

A Letter from the Catholic Bishops of New Jersey

February 17, 2008

Dear Friends in Christ:

Today, with heartfelt joy, we join in prayer with Catholics across New Jersey to celebrate the vocation and Holy Sacrament of Marriage. We salute all husbands and wives and we pray that God blesses them with the strength to persevere in their vocation so that each day they and their families grow in love.

Today, we also urge Catholics to reflect on the meaning and the importance of marriage to society. Marriage is the foundation of the family. The family, in turn, is the basic unit of society. Marriage as a union of one man and one woman has its roots not only in human tradition and history, but also in natural law, which transcends all man-made law. God himself is the author of marriage.

We point to both the Old Testament and the New Testament where the definition of marriage is clear:

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.
(Genesis 2:24)

In the New Testament, Jesus teaches us about the nature of marriage:

Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh... (Matthew 19:5-6)

Clearly, from the opening Book of Genesis to the wedding feast at Cana in John's Gospel to the present day, God has blessed the holy covenant of marriage.

Today, the institution of marriage faces many challenges from a society so concerned with individual freedom that some view marriage as a temporary or disposable convenience. Some even are attempting to change the very definition of marriage as a union of one man and one woman.

As Catholics, we do not stand by in silence in the face of these challenges that threaten the sanctity of marriage. We do not shirk our responsibility.

We must protect and promote the dignity of marriage. We must pledge our support to all family members including those who choose to remain single. We must reach out with the special compassion of Christ to those married couples and families experiencing difficulties, anxiety and illness.

Today, we ask all Catholics to reflect on the question, "How can I help my family and the families that I touch to grow in hope, love, peace and joy?"

Today, we ask all Catholics to pray that the love of spouses for one another continues to be steadfast and strong. May their spousal love be light and grace to their families, to their neighbors and to the world.

May God bless you.

Most Reverend John J. Myers
Archbishop, Archdiocese of Newark

Most Reverend Joseph A. Galante
Bishop, Diocese of Camden

Most Reverend Paul G. Bootkoski
Bishop, Diocese of Metuchen

Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli
Bishop, Diocese of Paterson

Most Reverend John M. Smith
Bishop, Diocese of Trenton

Most Reverend William Skurla
Bishop, Byzantine Catholic
Eparchy of Passaic

Most Reverend Joseph Younan
Bishop, Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Diocese