

New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops



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Statement on Marriage Wednesday, March 27, 2013

In these most sacred days when our Jewish brothers and sisters celebrate the Feast of Passover, and we Christians recall the saving actions of Jesus Christ, the eyes of our state and nation have been diverted to the halls of government to await authoritative interpretations of the law of the land regarding the age-old institution of marriage. We, the Catholic bishops of New Mexico, wish, in these circumstances, to reiterate our belief in the definition of marriage as a life-long bond between one man and one woman.

The tradition of marriage between one man and one woman comes to us not only from the Judeo-Christian tradition, but it has been witnessed in cultures throughout the world for many millennia. Protecting the institution of marriage from new definitions we believe guards this institution which is unique and irreplaceable. While there are certainly many examples in which a traditional family has not lived up to its call to protect and educate children and to live in peace, and even while there has been an erosion in the family structure in many parts of the world, we do not believe the answer to these societal ills is to redefine marriage.

If the biblical definition of marriage is changed to include same-sex couples, the effects on our society would be regrettable for many reasons. Jesus teaches that marriage is between a man and a woman. Jesus said, “from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female.’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’” (Mt 19: 4-5).

The effort to include same-sex unions within the institution of marriage has been presented as a civil right. Indeed, there have been tragic instances of discrimination, hatred, and even violence against people with same-sex attraction. We call for peace, tolerance, and understanding in these cases. We recall the words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: homosexual persons “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided” (2358). Indeed, civil rights in these instances are transgressed, namely, the right to live in peace and tranquility, without fearing violence. However, the redefinition of marriage to include same-sex couples cannot be classified as a civil right as it would infringe upon other important rights such as the right of children to a mother and father as well as the right to religious freedom. The millions of persons who believe that marriage must be between one man and one woman will be compelled to accept the redefinition.

The change in society to accept the marriage of interracial couples is qualitatively different from the present effort. Racial difference or sameness was never an essential factor for marriage; on the other hand, sexual difference is an essential component of marriage. This is spoken to not only by religion, but by nature – for only does the sexual union of a man and a woman bring forth children.

In our Catholic Christian faith, we believe it was this institution of marriage between one man and one woman that Jesus elevated to the status of a sacrament – a vehicle of grace and an opportunity for growth in holiness.

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