



Marriage

yesterday ... today
... always

A Statement by The Most Reverend Richard J. Malone, Th.D., S.T.L., Bishop of Portland



Marriage: yesterday ... today ... always

A Statement from the Roman Catholic Bishop of Portland

“Have you not read that 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’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh” (Matthew 19:4-6a).

From generation to generation, the institution of marriage has been the cornerstone of family life and societal well-being. We rejoice that so many couples live in fidelity to their marital commitment. I personally thank them for proclaiming in their daily lives the beauty, goodness, and truth of marriage. In countless ways, both ordinary and heroic, through “good times and bad,” they bear witness to the gift and blessing they have received from the Creator.

There are other reasons why the Church is moved to reflect upon marriage in a manner which emphasizes its importance as an institution so necessary for the life of society and for the world. It is troubling that far too many people do not understand what it means to say that marriage — both as a natural institution and as a Christian sacrament — is a blessing and a gift from God. We observe, for example, that the incidence of divorce remains high. Some esteem marriage as an ideal but are reluctant to make the actual commitment necessary to enter into and sustain it. Still others choose instead to live in cohabiting relationships that may or may not lead to marriage and can be detrimental to the well-being of any children born into such an arrangement.

Even within marriage, a couple does not always recognize its responsibility to serve life by being open to children. For some, children are seen no longer as integral to a marriage but merely as an option, that is, a choice to accept or reject. Furthermore, the institution of marriage is seen too often as a private matter with little relation to the common good, relegated mainly to achieving individual satisfaction and fulfillment.¹ It is in response to these and other threats that the Church is compelled to teach and speak with renewed fervor about marriage and the family in the fullness of both truth and charity.

We can be proud that the State of Maine in its current law protects the truth of marriage and the rights of children by proclaiming the following:

The people of the State of Maine find that the union of one man and one woman joined in traditional monogamous marriage is of inestimable value to society; the State has a compelling interest to nurture and promote the unique institution of traditional monogamous marriage in the support of harmonious families and the physical and mental health of children; and that the State has the compelling interest in promoting the moral values inherent in traditional monogamous marriage.²

Public policy and law are meant to serve and protect this truth.³ Society is vitally dependent on marriage as we know it and as it was intended and ordered by God from the very beginning.

Marriage is a Unique Relationship

Marriage is a unique union, a relationship different from all others. It is the permanent bond between one man and one woman and the indispensable good at the heart of every family and every society. Attempting to redefine marriage to include any other kind of relationship empties the term “marriage” of its inherent meaning, for it excludes the necessary complementarity between man and woman, treating sexual difference as if it were irrelevant to what marriage is in its essence, in fact, and in truth.

Marriage is ordered toward an authentic union of persons and the generation of new life. It is only through the union of a man and a woman that new life is created. The stable, lifelong and loving relationship of a man and woman, when legally recognized as a marriage, provides the ideal conditions for raising and socializing any children born of their union.⁴ Also, the absence of sexual complementarity makes the marriage of two people of the same sex impossible: they cannot realize the procreative sort of union, including the bodily union, distinctive of marriage.

Proponents of redefining marriage often refer to a “right to marriage” and condemn those who oppose this “right.” But something as unique as marriage is only possible for those open to the complete fulfillment of its purposes; it is not a “right” that can be given or denied. Moreover, no one has a right to have the law or the institutions of the state call “marriage” something that it is not. Truth demands that we recognize as marriages only those unions that are the true and full expression of marriage.

We acknowledge that people come together for many different reasons, but we must remember that the mere existence of a relationship, even one that claims to be based on love and commitment, does not automatically constitute a marriage. When such associations require legal access to certain benefits, privileges, or rights of ownership, the state can choose to grant such a request by any number of legal provisions as long as the truth and purposes of marriage are not obscured.

The True Nature of Marriage

The true nature of marriage, a husband and wife living in openness to life, is also a witness to the precious gift of the child and to the unique and irreplaceable roles of both a mother and a father. In creating new life, the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage come together. Marriage, therefore, is not confined wholly to the loving intimacy of husband and wife but strives in generosity to go beyond this to bring new life into being.⁵

This procreative meaning of marriage involves not only the conception of children but also their upbringing and education. The loving communion of marital spouses is the primary context in which children are both conceived and brought up in love.⁶

It is true that some marriages will not result in procreation due to infertility, even though the couple is capable of the natural act by which procreation takes place. Indeed, this situation often comes as a surprise and can be a source of deep sadness, disappointment, anxiety, and even great suffering for a husband and wife.⁷ When such tragedy affects a marriage, a couple may be tempted to think that their union is not complete or truly blessed. This is not true. The marital union of a man and a woman is a distinctive communion of persons which even infertile couples continue to manifest.⁸

A Child is a Gift

While the desire for a child is natural, marriage does not confer upon spouses an actual right to have a child — however strong this desire may be. A child is not a possession to be had but a gift to be received. It is the child who has rights: first, the right to be the fruit of a specific act of conjugal love between his or her parents; second, the right to be respected as a human being from the moment of conception;⁹ and third, the right to be raised with both a mother and a father.

Even when their child-bearing years have passed, our senior couples continue to be life affirming. They do this by staying involved in the lives of young people, especially their grandchildren, as spiritual mentors, teachers, and wisdom figures. They also continue to be nurturing through the exercise of care for those who are needy, disabled, or pushed to the margins of society, and by their support for or participation in works of charity and justice.¹⁰

Marriage and the Natural Law

Unlike other great religions, Christianity has never proposed a revealed law to the state and to society, that is to say, a juridical order derived from revelation. Instead, it has pointed to nature and reason as the true sources of law — and to the harmony of objective and subjective reason, which naturally presupposes that both spheres are rooted in the creative reason of God.¹¹

The Church's effort to promote and protect marriage in the public square is not a matter of forcing faith on anyone. We share in the civic responsibility of every citizen to uphold the perennial truths of reason rooted in the natural law, truths knowable to men and women of any faith or of none. These truths establish the foundation of any society that is respectful of individual human dignity and the common good.

Natural law is the source from which both civil law and Church law emerge.¹² Discernible through reason alone, natural law describes what is both just and true. Its first precepts are known even by children, whose sense of right and wrong is a clear manifestation of the law written on the hearts of all people. It is the law founded in the very nature of the human person and the innate call to do and pursue good and to avoid evil. It follows that as long as men and women shall live, this law cannot cease to exist.¹³ Its common principles are universal and timeless; they command and forbid certain acts in the same manner everywhere and always.¹⁴

Natural law envisions the stability and permanence of the parental commitment within marriage, which down through the ages has proven to be the best atmosphere for educating, nurturing, and raising children. Natural law guides all law toward a fundamental orientation and purpose to respect the common good of all people — a good to which marriage between a man and woman makes an irreplaceable, unique, and singular contribution. On this basis, marriage deserves the distinct support and protection of our civil law, the esteem of society, and the continuous faithful teaching and lived witness of the people of God.

Marriage and the Good of Society

The common good of all society is vitally dependent on marriage as we know it and as it has been intended by the Creator from the very beginning. Marriage is unique for a reason and has something truly and profoundly valuable to offer society. It is the foundation of the family and the best place for children to be loved, cared for, educated, and taught to be productive, creative, upright, and responsible citizens. When we recognize the truth of marriage and support it, we ensure that as many children as possible know and are known by, love and are loved by, the mother and father in the exclusive marital embrace. By the grace of God, they are brought into being, and in their parents' permanent marital love these children find their greatest security.¹⁵

A Final Word

Dear brothers and sisters,

This document articulates the unchanged and unchangeable truth about marriage, which is the same “yesterday, today and always.”

Marriage, in its essence, is a permanent and exclusive union of one man and one woman whose complementarity alone can achieve the fullness of that which is both unitive (“one flesh”) and procreative (“new life”).

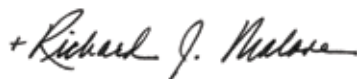
I acknowledge that this immutable truth, as revealed in the order of creation and in the word of God, is the ideal, which both society and the Church have upheld and which couples have lived for millennia.

In doing so, I have acknowledged not only the heroic example of many faithful couples but also the perennial difficulties that they all face to varying degrees. Likewise, I addressed the direct and pervasive challenges presented by the culture to the institution of marriage itself and to children, including divorce, cohabitation, and of increasingly imminent concern, the recent attempts to redefine marriage.

As your bishop, whose primary role is that of teacher, it is my hope that this document will challenge everyone who reads it to embrace anew the truth, beauty and goodness of marriage as it has always been and always will be.

Please pray for all married couples that their love and fidelity grow ever deeper as a witness to the ideal and truth of marriage. Pray also that our society may come to embrace the fullness of the gift that marriage is in its essence: the union of one man and one woman who are open to the gift of new life.

Given on the twelfth day of February, World Marriage Day, in the year of our Lord, two-thousand and twelve, the eighth of my episcopate.



The Most Reverend Richard J. Malone, Th.D., S.T.L.
Eleventh Bishop of Portland

Appendix

¹ *Marriage: Life and Love in the Divine Plan*, A Pastoral Letter of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2009); p. 44.

² Maine Revised Statutes §650

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), #2207-2213.

⁴ Rosenberg and Wilcox in *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children* (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2006), p. 17, make the following observation: “One cannot equate a household headed by a married mother and father with a household headed by parents who are cohabitating. There is something about the legal and social commitments of marriage that strengthens the positive impacts of fathering — it may simply be that being married strengthens the commitment of a father to his family.”

⁵ We should further note that advances in biomedical technology which have made it possible to procreate apart from sexual relations through artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization (even when these cells are taken from a husband and wife), or embryonic transfer do not honor the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage and the conjugal act. Consequently, these procedures are never morally permissible.

⁶ *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, p. 16.

⁷ Much is being done by medical professionals and researchers in addressing infertility. While fully respecting the dignity of human procreation, some have achieved results which seemed previously unattainable. Training in and the practice of Natural Family Planning by spouses who are experiencing infertility can help medical professionals to diagnose its cause and to propose a remedy so that the couple will be able to conceive with full respect to their personal and marital dignity and that of the child to be conceived. See also *Donum vitae*, IIB, 8.

⁸ *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, pp. 14-15.

⁹ *Donum vitae*, IIB, 8.

¹⁰ *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, p. 15.

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI. Germany Visit “Address to German Parliament” (September 22, 2011) in *Origins*, Vol. 41, Issue 18, October 6, 2011, p. 280.

¹² *Summa Theologiae* I-11, q. 93, a. 3. Here, Saint Thomas Aquinas quotes from Cicero and Saint Augustine.

¹³ CCC, #1955.

¹⁴ CCC, #1957.

¹⁵ Gregory J. Mansour and Robert P. George, *Marriage or Friendship?* Touchstone (January-February 2012): pp. 13-14.