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The truth of marriage

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“Man and woman he created them...” From the first chapters of Genesis and all through the Gospels and New Testament, God’s plan for marriage, the union of man and woman, is clear. Jesus Christ himself taught with great love that marriage, in the plan of God, is the lifelong union of one man and one woman (Matthew 19:4-6).

But, now the Supreme Court has mandated same-sex “marriage” in every state of our nation, including North Dakota, regardless of the expressed will of voters. With little regard for the common understanding of marriage that predates any government or court, five justices imposed a new understanding of marriage that ignores what is inscribed in human nature by God himself.

By its nature, marriage remains the union of one man and one woman, and this is not only a matter of faith but also of reason. It can be discerned in the complementarity of man and woman. In other words, man and woman are suited to each other, meant for each other. Man and woman were designed by God for each other, and only a man and a woman can form a union that brings forth children.

The union of a man and woman in marriage is different from all other relationships. It is a union designed to support spouses of the opposite sex to be faithful to each other and to the children they bring into the world. It is actually unjust to disregard the importance that real marriage has for children, who in the ordinary course of events, deserve to have and to know their mother and their father, who will be committed to each other and to them throughout their lives.

Pope Francis has reiterated what the Church has always believed about marriage. The man/woman nature of marriage, he said, “is an anthropological fact...that cannot be qualified based on ideological notions or concepts important only at one time in history.” He recently described the union of man and woman in marriage as “a unique, natural, fundamental and beautiful good for people, families, communities and society.”

It seems inevitable, and some have already used this language, that those who adhere to the traditional meaning of marriage will be called bigots and haters. It is considered by some an act of bigotry to insist that same-sex “marriage” is impossible. But, our belief is rooted neither in bigotry nor in hate. It is rooted in God’s plan of love for his people, the plan that is written into the very design of our bodies, the plan that has seemed obvious to the human family for millennia.

It has been predicted, even by some members of the Supreme Court, that this decision will present serious challenges to freedom of religion in this country. Although the freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Constitution, we should be ready to face legal challenges to our right to live our faith and to practice what we believe about marriage. Already, there have been successful efforts to marginalize Church agencies and other religious groups who reject same-sex “marriage.” Catholic adoption agencies in some states have been forced to close because they would only place children with married, heterosexual couples. Private individuals and business owners have been heavily fined, because they refused to participate in same-sex wedding ceremonies. And, already there is talk of withdrawing tax exempt status or accreditation from institutions that will not recognize same-sex “marriage.” This possibility was even acknowledged

by the administration's own lawyer in the Supreme Court hearing of the case. Proponents have also questioned whether clergy who will not marry same-sex couples should lose their legal status to witness weddings for the state.

We should not be surprised, then, when the Church is targeted by those who insist that same-sex "marriage" must be accepted by all. The Court makes a passing reference to the right of all persons to speak and advocate for the traditional understanding of marriage, but they fail to mention how this right will be protected. Indeed, it is already under assault. If we cherish our faith, we will need to actively defend it and can no longer assume that it will remain unchallenged.

It goes without saying that in the face of this decision and the challenges that accompany it, we must always remain charitable. Even with those who oppose our beliefs regarding marriage, followers of Christ must be patient and Christ-like. We must have respect for all persons, because every human being is created by God and must be treated with respect, sensitivity and love. We are all sinners before God, and in need of his mercy. We can only humbly accept the truth as it has been given to us, and strive to live it and defend it to the best of our ability. And, as a Church, we must continue to welcome all to the life-giving grace and truth of Christ, including the truth of marriage.

In 1973, the justices of the Supreme Court denied the right to life of the unborn. They were tragically wrong, and we continue to affirm that life is sacred from conception to natural death. Now, the Court has denied the truth of marriage, and they are wrong again. So, without hesitation or discouragement, as people of faith endowed with reason, we will continue to proclaim the truth, the goodness, and the beauty of marriage as given to us by God. Regardless of the Supreme Court ruling, the Church will remain faithful to this teaching of our Lord, which is not discriminatory but is written into our human nature by God himself.

In the Diocese of Fargo, we have been observing a Year of Marriage and Family. In light of these recent events, it seems more urgent than ever to reaffirm the truth of marriage as it has been given to us by God. In every parish, the truth of marriage must be reaffirmed and celebrated as fully as possible. And, I sincerely hope that everyone who is able will attend our diocesan celebration of Marriage and Family on Oct. 24 in Fargo. This event will be an occasion for all of us to truly rejoice in the great gift of marriage and family life that God has given his people. Now more than ever, we must stand together in prayer and solidarity with one another as we continue to live and proclaim the true meaning of marriage and the joy of family life.