

Homily for the 30th Sunday of the Year - Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
October 25, 2020
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

This past week has seen a flurry of media reports concerning comments attributed to Pope Francis about “civil unions” in a documentary about the Holy Father called “*Francesco*.” These reports have left many people understandably confused, so I would like to spend a few minutes of my homily today addressing this issue since you may be wondering about this yourself.

An analysis of the original video of the documentary in Spanish concludes that Pope Francis “has been quoted wildly out of context, with separate sentences being cherrypicked and creatively stitched together, giving the impression that he meant something he really didn’t.” Moreover, the Pope specifically said he does not approve in any way of homosexual acts, but they left that out.¹

Along those same lines, another analysis by a Spanish-speaking priest said, “It is clear the context in Spanish means something else than what the media is saying.” For example, the phrase used by Pope Francis in Spanish is “*convivencia civil*,” which is translated more accurately “civil coexistence” or “living together” rather than “civil union,” which has a different connotation in English as a secular version of marriage.²

Here is the statement that I issued in response to inquiries from the media:

Based on what has been reported, it appears that the Holy Father is reminding the Catholic faithful of our duty not to alienate or discriminate against people with same-sex attraction. It is also clear Pope Francis is not changing, nor can he change, the Catholic Church’s teaching that marriage is reserved for one man and one woman and that any form of sexual activity outside of marriage is sinful. We have seen a pattern of media quotes by the Holy Father being taken out of context and used to suggest a change in Church teaching, so we have learned not to put too much stock in an interview quote.

So what does the Catholic Church officially teach about civil unions?

The official teaching was prepared by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and approved and ordered published by Pope St. John Paul II, in an Audience of March 28, 2003. It is contained in a document called, "Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons." It is not a coincidence, I am sure, that it was promulgated on June 3, 2003, the Memorial of St. Charles Lwanga and his Companions, known as the Martyrs of Uganda, who died rather than submit to the homosexual demands of the King.

Section three of the document presents "Arguments From Reason Against Legal Recognition of Homosexual Unions." In this section, arguments are made from the order of right reason, from the biological and anthropological order, from the social order, and the from the legal order.

The conclusion of this official teaching document summarizes the issue very well, which I quote as follows:

The Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions. The common good requires

that laws recognize, promote and protect marriage as the basis of the family, the primary unit of society. Legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage would mean not only the approval of deviant behavior, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society, but would also obscure basic values which belong to the common inheritance of humanity. The Church cannot fail to defend these values, for the good of men and women and for the good of society itself.³

This remains the official teaching of the Church, and as I have said on previous occasions, the Pope does not change official teaching in airplane press conferences or media interviews. Moreover, since the teaching about the intrinsic grave sinfulness of homosexual acts is a matter of divine law, not even the Pope can change it. The Pope knows that well, and so that is why he said he does not approve in any way of homosexual acts.

The culture of western society today spreads many falsehoods about same-sex attraction and uses euphemisms to deceive people about its true reality, offering phrases such as “marriage equality” and arguing that people who love each other should be able to marry each other, even if they are of the same sex. Of course, it does not take much to see through such false

illusions. Siblings should love each other, but brothers and sisters cannot marry each other. Parents should love their children, but they do not marry them. Yes, we are called to love, but to love as Jesus taught us.

In today's Gospel (Mt 22:34-40) Jesus says the greatest commandment is a twofold commandment of love: love of God and love of neighbor. Judaism believed that, in addition to the Torah, Moses also received from God 613 oral laws: 248 were positive ones while 365 were negative. Rabbis frequently debated about which of these 613 commandments was the most important. In today's Gospel, a "scholar of the law" (a scribe) tests Jesus regarding which law is the greatest.

Jesus answers by first quoting Deuteronomy 6:5. Almost every Jew would know this verse by heart. Many rabbis would agree with Jesus that the totality of love stipulated by this version lies at the very center of the law. Judaism saw the Torah (law) as a unified whole, including heart, soul, and mind. It also required putting this love into concrete practice. This reflects what Judaism means by covenant fidelity, which includes willing and doing.

The second is like it. Jesus was not asked for a second-place commandment. Nevertheless, he quotes Leviticus 19:18, which declares that one should love one's neighbor as oneself. Jesus then makes it very clear that

this additional commandment is not a second choice but is equal to the first. Again, no Jew would argue with Jesus against the importance of loving one's neighbor as oneself. If Jesus manifests any originality here, it might be in his combining Deuteronomy 6:5 with Leviticus 19:18, seeing them as one – and the greatest commandment.

Earlier in St. Matthew's Gospel, (Matt 5:17), Jesus makes it clear that he has come not to do away with the law and the prophets but rather to fulfill them. Obviously, some people felt that Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets; their observance is now surpassed by his teaching. Nothing could be further from the truth. If anything, the law and the prophets are even more important now. Their importance stems from the fact that they flow from the greatest commandment as Jesus has just articulated it. This is solid orthodoxy – both for the Judaism of Jesus' time and for the members of the Christian community today.

As we heard in our second reading today, St. Paul's teachings on love to the Thessalonians (1 Thes 1:5c-10) came down much to this point: clear out all the idols, everything that takes up your heart, trust, time, or love, and give it entirely to God, and to those God calls you to love.

How do we apply the law of love in our lives? What does it mean to love God and our neighbor in the world today? Can we broaden our concept of neighbor to include the wider world, particularly where basic needs are great? The love Jesus is talking about is more than warm feelings towards others. Charity is vital in our world, but it goes alongside speaking the truth and acting on behalf of others.

Through Jesus' act of selfless love, God's will for us has been revealed. By faith we know that God is a holy Trinity of love. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit experience an endless spiral of love out of which God creates. Through the gift of the Eucharist, we share in this love. Truly being in God's image and likeness means reflecting God's love in the way we live.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ <https://wherepeteris.com/those-pope-francis-quotes-video-editing-and-media-controversy/>.

² <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=265024251573217>.

³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Consideration Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons," June 3, 2003, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html