

A NOTE FROM FATHER EICKHOFF

There is a good piece of advice that everyone should take regarding the news media. First, read or listen to the news concerning a topic that you are very familiar with. Second, notice how badly the reporter understands and conveys to the public the topic you know well. Third, realize that most reporters and journalists have the same lack of knowledge or understanding about topics you don't know well. Fourth, have a healthy caution concerning the validity about anything you read or hear in the news media. This piece of advice is especially true about anything you read or hear in the news media concerning the Catholic Church. The vast majority of reporters and journalists have little knowledge about the Catholic Church and therefore make some mind-numbing mistakes in their news stories.

It is important to keep this in mind when reading news reports about the recent document entitled "Fiducia Supplicans" released by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (a part of the governing structure of the Catholic Church) and approved by Pope Francis concerning the nature of blessings and whether persons in same sex civil unions can have their "marriages" blessed in the Catholic Church. In many news reports the headlines stated that the Catholic Church was now allowing priests to bless same sex "marriages." That is **not** what the document stated. Instead, the document made a distinction between what we might call "everyday blessings," impromptu blessings requested by a person or persons to a priest; and "formal blessings," which take place in a liturgical setting, and which bestow legitimacy upon a person or situation. In the first example "everyday blessings" cover situations such as asking a priest to bless someone who is recovering after surgery or for a safe trip. In the second example, "formal blessings" cover such cases as marriage in the Church. The document repeated the Church's teaching that a situation that is inherently liturgically invalid (such as a same sex union) cannot be blessed in the Church. However, anyone regardless of their current state of moral rectitude, may rightly request an "everyday blessing" from the Church and its ministers for cases that do not confer legitimacy upon immoral situations. The document points out that God's mercy and compassion are for all persons including and especially sinners - a fact that all of us should be grateful for since we are all sinners in some fashion - and that God does not only give His blessings to the morally upright. In granting "everyday" blessings to persons who are in sinful situations a greater good may result since God's blessings often work to encourage a sinful person to abandon his sinful ways to draw closer to the goodness of God.

In other words, should two persons in a same sex civil union approach me as a priest and ask for a blessing upon their "marriage" before they leave on a beach vacation, I would have to refuse their request to bless their civil union in the church. On the other hand, I could bless them to have a safe trip so that they are not eaten by sharks while at the beach.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Stephen Eickhoff
Pastor