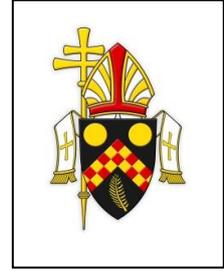


MESSAGE FROM ARCHBISHOP MARK COLERIDGE



The postal survey on same-sex marriage is behind us, and now we await the legislation that will follow. That is largely beyond our control, but there are other things that are within our control; and we would do well to look at these, particularly as we journey through Advent towards Christmas when we celebrate the marriage of heaven and earth.

After a debate which was often vitriolic or worse, there's a need to heal wounds and build bridges. That won't be achieved quickly or easily; and it will depend in part upon what happens in the aftermath of the postal survey and the legislation. That touches upon religious freedom. Some will see the vote and the legislation as a personal liberation which goes no further: so be it. But others will see it as a major victory in a long ideological war in which the Catholic Church is an enemy whose influence and freedom are to be curtailed at every opportunity. That's why there's a need not for paranoia or panic but for clear-eyed vigilance. The newly constructed right of same-sex couples to marry must not be set against long-recognised rights to religious freedom which are fundamental to the health of society. It's worth recalling that, in the area of religious freedom, we're talking about genuine rights, not exemptions which may be grudgingly conceded by government but withdrawn at any time in the future if government so decides.

An even larger and more urgent need in the wake of the vote and the legislation is to strengthen and renew our catechesis of marriage in every way and at every point. This is the call of Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*, and it's time for us in Australia to respond in practical and positive ways. This is especially true at a time when evidence of the trivialisation of marriage is all around us, no more clearly than in mass entertainment, particularly some television shows.

As the Pope writes in *Amoris Laetitia*: "There is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things. Nor it is helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority. What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them. We also

need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today's problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism" (35-36).

We need to consider a new language in which to express what the Church believes and teaches about marriage, given that the language we have used speaks to too few. Pope Francis again: "We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage (AL 40).

We need a new nuptial catechesis which begins long before engagement and marriage. This would be the beginning of a journey on which the Church accompanies the couple at every point. Marriage preparation can't be consigned to a few sessions just before marriage. It needs to begin long before. Given how counter-cultural our understanding of marriage has become, preparation for it needs to be a kind of catechumenate.

But the journey doesn't end at marriage. The Church needs to accompany couples in the early years of marriage and right through their life together until death. This also applies when marriage fails. The Church has to travel the road with those who are divorced and with those who have remarried beyond divorce. We need to ask what resources we will need for such a ministry – educational resources, formative communities, celebrations for different moments of the journey and support for those in trouble.

Therefore, I invite everyone in the Archdiocese of Brisbane to think about how we as a Church might do this. Married people especially will have ideas of what might be done. I say this knowing that we already moving towards the Plenary Council in 2020 when it's likely that questions of a lifelong nuptial journey and the Church's accompaniment of it will be on the agenda. So let this be our positive and enduring response to the result of the postal survey and the same-sex marriage legislation as well as part of our preparation for the Plenary Council and all that lies beyond.

+ Mark Coleridge
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