

The Truth of Marriage

It has been a year of challenge for moral values in Australia. Last month saw the outcome of the marriage plebiscite and then the passing of the Victorian assisted-suicide legislation. Catholics need to rightly understand these matters, and Legionaries can lead the way in holding to the truth of God's law as found in Catholic teaching, which is guided by the Holy Spirit. Deeply understood, God's law is always seen to be the path of genuine justice, love and compassion.

So on the marriage issue, there is only one valid Catholic position, laid out in the Holy See's 2003 document, formally approved by John Paul II and thus magisterial and binding: 'If it is true that all Catholics are obliged to oppose the legal recognition of homosexual unions, Catholic politicians are obliged to do so in a particular way, in keeping with their responsibility as politicians...To vote in favour of a law so harmful to the common good is gravely immoral... Respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behaviour or to legal recognition of homosexual unions. The common good requires that laws recognise, promote and protect marriage as the basis of the family, the primary unit of society.' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Considerations regarding proposals to give legal recognition to unions between homosexual persons* 10, 11)

And in *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reminded us that a child's rights are violated if he or she is deliberately deprived of the love of either mother or father without necessity. Treating same-sex unions as equivalent to marriage institutionalises this injustice more deeply.

He wrote: 'Every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father; both are necessary for a child's integral and harmonious development...If for some inevitable reason one parent should be lacking, it is important to compensate for this loss, for the sake of the child's healthy growth to maturity' (172) ... 'As for proposals to place unions between homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family.' (251)

Thus the 'yes' vote in the plebiscite was truly a defeat for justice. The common argument that it was somehow necessary for human rights and equality is quite empty. Individuals already all had equal rights regarding marriage. Emotional inclinations (such as sexual desires) neither create nor remove rights of this nature. Every Australian equally has the right to enter into marriage with a willing partner of the opposite sex (assuming no other legal impediments) and to receive special social privileges for that union, *because* such unions are potentially procreative, at least in principle.

And everyone in our society equally *lacks* any true right to receive these special privileges, with regard to relationships having no possible connection with procreation and its service to society. So, while all *individuals* are equal, not all *relationships* are equal to [heterosexual] marriage in the contribution it makes to the continuation of society and the nurturing of the next generation.

The 'yes' vote was also a defeat for genuine love, since central to love is willing the true good of all those involved, which is not the case here, considering the paramount rights of children. But we can add that genuine love for the actual couples also requires of all people never to actively approve or foster homosexual behaviour. Sexual activity that deliberately excludes

procreation is always morally destructive, overriding the dignity of the body's natural procreative meaning, and treating the body (with its self-transcending procreative potentiality) as a mere object, an impersonal piece of property we may manipulate for our emotional satisfaction. True love excludes willing such behaviour, whether for ourselves or for others.

All this is something that can be known in the first place by natural moral reason. It has nothing especially to do with religion, any more than the prohibition against theft is especially a religious matter. It's misleading when people speak of the case against homosexual relationships as though it simply depended on a few Bible verses.

Another confusion is when Catholics say, 'We don't really have to care too much about this, because it's to do with *civil* marriage, not *sacramental* marriage'. Again, that's an abdication from caring about the children who might be involved, and also about the spiritual well-being of those involved in these relationships. (Many people with homosexual inclinations welcome the Catholic teaching for confirming the genuine path to spiritual wholeness.) And we care about the health of marriage in society generally, not just of Catholic marriages.

And to clarify, we don't view civil marriage in general as simply irrelevant. True, by current Church law a *Catholic* normally must marry before an authorised Catholic priest or deacon to be validly married in God's eyes. But two *non-Catholics* marrying each other before a civil celebrant or non-Catholic minister *is* a valid marriage in God's eyes, if there are no other obstacles to validity. And any *valid* marriage is also a *sacramental* marriage if both parties are baptised (as in the case of two Protestants). Sacramental marriage is built upon the presupposition of marriage as something already built into human nature.

And finally, we don't idolise 'the will of the people'. With a choice between two ethically *good* or ethically *neutral* options for society, we rightly pay special respect to the will of the majority. But majority vote doesn't have the power to change injustice into justice, ethical evil into ethical good. The moral law written in the human heart and knowable by reason, (recognised also by believers in God as expressing His will and law), cannot be 'outvoted'.

St John Paul II wrote, 'Democracy cannot be idolised to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality... Its "moral" value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behaviour, must be subject.' (*Evangelium Vitae* 70) For example, we would not 'respect' a majority vote authorising slavery or abortion (not at all putting all these issues on the same level, but simply noting they are all against true justice, so cannot be made right by mere voting).

'In those situations where homosexual unions have been legally recognised or have been given the legal status and rights belonging to marriage, clear and emphatic opposition is a duty. One must refrain from any kind of formal cooperation in the enactment or application of such gravely unjust laws and, as far as possible, from material cooperation on the level of their application. In this area, everyone can exercise the right to conscientious objection.' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *op. cit.* 5)

We continue to pray that marriage and family according to God's plan and human well-being will be upheld in our nation.