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BISHOP BRENNAN'S STATEMENT ON 'FIDUCIA SUPPLICANS'

In a Declaration recently signed by Pope Francis and issued through the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Holy Father promulgated some teaching and guidelines, "*On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings*." It raised quite a stir in and out of the Church. I must say, however, that contrary to some initial over-reactions from people on opposite ends of the spectrum - even in the Church - and contrary to the most common narrative circulating in the secular news media, Pope Francis is not advocating the blessing of same sex unions nor is he authorizing priests to impart such a blessing upon those unions or upon any union that the Church would consider and call 'irregular'. So, in a very small nutshell, what does this Declaration teach?

The document's title in Latin is '*Fiducia Supplicans*' which literally means '*Supplicating Trust*'. That is not common usage in the English language, but the key word is a form of the word 'supplicate' which means, "To ask or beg for something earnestly or humbly." In this case, it is directed toward anyone who might approach a bishop or a priest for a simple blessing, usually after Mass, for a particular need or for the need of a loved one. Among many others, it might be a request to pray blessings upon a child, a parent, a friend who is sick or for someone who has died. It could be a heart-felt request from someone who has a deep sense that they need to turn their life around. Brothers and sisters, we priests have been doing that since the first century and any priest worth his salt has been doing that since day one of his ordination.

When bishops and priests are asked to bless someone, we don't ask them if they are Catholic. We don't ask them if they are practicing the Faith or married in the Church. We don't ask when the last time was that they went to Confession. All of that can and should come later. We simply impart the blessing pastorally, lovingly and spontaneously. As the Declaration says, "Thus, when people ask for a blessing, an exhaustive moral analysis should not be placed as a precondition for conferring it. For those seeking a blessing should not be required to have moral perfection." If that requirement were the case, we would all be left out.

Ultimately and exclusively, even for people in irregular unions or sinful situations, the blessings of which the document speaks are always directed toward persons, that is, towards individuals in need and not toward unions. Additionally, and in support of the unchanged and permanent teaching on Marriage as between one man and one woman, the Declaration states that, "The Church has the right and the duty to avoid any rite that might contradict this conviction or lead to confusion. Such is also the meaning of the *Responsum* of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, which states that the Church does not have the power to impart blessings on unions of persons of the same sex." That is the reason why if a blessing is imparted in this context, then rites, formulas, and anything associated with or even remotely resembling liturgy are forbidden. Keep the blessing simple, usually while greeting folks after Mass and, above all, keep it pastoral.

Anyone seeking or justifying the blessing of an irregular or illicit union based on '*Fiducia Supplicans*' would be looking in the wrong place. Anyone seeking a stamp of approval for their life or lifestyle must look elsewhere too. Blessings imparted are meant to change and transform us and not God or His opinion about us. The same goes for Church teaching. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

In Christ,

Most Rev. Joseph V. Brennan, D.D.
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