

Homily for the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

OK. The elephant in the room today for many people would be the Supreme Court's decision on Friday to give a constitutional right to couples of the same sex to marry. In particular, the Supreme Court – in a 5 to 4 ruling – set forth as law that all states are now required to issue marriage licenses to two people of the same sex and all states must recognize these same-sex “marriages” contracted out of state. The Diocese of Harrisburg responded with the following statement: “We are deeply disappointed that the Supreme Court in its ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that it did not uphold the right of states to maintain and recognize the true meaning of marriage in law as the union of one man and one woman. It is in a sense the *Roe v. Wade* decision for marriage. Thousands of laws nationwide related to marriage will be adversely impacted. Marriage is a natural institution that does not belong to the Court or State nor to the Church. The natural meaning of marriage can be known through reason without appealing to Scripture. We fear the Courts decisions redefining marriage and the rights of the States will have a long term corrosive effect on the institution of marriage which is the bedrock of our society. We pray that marriage between a man and a woman will remain a strong truth in our world. The common good of all, especially our children, depends upon a society that strives to uphold the truth of marriage.”

If you've seen the news coverage on this topic, you've probably have seen the full gambit of emotions from rejoicing to disappointment and everything in between. Even as I perused Facebook for a little bit on Friday I immediately found strong expressions of support and opposition for this ruling. And I imagine even if I surveyed this congregation here today I would find a wide range of views. Finally, after months and years of back and forth, the question has been settled – civilly-speaking, that is legally. Now marriage between people with same-sex attractions is the law of the land. But as we know, what is legal is not always moral, just look at the examples of slavery and abortion, to name two.

So, while the question of same-sex marriage has been answered according to the law, many other questions still remain – questions that I know many of you, family members, co-workers, or friends might have. It's with respect to some of these questions that I'd like to provide hopefully helpful answers – answers which you'll also find in this week's bulletin. When it comes to difficult moral issues such as this, we as Church must not shut down the discussion – either by getting angry and not talking about it or by simply saying I'm against it because God says so, period!

So, does God really hate men and women with same-sex attractions? And does the Church hate them too? Is that why the Catholic Church is against same-sex “marriage”? Quite simply, the answer is “no”. How could God, as our Father, or Church, as our mother, hate anyone? Love is the summation of the Gospel. Hate is the antithesis. “But, what does it mean to love someone”, we might ask? Well, is love best expressed when a parent lets his or her child get whatever they want, even if it will hurt them or someone else? My experience with many men and women with homosexual orientations is that they are hurting and are hungry for love and to be accepted as they are. And so, by allowing them to marry, just like one man and one woman, they can finally feel “normal”. But, changing marriage, as defined by God from the beginning, will not take away their hurt, their struggle, or the truth that God is calling them to so much more in life.

But, if marriage is about love, and if two people love each other, shouldn't they be allowed to do whatever they want to do? Aren't we discriminating by saying certain people can't get married? Certainly, as children of God, everyone must be given the dignity that is ours from the moment of our conception until death. But, while everyone has the right to marry, no one has the right to change what marriage is. It would be analogous to me saying that I want to be a mother. It seems silly for a man to say he wants to give birth to a child, because biologically he can't. The same is true with marriage in its essence – despite one's desires to the contrary, the reality of the institution cannot be altered. Truth is not a democracy.

So, what am I supposed to do – I have a child, grandchild, neighbor, or friend that has same-sex attractions – am I supposed to sit on the judgment seat and deprive them of happiness? I thought we're not supposed to judge? Usually when we think of judging someone, what we actually mean is condemning or criticizing them. But actually to judge something is actually to assess it and make a decision about it. For example, I have to make a judgement about whether or not eating a second piece of cake is good for my waist-line. Judgment is not inherently a wrong, sinful thing. It's something that we all must rationally do. Because if we don't make well-formed, logical judgments, then we'll end up making decisions based on our feelings – and we all know how fickle and misleading our feelings can be sometimes!

The Catholic Church's objection to same-sex "marriage" is not a condemnation of those men and women with same-sex attractions who want to have a fulfilling, meaningful life. It is a witness to and a protection of this unique relationship whereby one man and one woman image the sacrificial love of Jesus, the Groom, for His Bride, the Church. And, as is true for every man, woman, and child, true happiness comes from the joy and peace given when we know and personally experience the eternal love that God has for each of us. As Christians, we are called to be channels of God's love for the world. And whether or not the law agrees with us, we must continue to be the Love of God in the world even though the definition of marriage *and* love have changed. God bless you.