

4th Sunday of Advent 2023

Dear Parishioners of St. Paul Parish:

The topic of the blessing of individuals, including those in irregular situations such as living together outside of marriage or same-sex couples, became a news story when the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (DDF), approved by Pope Francis, issued a Declaration under the title [*Fiducia Supplicans*](#) (*Supplicating Trust*) with the subtitle, "On the Pastoral Meaning of Blessings," on December 18, 2023. The Declaration sought to bring clarity and to distinguish between liturgical blessings and even semi-liturgical blessings and "non-ritualized blessings" that are spontaneous. However, it seems that more questions have been raised as a result.

As a starting point, it is essential to understand that the document is about different types of blessings and who can receive them. The document **in no way** changes the Church's teaching that marriage is only between one man and one woman. It does say that those in irregular situations could spontaneously ask for a blessing. [Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston in response to the Declaration](#) said: "We thank the Holy Father for his love and care of all the people in the flock. We caution and make clear that the Holy Father has not endorsed gay marriage, but has recognized all Catholics, including those whose unions are not recognized by the Church, as equally in need of God's grace and love."

It is not uncommon for a parishioner to approach after Mass and ask for a blessing because they are going on a trip, are having medical tests, are going for a job interview or before an exam and the list could go on. It is spontaneous. There is no ritual used with pre-designed prayers for these blessings. As an act of faith the person is simply asking for a blessing. A spontaneous prayer is said that concludes with a blessing. This is quite different than when someone asks to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. In this case, we go back into the church, get the ritual and oil, and administer the Sacrament according to the prescribed Rite. In the case of the spontaneous blessing, nothing needs to be known about the person. In the latter, except in a life and death situation, they need to be baptized and a Catholic.

Cardinal O'Malley in his statement also said: "The document, therefore, offers a type of blessing that can be conferred on anyone to invoke God's help and mercy in their lives. It is the Church reaching out a hand of affection to all Catholics in the hope that these simple gestures provide an effective means of increasing trust in God on the part of the people who seek to be guided by a greater understanding of God's plan for love and truth."

The spontaneous blessings, as explained in the DDF document, are not to look like or resemble a sacramental blessing, because they are not. The blessings cannot be a planned event, such as a blessing at a civil ceremony that would give the person (couple) and those in attendance the indication that what they are doing is morally okay. This is true for all civil marriage ceremonies.

The Prefect of the DDF, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, said the declaration "remains firm on the traditional doctrine of the Church about marriage, not allowing any type of liturgical rite or blessing similar to a liturgical rite that can create confusion," but it also explores the "pastoral

meaning of blessings" in a way that opens "the possibility of blessing couples in irregular situations and same-sex couples without officially validating their status or changing in any way the Church's perennial teaching on marriage."

[Archbishop Blair in his statement](#) said "it is important to emphasize that [the] blessing described by the DDF is being conferred on persons, and not on a relationship that is not in conformity with what the Church believes and teaches about human sexuality and marriage."

So from my vantage point, what is the point of all of this? God loves his people always and the Church should always be willing to accompany people along the way. Imparting a simple blessing that is requested by an individual or couple in an irregular situation is symbolic of that accompaniment. If the person(s) seeking the blessing are doing so to legitimize their situation it would not be granted. On the other hand, if the person is asking God's blessing so he, she, they can grow closer to God it would be.

In paragraph 38 of the DDF document it says: "one should neither provide for nor promote a ritual for the blessings of couples in an irregular situation. At the same time, one should not prevent or prohibit the Church's closeness to people in every situation in which they might seek God's help through a simple blessing. In a brief prayer preceding this spontaneous blessing, the ordained minister could ask that the individuals have peace, health, a spirit of patience, dialogue, and mutual assistance - but also God's light and strength to be able to fulfill his will completely."

It is my hope that this will have helped you understand the purpose and intent of the document. The full document, *Fiducia Supplicans*, can be accessed [here](#). Archbishop Blair's full statement can be accessed [here](#). If questions remain, feel free to inquire.

Peace and all Good,

Fr. Joseph Benicewicz, OFM Conv.
Pastor