

Dominica Decima Nona Post-Pentecosten [19th Sunday after Pentecost]: September 25, 2016

Homily given by Archbishop Roger LaRade, O.F.A.
Beloved Disciple Eucharistic Catholic Church, Toronto

Ephesians 4: 23-28; Matthew 22: 1-14

On Christian Same-sex Marriage

This weekend, large crowds in Mexico manifested against same-sex marriage. Mexico is the latest country where opposition to marriage equality has been mounted based on religious tradition. The Gospel passage for the Mass of the 19th Sunday after Pentecost presents us with the parable of the Marriage Feast, and gives us the opportunity to preach on Marriage.

Nuptial, or marriage, imagery is an ancient figure of speech used to illustrate the relationship between God and His people. The Old Testament prophets use it in this way. St. John the Baptist calls himself the herald of the Bridegroom, and St. John the Evangelist talks about the Lamb and Bride, while St. Paul uses it to describe the relationship between Christ and the Church, the People of God. And, Jesus uses nuptial imagery in speaking of Himself as the Bridegroom of the Church.

This all points to the fact that the relationship between God and His people, between Christ and us, is understood - better yet, is experienced - as a deepening, life-giving, intimate relationship of love, support, and personal growth. This is the basis for our understanding of the marriage relationship.

Many mystics, both male and female, have experienced and described their relationship with Christ as a spousal relationship. The Church has described the relationship, not only of consecrated women, but also of the (male) priest to Christ as one of marriage.

This marriage relationship with Christ is a relationship that is open to all people, irrespective of gender. As a man, I am called to be the spouse of Christ. Christ calls me to be His spouse, to have an intimate relationship of love with Him. The spousal relationship with Christ, therefore, is not limited by one's gender, by biology, by the physical.

I can hear some objecting by saying that, of course, this is true because it is not a physical relationship, but rather a spiritual relationship. This argument separates the physical and the spiritual. Yet, the teaching of the Church, elaborated by early Church Fathers, sees in the human person a unity of the physical and the spiritual, as they do in Christ. The spiritual and the physical enhance one another as a unity.

We cannot get around the fact that our relationship of love with Christ includes all of who we are, physical and spiritual. This includes our sexual orientation as an inherent facet of who we are as persons. I relate to Christ as a Gay man. Christ calls me to a spousal relationship with him as a Gay man. Christ does not call me to Him as a man who happens to be Gay, or as some Churches teach, as a person "with homosexual tendencies". I am not a person "with homosexual tendencies"; rather, I am a homosexual. It is as such that Christ calls me into His loving arms, to be evermore fully who God has created me to be.

Our understanding of Marriage as a Sacrament of Christ should be based and reflect our understanding of being called into spousal relationship "through Him, with Him, and in Him". Just as Christ calls each and every one of us to a deepening, life-giving, intimate spousal relationship of love, support, and personal growth, so that we become one with Him, so also does Marriage in Christ, as a Sacrament of Christ, call two people to become one irrespective of sexual orientation.

Believing that different sexual orientations are inherent to God's creative plan, we believe that God desires for His love to be imaged and realized in same-sex spousal relationships.

The call to the vocation of Marriage in Christ is not limited by sexual orientation. The Sacrament of Marriage, modelled on the relationship of Christ with His Church, is a life-giving union of love, support and mutual respect to which every individual may be called irrespective of their sexual orientation. God has placed in each one of us the desire and capacity to love and be loved, and to love and be loved in an intimate way in a marital relationship. This God-given desire brings together both body and spirit; it is both a physical and a spiritual reality. It is not a desire which God means to be limited to heterosexuals.

The Mass today calls us to be saved by Christ. In the Introit, we hear Christ tell us: "I am your salvation." In the Epistle, St. Paul tells us to "Put on the new man which has been created in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph.4:24). The "new

man" is the person who is clothed in the garment of grace, as Jesus explains in His parable of the Marriage Feast. This most important task of our life is to become the spouse of Christ.

How do we do so? St. Paul tells us that it happens through love of truth, love of neighbour and love of justice. In our lives, we must constantly seek the truth as presented to us by Christ, we must constantly be of service to others, especially the most in need, and we must constantly seek justice, both on a personal level and on a collective level.

Our mission as a Church is to witness to the infinite love of God for all His people, including His LGBTQ children. We seek to do so in the truth of Christ, serving our neighbour by seeking God's justice. We do so in all humility, trusting on sanctifying grace given us by the Sacraments, including the Sacrament of Marriage. In doing so, we may likely find ourselves at odds with others. On some issues, we will find ourselves at odds with prevailing attitudes in the political and social worlds which are not based on a Christ-centric position. On the issue of Marriage, we find ourselves at odds with some in the Church world. This may well be the sacrifice imposed on us for seeking to be a faithful spouse of Christ.

Let us pray to be worthy of being clothed in the garment of grace, the nuptial garment of Christ.