

DIOCESE OF PATERSON

Diocesan Center
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Office of
THE BISHOP

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June 26, 2015

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord,

The recent Supreme Court decision "*Obergefell et al. v. Hodges*" has now redefined the legal definition of marriage in our country.

Responding to the cultural trends of the last sixty years, the judges have made a decision that will affect not only those individuals who decide to enter same-sex unions, but every citizen and institution within the nation.

This decision rejects the understanding of marriage that has been held across the millennia by people of every race and religion. The consequences of this decision will have long-range effects in politics, economics, education, and, in no small way, religious freedom. The adverse consequences of this decision will become more and more evident in the days and months ahead in terms of our Catholic schools, universities, hospitals, charitable institutions and churches.

As your bishop, I take serious my responsibility to safeguard and pass on to you the teachings of Jesus that have been handed down to us by the apostles in the deposit of faith. Therefore, I ask you to always keep in mind, as faithful Catholics, the following truths of faith.

First, as believers, we abstain from judging the consciences of those who choose to live in lifestyles contrary to the teaching of Jesus. Only God sees the heart and judges rightly each human person. As a consequence, we speak charitably and compassionately of all people, even those who disagree with us on fundamental truths of the natural law.

Second, precisely because we are people of reason and faith, we hold that there is objective truth about the human person and the world. Objective truth is founded on God's design for creation and independent of the political and cultural trends of any age.

Third, without a doubt, the objective truth about family, as intended by God, is a most fundamental, objective truth for the good of all society. From the very first pages of Genesis, we learn that God created us in his own image and likeness, male and female, he created us. (cf. Gn 1:27). In the beauty of God's creative design, marriage is based on the complementarity of man and woman. As Pope Francis has said, "the removal of difference, in fact, creates a problem, not a solution."

Courts and constitutions may change the legal definition of marriage. But, they cannot alter God's loving plan inscribed within the natural law.

As Catholics, therefore, we are committed to the teaching of Sacred Scripture faithfully handed down to us by the Church that marriage is, by God's design, a union between a man and a woman, open to life, in a lifelong commitment of fidelity and mutual love. That is God's gift of marriage that we cherish and seek to protect.

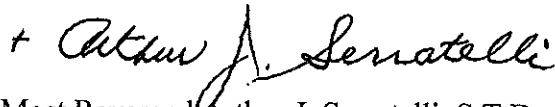
Fourth, the laws of a nation are good or bad only insofar as they are in accord with God's plan for his creation. Human laws are fallible and change. In 1857, the Supreme Court of this nation upheld slavery. Clearly, a bad decision condoning an evil. Because a court tells us something is good does not make it good. We, as believers, are ultimately responsible to a higher authority.

While accompanying others with patience and love, even members of our own families, who do not accept the Church's teaching on marriage, as believers, we cannot cease to support and promote God's sacred plan for marriage. Please keep in mind that, by our own fidelity to what is good in God's eyes and by the witness of our lives, we are of invaluable benefit for all of society.

In the days ahead as we face many challenges to our faith and, perhaps, even persecution, I pray that "the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rm 15: 13).

Invoking God's blessing on each of you and your families, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Arthur J. Serratelli". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of a small cross symbol.

Most Reverend Arthur J. Serratelli, S.T.D., S.S.L., D.D.
Bishop of Paterson