



Bishop Andrew Cozzens' statement re: Fiducia Supplicans

December 18, 2023 – Today the Vatican issued a statement, signed by the Holy Father, that spoke about offering blessings to people who currently live outside of the way of life commanded by Jesus. The document especially addresses the question of blessing “same-sex couples.” The document from the Vatican, *Fiducia Supplicans* (FS), is clear that this is not in any way a change in the Church’s teaching about marriage. The Church’s teaching about marriage, since it is rooted in the Gospel we have received from Jesus Christ, is unchangeable. The Vatican document itself states that marriage is an “exclusive, stable, and indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children” and the document also states that “this conviction is grounded in the perennial Catholic doctrine of marriage; it is only in this context that sexual relations find their natural, proper, and fully human meaning. The Church’s doctrine on this point remains firm” (FS, 4).

What is the Vatican saying then? We know that Jesus Christ came to call all peoples to repentance and conversion because he desires that we would share with him the fullness of divine life in his kingdom. All of us are sinners and all of us are at different stages in this path of conversion. We see in the Gospels that whenever anyone comes to Jesus with a heart open to him, a heart seeking his mercy, Jesus always responds with mercy and inviting them to deeper repentance and discipleship. There are many examples of this in the Gospels, for example, the woman caught in adultery. Jesus receives her with mercy, saves her from the penalty of death, yet without condoning her sinful activity. He shows her love and mercy and calls her to a new life when he says, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more” (John 8:11). Jesus does this for all of us.

Today’s document emphasizes that people who come to the Church for a blessing, “acknowledge that the life of the Church springs from the womb of God’s mercy and helps us to move forward, to live better, and to respond to the Lord’s will” (FS, 20). Although it is impossible for us to bless a same-sex union, since any sexual-union outside of the marriage of one man and one woman is contrary to the Gospel, we may bless individuals who are not yet living in full accord with the Gospel, even those in a same-sex union. This is not a marriage blessing and should never be done in a liturgical or ceremonial way which would give the false idea of blessing a union contrary to the Gospel. It is not legitimate to use the Book of Blessings or any official ritual for blessing a union contrary to God’s law. This is a blessing for persons who “recognizing themselves to be destitute and in need of his help—do not claim a legitimation of their own status, but who beg that all that is true, good, and humanly valid in their lives and their relationships be enriched, healed, and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit” (FS, 31).

This blessing is not for people seeking a legitimation of same sex union but for those seeking to live better: “there is no intention to legitimize anything, but rather to open one’s life to God, to ask for his help to live better, and also to invoke the Holy Spirit so that the values of the Gospel may be lived with greater faithfulness” (FS 40).

The truth is we are all sinners and all of us need God’s blessing to come to repentance and conversion. Often at Holy Mass we tell people who are not able to receive Holy Communion because they are living in a situation that is objectively outside of Jesus’ commandments that they should come for a blessing. This reception of the blessing expresses a humble desire to grow in conversion, to seek his help to overcome sin, to seek holiness which is the goal of every Christian life.

Let us pray that many people, like the Woman at the well, Zacchaeus the tax collector, the Woman caught in adultery, or Saint Peter himself who was a grave sinner, may “feel that they are still blessed, notwithstanding their serious mistakes, that their heavenly Father continues to will their good and to hope that they will ultimately open themselves to the good” (FS, 27).

And of course, as the Vatican made clear, “Any blessing will be an opportunity for a renewed proclamation of the *kerygma*, an invitation to draw ever closer to the love of Christ” (FS, 44). Thus, when people come to the Church seeking her blessing let us also proclaim to them the saving love of Jesus found through repentance for all of us who are sinners.

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