

AN INQUIRY ON THE NATURE OF MARRIAGE AND NON-MARITAL UNIONS

Opening Prayer

Let us remember that the all-wise God is with us as we pray.

St. Paul warned his people to be wary of the values of the world. He said, "Do not model your behavior on the contemporary world, but let the renewing of your minds transform you, so that you may discern for yourselves what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and mature." (Romans 12:2)

We too are challenged to renew our mind by prayer, by listening to the word of God, and by following the law of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

God, renew and transform us. We want to do your will. Show us what it is, so we can do good and grow in your image.

Holy Spirit, as we gather here, inform our reason, enlighten our reflection. Open our eyes, ears, heart and mind. We offer this prayer to you, Spirit of wisdom and understanding.

Amen.

Scriptural Reflection

God created man in his image,
In the divine image he created him;
Male and female he created them.
God blessed them, saying:
"Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it."

--Genesis 1:27-28

But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh.

--Mark 10:6-8

What does the first passage tell us about the image of God? What is the significance of the creation of humans as male and female?

What is the image of marriage suggested in the second passage?

Social Inquiry

Marriage, as instituted by God, is a faithful, exclusive, lifelong union of a man and a woman joined in an intimate community of life and love. They commit themselves completely to each other and to the wondrous responsibility of bringing children into the world and caring for them. . . . Man and woman are equal. However, as created, they are different from but made for each other. This complementarity, including sexual difference, draws them together in a mutually loving union that should always be open to the procreation of children.

Between Man and Woman
Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions, 1
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2003

Across times, cultures, and very different religious beliefs, marriage is the foundation of the family. The family, in turn, is the basic unit of society. Thus marriage is a personal relationship with public significance. . . . When marriage is redefined so as to make other relationships equivalent to it, the institution of marriage is devalued and further weakened. The weakening of this basic institution at all levels and by various forces has already exacted too high a social cost.

Ibid., 5

For several reasons a same-sex union contradicts the nature of marriage: It is not based on the natural complementarity of male and female; it cannot cooperate with God to create new life; and the natural purpose of secular union cannot be achieved by a same sex union. Persons in same-sex unions cannot enter into a true conjugal union. Therefore, it is wrong to equate their relationship to marriage.

Ibid., 4

To uphold God's intent for marriage, in which sexual relations have their proper and exclusive place, is not to offend the dignity of homosexual persons. Christians must give witness to the whole moral truth and oppose as immoral both homosexual acts and unjust discrimination against homosexual person.

Ibid., 6

The first creation account tells us that God created man in his own image, male and female. In the second account, the creation of man isn't complete until he exists as male and female--as a communion of persons. From this, we can see that man shares the "image and likeness" not only as an individual human being, but also as a communion of persons.

Adam mirrored the image of God not so much in his solitude, before Eve was created, as after, when he and Eve formed a communion of persons. In this way, they mirrored the glory of the divine communion of persons--The Holy Trinity. And on this union of man and woman, God bestowed the blessing of fertility.

Body and Gift: Reflections on Creation
based on a series of talks by John Paul II,
adapted by Sam Torode

The marital act is a unique kind of act. It is the personal act of two subjects, husband and wife. In it they "give" themselves to one another and "receive" one another. Yet they do so in

strikingly different and complementary ways, for it is an act made possible precisely by reason of their sexual differences.

Man and woman . . . are made in the image of God. They are two differing and complementary ways of imaging Him.

The point is that males and females, men and women, embrace within themselves the masculine and the feminine, but they embody and manifest these aspects of their personality in differing and complementary ways.

Women, as many studies point out, tend toward responding to situations as entire persons, with their minds, bodies, and emotions integrated, whereas men tend to respond in a more diffuse and differentiated manner. Again, women are, on the whole, more oriented toward helping or caring for personal needs, whereas men, on the whole, are more inclined to formulate and pursue long-range goals and to achieve particular sets of prescribed ends. . . . Note, however, that all this is a matter of *emphasis*, corresponding to the ways in which men and women tend to emphasize their sexuality.

Here it is important to realize that fathering and mothering are by no means mutually exclusive. The complementarity between males and females is sharply differentiated at their biological roots – only the woman can conceive and nurture the child within her womb and nurse it after birth. Nonetheless, the personality and character traits (the “masculine” and the “feminine” . . .) are present in both males and females, although, as we have seen, with different emphases in each. Children need to be both accepted and nurtured, to be challenged and held to standards, and both mothers and fathers must accept and nurture their children, challenge them and hold them to standards. But they do so in somewhat differing modalities, with the mothers accentuating acceptance and nurturance, the fathers challenging and disciplining.

William E. May

Marriage and the Complementarity of Male and Female

It is true that most people still view marriage as an arrangement between a man and a woman. The traditional definition of marriage as a social institution designed to promote child-bearing and child-rearing is grounded in distinct gender roles that were not just socially but legally imposed for much of American history. But society, and the law, have already greatly expanded the definition of family, and civil marriage has been redefined as a partnership of equals. No doubt marriage between one man and one woman will continue to define the vast majority of unions. But that needn't be the only acceptable definition.

In Massachusetts as elsewhere, the everyday reality of same-sex families is far ahead of the law. At Little League games, school plays, and Thanksgiving dinners, gay and lesbian couples and parents are living ordinary lives. They have made moral, emotional, and financial obligations to each other and seek only the recognition and protections a legal marriage affords. "The desire to marry is grounded in the intangibles of love, an enduring commitment and a shared journey through life," reads the plaintiff statement to the [Supreme Judicial Court]. It is time to extend these rights -- and responsibilities -- to all Americans.

Boston Globe editorial, 7/8/2003

Observe

1. What roles do you play in your marriage? Are they typically masculine or feminine roles?

2. What roles does your spouse play in your marriage? Are they typically masculine or feminine roles?
3. Ask three people, including children the question: "What is marriage?" Ask them how they got the definition they gave.
4. In November 2003, a court in Massachusetts ruled that same-sex partners may marry. Would your state recognize the validity of such marriages?
5. What are some of the legal benefits that married people receive from society? Can couples living together, both homosexual and heterosexual, receive the same benefits under existing law?

Judge

1. What is the purpose of marriage? How is a married couple different from a couple who live together without being married?
2. What do you understand by the term "complementarity?" What is its importance in marriage?
3. How does society benefit from the marriage of man and woman? Do those same benefits come from same-sex or non-marital heterosexual unions?
4. Is there any justification for the distinction in benefits available to married and non-married couples?
5. Is the prohibition of same-sex unions unjust discrimination?

Act

1. Read *Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions*. It can be obtained from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website, www.usccb.org.
2. Correspond with government officials regarding your beliefs on this issue and any specific legislation on the topic.
3. Take some time to reflect on the way that your spouse complements your nature. How does your union reflect the love of God? Write a love letter to your spouse.
4. Offer your services to help couples prepare for marriage in your Church community.
5. Make a weekend retreat with your spouse. Consider a Covenant Experience or Marriage Encounter.

Closing Prayer

All powerful and ever-living God,
You created human beings in love to share your divine life.
We see this high destiny in the love of husband and wife, which bears the imprint of your own divine love.

Love is our origin,
Love is our constant calling,
Love is our fulfillment in heaven.

The love of man and woman is made holy in the sacrament of marriage,

And becomes the mirror of your everlasting love.

Lord, grant that we may share with each other the gifts of your love and become one in heart and mind as witnesses to your presence in our marriage. Help us create a home together where love dwells and the Gospel is lived. And may we always bear witness to the love of God in this world so that the afflicted and needy will find us generous. May we reach old age in the company of friends and come at last to the kingdom of heaven.

Amen.