

November 25, 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Church's efforts to defend the institution of marriage has been interpreted by some as an indication of the Church's hostility toward homosexual persons. The way that the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts framed the issue is unfavorable to Catholics or others who do not oppose anyone, but rather support an institution which is the cornerstone of society.

Right from the beginning of this controversy I have called on all Catholics to rally behind the cause of marriage. It is encouraging that a number of Catholics who are homosexuals have expressed to me their conviction that marriage between a man and a woman is important for children and therefore for society.

The Church's position is not based on an animus against people with a homosexual orientation. Each and every member of the Church is called to holiness regardless of their sexual orientation. The Church has often warned against defining people by their sexual orientation in a way that diminishes their humanity. Each person is a mystery, an irreplaceable treasure, precious

in God's eye. We are God's creatures and in baptism we are His sons and daughters, brothers and sisters to one another.

The extreme individualism of our age is undermining the common good and fractionalizing the community. The Church wishes to call people to unity based on mutual respect and a commitment to the common good. We do not want Catholics who have a homosexual orientation to feel unwelcomed in the Catholic Church. We remind them that they are bound to us by their baptism and are called to live a life of holiness. Many homosexual persons in our Church lead holy lives and make an outstanding contribution to the life of the Church by their service, generosity and the sharing of their spiritual gifts.

We must strive to eradicate prejudices against people with a homosexual orientation. At the same time the Church must minister to all people by challenging them to obey God's commands, the roadmap for a meaningful human life that allows us to draw near to God and to one another.

In the Gospel when the self-righteous Pharisees bring the adulteress to be stoned, Jesus says let he who is without sin cast the first stone. Then to make sure they got the point Jesus wrote their sins on the ground. The

stones fell from their hands and they fled. Jesus said: “Neither do I condemn you”, but He added, “Go and sin no more.”

If we tell people that sex outside of marriage is not a sin, we are deceiving people. If they believe this untruth, a life of virtue becomes all but impossible. Jesus teaches that discipleship implies taking up the cross each day and following Him with love and courage.

It is never easy to deliver a message that calls people to make sacrifices or to do difficult things. Sometimes people want to punish the messenger. For this reason we priests at times find it difficult to articulate the Church’s teaching on sexual morality. We must never deliver the message in a self-righteous way, but rather with compassion and humility. It is important to express the moral teachings of the Church with clarity and fidelity. The Church must be Church. We must teach the truths of the Gospel in season and out of season. These recent times seem to us like it is “out of season”, but for that very reason it is even more urgent to teach the hard words of the Gospel today.

We know that friends and relatives of homosexual Catholics sometimes feel torn between their allegiance to Christ and their concern for their loved ones. I assure them that these goals are not incompatible. As Catholics we profess a firm belief in the dignity of each person and in the

eternal destiny to which God calls us. Calling people to embrace the cross of discipleship, to live the commandments and at the same time assuring them that we love them as brothers and sisters can be difficult. Sometimes we are told: “If you do not accept my behavior, you do not love me.” In reality we must communicate the exact opposite: “Because we love you, we cannot accept your behavior.”

God made us to be happy forever. That true and lasting happiness is accessible only by a path of conversion. Each of us has our own struggles in responding to the call to discipleship and holiness. We are not alone. Christ promised to be with us and has given us His Church and Sacraments to help us on the road.

At every Mass we pray that beautiful prayer before the sign of peace: “Lord...look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom.” May God grant us that grace of peace and unity.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

Archbishop of Boston