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| *(The following information is used with permission by Reverend H. Gregory West, JCL – Pastor, St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church.)* |
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| **Clarification on Pope Francis’ Declaration Regarding the Blessing of Same Sex Unions and Other Irregular Unions**  Today, a declaration entitled *Fiducia Supplicans* (*Providing Trust*) was issued by the Holy See at the direction of Pope Francis giving the clergy of the Catholic Church permission to bless “same sex unions and other irregular unions.” Of grave concern is the confusion this declaration causes among the Church’s faithful and the general population, a confusion which no doubt will be augmented by inexact reporting and commentary by the secular media and others.  As your pastor, I wish to offer the following clarification about the declaration, that is, **what it means and what is does not mean.**  With any official pronouncements by the Holy See, it is imperative that the faithful read the official statements as issued by the legitimate authority of the Catholic Church. Relying on other sources, notably commentaries and pundits found across the internet, risks the danger of encountering error and agendas that do not align with the Gospel and may come across as licit.  You may read the official text of the Declaration on the Vatican website, where it is posted in Italian, French, English, German, and Spanish.  **Why was the declaration made by Pope Francis?**  On February 22, 2021, some Cardinals of the Church issued a *dubia*, that is, a request for clarification about the possibility of extending such blessings. According to the Declaration, experts such as moral theologians, liturgists, and others were consulted. The Declaration is the result of the experts’ testimony and recommendations coupled by the Holy Father’s study and reflection.  **Does the Declaration change the Catholic Church’s teaching that marriage is between one woman and one man, indissoluble for life, and open to the birth of children?**  **No.**  It does not and cannot change that teaching, a truth given to the Church by divine revelation. The Church has no authority to change God’s revealed truths which are known from the natural order of creation.  **Does the Declaration mean that the Catholic Church will give recognition to same sex unions and other irregular unions? Will there be a new blessing ritual for such unions?**  **No.** “This 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… The Church does not have the power to impart blessings on unions of persons of the same sex.” The clergy may “perform blessings spontaneously that are not found in the [official] *Book of Blessings*.” (#35)  “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.” (#38)  “In any case, precisely to avoid any form of confusion or scandal, when the prayer of blessing is requested by a couple in an irregular situation, even though it is expressed outside the rites prescribed by the liturgical books, this blessing should never be imparted in concurrence with the ceremonies of a civil union, and not even in connection with them. Nor can it be performed with any clothing, gestures, or words that are proper to a wedding. The same applies when the blessing is requested by a same-sex couple.”(#39)  **So then, what is the purpose of the blessing Pope Francis is allowing?**  “Pastoral prudence and wisdom—avoiding all serious forms of scandal and confusion among the faithful—may suggest that the ordained minister join in the prayer of those persons who, although in a union that cannot be compared in any way to a marriage, desire to entrust themselves to the Lord and his mercy, to invoke his help, and to be guided to a greater understanding of his plan of love and of truth.” (#30) Further, “the grace of God works in the lives of those who do not claim to be righteous but who acknowledge themselves humbly as sinners, like everyone else.” (#32)  **Are Catholic clergy *required* to impart such a blessing?**  No.  **What are the key takeaways from the Declaration?**  1.      The Pope has absolutely no authority to modify official Church teaching, the source of which is Truth revealed to us by God. This includes marriage.  2.      The definition of marriage remains unchanged, that is, it is a union of one man and one woman (by gender of birth) who enter a lifetime covenant that is dissoluble only by death and is open to the birth of children.  3.      The Church cannot recognize the legitimacy of same sex unions, nor does it condone them.  4.      The blessing is not a liturgy or ritual. It must not have any semblance of a marriage rite. It is to be spontaneous and preferably private. The blessing is intended for the *persons themselves*, not for the union itself. No one, including dioceses, bishops, priests, deacons, or other Church officials, is permitted to create a ritual for the blessing.  5.      All of us are made in the image of God and therefore possess an inherent dignity and value. Just as all persons are sinners, so all need the comfort of God’s mercy so that they may know his truth and his plan of love for humanity.  Let us remain committed to our beloved Catholic Church and pray for her leaders.  Faithfully yours in Christ Jesus, *Father West* |