

Bless Every Person Married Civilly or Catholic. Leave the Rest to God's Love!

Senior Deacon Roger Fraser (retired)

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Stunned, I read the headlines screeching: "*Vatican bars gay union blessing, God 'cannot bless sin.' ... 'Vatican, Pope Francis say Catholic Church can't bless same-sex marriages...'*" From experience assisting with annulments for years I knew why gays could never be married in the Church, but suddenly this was a big issue and I thought I need to read the original publication...not that misinformation is a thing, but, it's always good to check what was actually stated.

Low and behold, The Responsum of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to a dubium regarding the blessing of the unions of persons of the same sex and the official Vatican article did include reasons the blessing would be illicit if it "*acknowledged the union as such...the blessing of homosexual unions cannot be considered licit*":

- A blessing on a human relationship is a Sacramental that requires it be ordered to both receive and express the good that is pronounced and given by the blessing.
- "...**any union** that involves sexual activity outside of marriage, is illicit from the moral point of view...*The Church is not the arbiter of [God's] designs and the truths they express, but their faithful interpreter and witness.*"
- "...avert an error into which one would easily be led: that of assimilating the blessing of unions of persons of the same sex to that of matrimonial unions."
- "*The answer to the proposed dubium **does not preclude the blessings given to individual persons** with homosexual inclinations, who manifest the will to live in fidelity to the revealed plans of God as proposed by Church teaching. Rather, it declares illicit any form of blessing that tends to acknowledge their unions as such. In this case...to approve and encourage a choice and a way of life that cannot be recognized as objectively ordered to the revealed plans of God.*" There's that word, choice.
- "...*But [God] does not and cannot bless sin: he blesses sinful man, so that [we] may recognize that [we are] part of his plan of love and allow [ourselves] to be changed by him. He in fact takes us as we are, but never leaves us as we are*"

All well and good, it's complicated, but now I'm thinking the next headline in all fairness and clarity may be: "***Vatican bars blessing of all straight-Catholic marriages outside the Church.***" Maybe it's not just the gays that need to worry, it's the tens of (hundreds of?) millions of straight Catholics married outside the Church...in seemingly illicit and invalid marriages...or, "unions" as some may now insist. Who will submit that dubium?

I am reminded that my parents were married by a Protestant minister from my mother's church in an apartment. It never struck me that my father was Catholic, but I do remember the story that he asked a Catholic priest to attend the wedding. Not surprisingly, the priest told him he wouldn't and that they would live in sin the rest of their lives. As the story goes, by father told him to "go to hell," and they wouldn't even walk on the same side of the street if they saw each other. Hmmm...what does that make me?

I'm reminded that when I became a Catholic, I knew and believed that He was the same God I had always believed in, He was the same Jesus, Mary was the mother of God, I didn't know much about the Eucharist, but did know He was present in my life...and the rest is detail. Most of all, I recognized I was joining my-soon-to-be wife's loving family and being welcomed into an amazing Christian community.

I'm reminded about the Boettcher family; mother, father and two young daughters; emigrated from Germany to the United States around the year 1900. The oldest daughter Frieda could always remember living as a child in Berlin and looking down from a 2nd story window seeing soldiers riding on horses past their apartment. They came through Ellis Island and settled in South Dakota. The family owned a store and a boarding house for

traveling workers. Life could not have been that easy. 11 years later disaster struck. The youngest daughter Emma was pregnant. The family was so scandalized that they immediately sold the business and moved to upper Saskatchewan, Canada. They bought a square mile of land for a \$1 land grant and settled just outside the town of Prince Albert, 60 miles north of Saskatoon. It is in the boonies today, imagine what it was back then. On Christmas Day 1911 a baby boy was born. The winter was so cold the family legend was that the baby was wrapped up in a blanket and was placed in a turkey pan on the open door of the wood burning oven to keep him warm. Over 100 years ago that 16 year old single-mother Emma, her baby and the Boettcher family were truly living a time of unsurpassed distress....and I have no doubt that they were holding onto Jesus for dear life prepared for the worst, knowing that life as they knew it had ended....But then, during the next 2 1/2 years some things happened: Emma was married...Tony her husband adopted her son...they had a daughter, and the babies were baptized at the Catholic Sacred Heart Cathedral in Prince Albert....once again, life as they knew it had ended, this time for the better. You might have guessed, the baby boy was my father...I never met my Grandma Emma, but I grew up knowing my Grandpa Fraser and Aunt Kay...and I met my Great Aunt Frieda on her 90th birthday.

Five months after he attended my ordination, my father died in the lobby of his Lutheran Church after having communion. I didn't realize he was baptized Catholic until we found the certificate going through his personal effects. At his funeral, I asked the minister if I could assist and do anything. He declined my help which turned out to be the right decision. I was in no shape emotionally to read or even lead a prayer during the service. But then afterwards, the minister approached me saying that the cemetery was a two-hour drive away and he couldn't go there and get back in time for another service...he asked if I could do the committal? The funeral director was Catholic and had the Order of Christian Funerals book, a stole, and the Holy Water. I like to say that my Dad was baptized a Catholic and I buried him Catholic, but during his life he wandered around a little.

I'm reminded of a priest's response to my prompting that he disavow an article published in a KofC newsletter, "Our Faith and Country at Crossroads," which supported Fr. James Altman "...for his message and for his bravery to stand up and speak the truth about what is happening in our country and also for standing up to our Catholic Church leaders (namely many Bishops, Cardinals and yes, even our Pope) for their soft, politically correct views....You cannot be Catholic & a Democrat. Period."

"It's complicated," he said.

No, it's not.

I'm reminded what matters, and it is not from a sinful Church full of sinful people. When I was in formation to become a Deacon, my homiletics teacher responded to a question about what the theme was of that day's readings. He said, "That's simple. There is only one theme in the Scriptures every day. It is that God loves us." That's why if you ever heard one of my homilies, you know that I always try to explain what I saw in the reading that shows that God loves us. I have said it in all of the homilies I preached so I wouldn't forget...that we wouldn't forget...that God loves us first and foremost above all else.

All the rest is detail.

To my civilly married gay brothers and sisters and my civilly married "fallen away" brothers and sisters, God Bless you. It is the least I can do...in fact, it may be officially the most I can do as well. Let's leave the rest to God. Amen!

It's not complicated. God Loves Us!

This issue has harmed so many people and isn't going away, so I decided to share one more story:

Years ago I learned how to deal with bullies. It was not with punitive justice...they were begging for a fight...that would have just make them madder than ever and relinquish control to them. It was with restorative justice. I had to "Go BIG" not only to making them accountable, but to try to change their hearts.

In 1960, my first day of high school, I went to gym class and met my best-friend-to-this-day, Terry. We found our Freshman selves, in the locker room with Seniors...what could go wrong?! It didn't take long before we heard the slurs about us being Joe and Jerry queer. I knew very little about gays, but I knew how I was being attacked. I decided to Go BIG. I made up two tee-shirts, with big graphics: one JOE QUEER and the other JERRY QUEER. The next class Terry and I wore the shirts...I remember no one said anything, let alone look at us...until one of the coaches called us into his office. He seemed more curious than mad...no, we weren't gay...but, we were calling out those Seniors who were bullies on our backs! He took care of it...absolutely no problems from anyone from then on....it was obvious the lead bullies had no support. We didn't even get any grief outside of gym class, which we expected.

Nearly a year ago the Covid-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to Go BIG again in my life. My service to others wouldn't include serving on the altar at Mass...I retired as a Deacon and it has been a freeing experience to decide what's next. Though tempting, I have not walked away from the church. Because God loves us, I am continuing to share His love and serving as a catalyst in ministries that I am passionate about. I am supporting and connecting with people and faith communities that have a connection with "my story"...and disconnecting from some as well. I am trying out some new restorative justice approaches to change hearts by responding pastorally to those who I see being marginalized. And, I decided I had to call out the bullies and injustices I was seeing in politics and in the Catholic church by inviting people to share our faith and discuss issues.

My challenge has been to select my choice of words carefully and to be patient so that dialog will continue....it is not that complicated, but hasn't been easy, and I realize there is no going back once you Go BIG!