

## **Profession of the immutable truths about sacramental marriage**

After the publication of the Apostolic Exhortation "Amoris laetitia" (2016) various bishops issued at local, regional, and national levels applicable norms regarding the sacramental discipline of those faithful, called "divorced and remarried," who having still a living spouse to whom they are united with a valid sacramental matrimonial bond, have nevertheless begun a stable cohabitation *more uxorio* with a person who is not their legitimate spouse.

The aforementioned rules provide *inter alia* that in individual cases the persons, called "divorced and remarried," may receive the sacrament of Penance and Holy Communion, while continuing to live habitually and intentionally *more uxorio* with a person who is not their legitimate spouse. These pastoral norms have received approval from various hierarchical authorities. Some of these norms have received approval even from the supreme authority of the Church.

The spread of these ecclesiastically approved pastoral norms has caused a considerable and ever increasing confusion among the faithful and the clergy, a confusion that touches the central manifestations of the life of the Church, such as sacramental marriage with the family, the domestic church, and the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist.

According to the doctrine of the Church, only the sacramental matrimonial bond constitutes a domestic church (see Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 11). The admission of so-called "divorced and remarried" faithful to Holy Communion, which is the highest expression of the unity of Christ the Spouse with His Church, means in practice a way of approving or legitimizing divorce, and in this meaning a kind of introduction of divorce in the life of the Church.

The mentioned pastoral norms are revealed in practice and in time as a means of spreading the "plague of divorce" (an expression used by the Second Vatican Council, see *Gaudium et spes*, 47). It is a matter of spreading the "plague of divorce" even in the life of the Church, when the Church, instead, because of her unconditional fidelity to the doctrine of Christ, should be a bulwark and an unmistakable sign of contradiction against the plague of divorce which is every day more rampant in civil society.

Unequivocally and without admitting any exception Our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ solemnly reaffirmed God's will regarding the absolute prohibition of divorce. An approval or legitimation of the violation of the sacredness of the marriage bond, even indirectly through the mentioned new sacramental discipline, seriously contradicts God's express will and His commandment. This practice therefore represents a substantial alteration of the two thousand-year-old sacramental discipline of the Church. Furthermore, a substantially altered discipline will eventually lead to an alteration in the corresponding doctrine.

The constant Magisterium of the Church, beginning with the teachings of the Apostles and of all the Supreme Pontiffs, has preserved and faithfully transmitted both in the doctrine (in theory) and in the sacramental discipline (in practice) in an unequivocal way, without any shadow of doubt and always in the same sense and in the same meaning (*eodem sensu eademque sententia*), the crystalline teaching of Christ concerning the indissolubility of marriage.

Because of its Divinely established nature, the discipline of the sacraments must never contradict the revealed word of God and the faith of the Church in the absolute indissolubility of a ratified and consummated marriage. "The sacraments not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called "sacraments of faith." (Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 59). "Even the supreme authority in the Church may not change the liturgy arbitrarily, but only in the obedience of faith and with religious respect for the mystery of the liturgy" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1125).

The Catholic faith by its nature excludes a formal contradiction between the faith professed on the one hand and the life and practice of the sacraments on the other. In this sense we can also understand the following affirmation of the Magisterium: "This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age." (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 43) and "Accordingly, the concrete pedagogy of the Church must always remain linked with her doctrine and never be separated from it" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 33).

In view of the vital importance that the doctrine and discipline of marriage and the Eucharist constitute, the Church is obliged to speak with the same voice. The pastoral norms regarding the indissolubility of marriage must not, therefore, be contradicted between one diocese and another, between one country and another. Since the time of the Apostles, the Church has observed this principle as St. Irenaeus of Lyons testifies: "The Church, though spread throughout the world to the ends of the earth, having received the faith from the Apostles and their disciples, preserves this preaching and this faith with care and, as if she inhabits a single house, believes in the same identical way, as if she had only one soul and only one heart, and preaches the truth of the faith, teaches it and transmits it in a unanimous voice, as if she had only one mouth" (*Adversus haereses*, I, 10, 2). Saint Thomas Aquinas transmits to us the same perennial principle of the life of the Church: "There is one and the same faith of the ancients and the moderns, otherwise there would not be one and the same Church" (*Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, q. 14, a. 12c).

The following warning from Pope John Paul II remains current and valid: "The confusion, created in the conscience of many faithful by the differences of opinions and teachings in theology, in preaching, in catechesis, in spiritual direction, about serious and delicate questions of Christian morals, ends up by diminishing the true sense of sin almost to the point of eliminating it" (Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 18).

The meaning of the following statements of the Magisterium of the Church is fully applicable to the doctrine and sacramental discipline concerning the indissolubility of a ratified and consummated marriage:

- "For the Church of Christ, watchful guardian that she is, and defender of the dogmas deposited with her, never changes anything, never diminishes anything, never adds anything to them; but with all diligence she treats the ancient doctrines faithfully and wisely, which the faith of the Fathers has transmitted. She strives to investigate and explain them in such a way that the ancient dogmas of heavenly doctrine will be made evident and clear, but will retain their full, integral, and proper nature, and will grow only within their own genus — that is, within the same dogma, in the same sense and the same meaning" (Pius IX, Dogmatic Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*)
- "With regard to the very substance of truth, the Church has before God and men the sacred duty to announce it, to teach it without any attenuation, as Christ revealed it, and there is no condition of time that can reduce the rigor of this obligation. It binds in conscience every priest who is entrusted with the care of teaching, admonishing, and guiding the faithful "(Pius XII, Discourse to parish priests and Lenten preachers, March 23, 1949).
- "The Church does not historicize, does not relativize to the metamorphoses of profane culture the nature of the Church that is always equal and faithful to itself, as Christ wanted it and authentic tradition perfected it" (Paul VI, Homily from October 28, 1965).
- "Now it is an outstanding manifestation of charity toward souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ" (Paul VI, Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, 29).
- "Any conjugal difficulties are resolved without ever falsifying and compromising the truth" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 33).
- "The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm [of the Divine moral law]. In obedience to the truth which is Christ, whose image is reflected in the nature and dignity of the human person, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its demands of radicalness and perfection" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 33).
- "The other principle is that of truth and consistency, whereby the church does not agree to call good evil and evil good. Basing herself on these two complementary principles, the church can only invite her children who find themselves in these painful situations to approach the divine mercy by other ways, not however through the sacraments of penance and the eucharist until such time as they have attained the required dispositions" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 34).

- "The Church's firmness in defending the universal and unchanging moral norms is not demeaning at all. Its only purpose is to serve man's true freedom. Because there can be no freedom apart from or in opposition to the truth"(John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, 96).
- "When it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the "poorest of the poor" on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal" (emphasis in original) (John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, 96).
- "The obligation of reiterating this impossibility of admission to the Eucharist is required for genuine pastoral care and for an authentic concern for the well-being of these faithful and of the whole Church, as it indicates the conditions necessary for the fullness of that conversion to which all are always invited by the Lord" (Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, Declaration on the admissibility to the Holy Communion of the divorced and remarried, 24 June 2000, n. 5).

As Catholic bishops, who - according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council - must defend the unity of faith and the common discipline of the Church, and take care that the light of the full truth should arise for all men (see *Lumen Gentium*, 23 ) we are forced in conscience to profess in the face of the current rampant confusion the unchanging truth and the equally immutable sacramental discipline regarding the indissolubility of marriage according to the bimillennial and unaltered teaching of the Magisterium of the Church. In this spirit we reiterate:

- Sexual relationships between people who are not in the bond to one another of a valid marriage - which occurs in the case of the so-called "divorced and remarried" - are always contrary to God's will and constitute a grave offense against God.
- No circumstance or finality, not even a possible imputability or diminished guilt, can make such sexual relations a positive moral reality and pleasing to God. The same applies to the other negative precepts of the Ten Commandments of God. Since "there exist acts which, per se and in themselves, independently of circumstances, are always seriously wrong by reason of their object" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, 17).
- The Church does not possess the infallible charism of judging the internal state of grace of a member of the faithful (see Council of Trent, session 24, chapter 1). The non-admission to Holy Communion of the so-called "divorced and remarried" does not therefore mean a judgment on their state of grace before God, but a judgment on the visible, public, and objective character of their situation. Because of the visible nature of the sacraments and of the Church herself, the reception of the sacraments necessarily depends on the corresponding visible and objective situation of the faithful.
- It is not morally licit to engage in sexual relations with a person who is not one's legitimate spouse supposedly to avoid another sin. Since the Word of God teaches us, it is not lawful "to do evil so that good may come" (Romans 3, 8).

- The admission of such persons to Holy Communion may be permitted only when they with the help of God's grace and a patient and individual pastoral accompaniment make a sincere intention to cease from now on the habit of such sexual relations and to avoid scandal. It is in this way that true discernment and authentic pastoral accompaniment were always expressed in the Church.
- People who have habitual non-marital sexual relations violate their indissoluble sacramental nuptial bond with their life style in relation to their legitimate spouse. For this reason they are not able to participate "in Spirit and in Truth" (see John 4, 23) at the Eucharistic wedding supper of Christ, also taking into account the words of the rite of Holy Communion: "Blessed are the guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19, 9).
- The fulfillment of God's will, revealed in His Ten Commandments and in His explicit and absolute prohibition of divorce, constitutes the true spiritual good of the people here on earth and will lead them to the true joy of love in the salvation of eternal life.

Being bishops in the pastoral office those, who promote the Catholic and Apostolic faith ("cultores catholicae et apostolicae fidei", see *Missale Romanum, Canon Romanus*), we are aware of this grave responsibility and our duty before the faithful who await from us a public and unequivocal profession of the truth and the immutable discipline of the Church regarding the indissolubility of marriage. For this reason we are not allowed to be silent.

We affirm therefore in the spirit of St. John the Baptist, of St. John Fisher, of St. Thomas More, of Blessed Laura Vicuña and of numerous known and unknown confessors and martyrs of the indissolubility of marriage:

**It is not licit (*non licet*) to justify, approve, or legitimize either directly or indirectly divorce and a non-conjugal stable sexual relationship through the sacramental discipline of the admission of so-called "divorced and remarried" to Holy Communion, in this case a discipline alien to the entire Tradition of the Catholic and Apostolic faith.**

By making this public profession before our conscience and before God who will judge us, we are sincerely convinced that we have provided a service of charity in truth to the Church of our day and to the Supreme Pontiff, Successor of Saint Peter and Vicar of Christ on earth .

31 December 2017, the Feast of the Holy Family, in the year of the centenary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima.

- + Tomash Peta, Archbishop Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of Saint Mary in Astana
- + Jan Pawel Lenga, Archbishop-Bishop of Karaganda
- + Athanasius Schneider, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Mary in Astana