would say: choose carefully: choose someone who shares your vision of what Marriage can be.

In fact, the miracle of Christian Marriage needs a third person: Jesus Christ. It is true that the blessing of Marriage is God's gift offered to all people: In the words of the Catholic wedding ceremony, "married life has been established as the one blessing that was not forfeited by original sin or washed away in the flood". But when two Christians marry, it becomes a Sacrament.

The ministers of this Sacrament are the couple who exchange their consent. They accept a special vocation in the mission of the Church. The family has been called the "domestic church". In its shared life of love, forgiveness, service and prayer, in parents handing on the Faith to their children, the Church is built up. Pope Francis has said "Children, before living in a house made of bricks, inhabit another house, even more essential: they live in the mutual love of their parents".

This little church cannot do it alone, though. It needs the company of other Christians; it needs the Word of God in the scriptures and the teachings that break them open; it needs the Sacraments. In other words, it needs to belong to the wider Church, giving and receiving.

We cannot forget our sisters and brothers who have suffered the death of a spouse or, for whatever reason, the breakdown of their relationship. Christ is closest to those who suffer. In his name, we offer the friendship and faith of the Church community and our willingness to walk with you on the path of healing and hope.

There are many kinds of human relationships, in which people may find the deep commitment of unselfish love. But Marriage is unique, and it does no honour or service to other partnerships to dress them in the clothes of something they are not.

Customs and laws will come and go, but God's blessing remains. The hearts of some of our sisters and brothers have grown lonely and cold; they need to see the love of Christ made visible in us his Church. I pray that more people will find the courage to say yes to the vocation of Christian Marriage and become this beautiful miracle for the Church and the world.

Mary, Mother of the Church, who asked your Son for the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana, pray for more miracles of Christian Marriage to bring life and joy among us all.

+Michael McKenna
Bishop of Bathurst

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