



DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

July 21, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Recently, the United States Supreme Court, in the *Obergefell* decision, mandated that all states legalize so-called "same-sex marriage." Regardless of the decision, no human law can override the laws of God, and no human court can redefine something as integral to human society as marriage. The Catholic Church will continue to defend and promote the institution of marriage as the Church has always understood it.

This court decision has made clear that our society no longer recognizes marriage as it has been defined throughout human history. Yet marriage is not a human construct that can be redefined, but instead is an institution created by God 'from the beginning' to unite a man and a woman. Marriage has certain unique characteristics:

Marriage is *between a man and a woman*. In Scripture, when Jesus was questioned about marriage, he responded, "From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one." (Mark 10:6-8). In our day, Pope Francis has declared: "The complementarity of man and woman is being questioned in the name of a freer and more just society. The difference between a man and a woman is not meant to stand in opposition, or to subordinate, but is for the sake of communion and generation, always 'in the image and likeness of God.'"

Marriage is *open to life*. In marriage, the husband and wife commit to each other – and no other – for as long as they both shall live. "What therefore God has joined together, let no one put asunder" (Mark 10:9). In addition to unity, procreation is one of marriage's primary purposes. Not every marriage produces children, but even in these cases the couple affirms the life-giving aspect of marriage by their willingness to nurture new life should God bless them with it.

These central characteristics of marriage make it the foundation of a strong society, for marriage gives all new members of a society – children – the best possible environment for a healthy upbringing. Our Holy Father has stated, "Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's development and emotional maturity." This obliges the government to support and favor such a definition of marriage in its civil laws.

As Catholics, we must continue to follow our Lord and defend and promote the institution of marriage as one that is faithful, life-long, between a man and a woman, and open to life. Let us pray for one another, and pray for our country, our government leaders, and all married couples.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of the Diocese of
Venice in Florida