

Statement on *Fiducia Supplicans* by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith

Sin is still not love!

Today, December 18, 2023, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, under its Prefect Victor Emanuel Fernández, issued a statement on blessings. Press articles and commentaries, as well as other media, are already celebrating or regretting that the statement appears to permit blessing homosexual and divorced couples. It is a theologically very ambivalent and ambiguous, as well as imprecise, document. It brims with an optimism almost bordering on naivety about its application and the accompanying circumstances, as well as the use of rubrics, which can be formulated individually. The document does not answer many questions that the priest has to ask himself in these circumstances. Theologically, the document goes beyond this and claims to expand and enrich the classical understanding of blessings and thus takes on the form of a declaration (No. 1). The document emphasizes that blessings always and everywhere offer an opportunity to call upon God through Christ in the Holy Spirit and to thank him.

It has always been possible to bless many things and in this way to pray for the health and well-being, or for other graces for the object in question as part of God's creation. *"For this reason, blessings have as their recipients: people; objects of worship and devotion; sacred images; places of life, of work, and suffering; the fruits of the earth and human toil; and all created realities that refer back to the Creator, praising and blessing him by their beauty."* (No.8) Therefore, blessings are always possible for everything good, everything that God has created, and may principally not be forbidden. This does not apply to sins and sinful attitudes since they are against God. One must want to abide by the laws of God as the Church teaches them, a person's constant need of conversion notwithstanding: *"One who asks for a blessing show himself to be in need of God's saving presence in his life and one who asks for a blessing from the Church recognizes the latter as*

a sacrament of the salvation that God offers. To seek a blessing in the Church is to acknowledge that the life of the Church springs from the womb of God's mercy and helps us to move forward, to live better, and to respond to the Lord's will." (No. 20)

Blessings can only be bestowed, however, if the recipient of the matter is disposed to do so, that is, if that which is to be blessed about him is ready to receive the blessing, which homosexual relationships and acts fundamentally are not, since they are inherently sinful and constitute a grave violation of natural law: *"... when a blessing is invoked on certain human relationships by a special liturgical rite, it is necessary that what is blessed corresponds with God's designs written in creation and fully revealed by Christ the Lord. For this reason, since the Church has always considered only those sexual relations that are lived out within marriage to be morally licit, the Church does not have the power to confer its liturgical blessing when that would somehow offer a form of moral legitimacy to a union that presumes to be a marriage or to an extra-marital sexual practice."* (No.11) Thus, it is still impossible to bless a homosexual or pseudo-romantic relationship or a relationship in adultery. People, objects, or acts of created things are blessed and are thereby placed in reference to God. The blessings proposed here by the Dicastery of Faith are invocative, that is, they are intended to awaken temporal blessings, protection, prosperity, and present graces. Thereby, they are also dependent on the pious disposition of both the giver and the recipient. The thing to be blessed must be capable of being blessed, that is, of being graced, of being able to flourish. This is something that inherently bad acts cannot do, since every sinful act means a loss of God's sanctifying grace. The recipient must also be piously disposed, and so pious, morally good efforts are the condition for the blessing to have an effect, which is impossible when the object of the blessing is an inherently bad act. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith supports all of this in this letter, and it clearly emphasizes the difference to the sacrament of marriage and the blessings associated with it.

The type of blessing that the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith now authorized is a novelty in church history. On the grounds that it is allegedly necessary in pastoral practice to bless outside the liturgy and outside the rubrical rules, it introduces the

possibility of blessing “irregular” situations. However, there are still no official guidelines for this that would correspond to the liturgical rules of the Church. The form must be clearly defined, i.e., the blessing formula, which must express what the blessing is intended to achieve, as well as the matter, which usually consists of the sign of the cross or the laying on of hands. Both of these are still undefined. The disposition of the recipient, who in this situation requests the blessing for the precisely declared object, is also not yet specified. All of this appears completely undefined and vaguely formulated in the Roman document, and this opens the door to abuse and can be misinterpreted as legitimizing the blessing of sin or sinful acts. There is only the repeated call not to cause confusion or scandal. This lack of liturgical form represents a kind of de-legitimization and liberalization of blessings and can lead to the above-mentioned requirements for blessings not being observed and thus the blessing ultimately becoming ineffective. For this reason, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith classifies these blessings in the category of popular piety. The question of the effects of such blessings is therefore only explained in the popular pious sense, in terms of positive emotions or the stimulation of religious experiences. There is hardly any mention, however, of the habitual and temporal graces or indulgences that sacramentals and blessings can impart. This is a noticeable distancing from the clear dogmatic and rubrical definitions that characterize many liturgy books. The blessings thus become purely devotional exercises.

In no. 31, the document presents the motivation and effect of the blessing and emphasizes that it is about invoking God and entrusting God in an “irregular” situation so that a better understanding of God's loving plan can arise in the recipient. Above all, what is true and good about the relationship and points to God and his plan should be blessed. This is not objectionable at first glance. *“The Church, moreover, must shy away from resting its pastoral praxis on the fixed nature of certain doctrinal or disciplinary schemes, especially when they lead to “a narcissistic and authoritarian elitism, whereby instead of evangelizing, one analyzes and classifies others, and instead of opening the door to grace, one exhausts his or her energies in inspecting and verifying.”* (no. 25) This is to be seen very critically, since dogmatic and rubrical conditions are there to ensure that

grace can be communicated in the name of the Church. The purpose of the rules is to make access easier. Devotional exercises are always to be recommended for every Catholic, but blessings through the Church with the authority reserved for her give much better access to God. Thus, it should be clearly emphasized that it is this good motivation and intention to live as good Christians that is to be blessed, and in not any sinful state. If a couple wants to be blessed, the good should be blessed; the request for the grace of conversion is essential here.

This document raises the question of whether it is not part of Rome's policy of appeasement towards liberal dioceses and associations, such as the German synodal committee, without touching fundamental pillars of Catholic moral theology. Blessings are introduced that are completely undefined and free and can therefore be used for anything and in any moral situation in the future. The danger of misusing this document to bless the sinful relationships of homosexual and divorced couples in "irregular" situations is present in any case. The undefined, extra-liturgical form that this is to take also harbors dangers, in that the celebrations can be organized in the form of marriage ceremonies, as is already the practice in some Belgian dioceses. The document and its optimism can, in the right context, possibly be seen as the introduction of another treasure of popular piety, intended to help people to come out of sinful, desperate situations and to be reunited with God through confession and penance. The vagueness and textual, creative, and situational openness make this reading possible in any case. Unfortunately, there is hardly any reason for the public and the people of God to read this overloaded, convoluted, and definitely misleading text in the continuity of the doctrinal tradition. Many are left with the impression that the Church no longer considers homosexual relationships and other "irregular" situations to be immoral and now blesses them. That would be the worst possible reading. Clear answers to the *dubia* would have been necessary here in order to avoid creating even more confusion than already exists. It is foreseeable that further implementing provisions would be needed in order to follow the morally correct and pastorally beneficial path of the present document and to avoid the abuse that causes people to remain separated from God in their sin. Unfortunately, the text itself already announces that answers to further

questions about the concrete implementation are not to be expected. Let us hope for the best and remain united in prayer.

Maria 1.0 is an initiative of Catholics, especially young women, who live the one universal faith of the Church in different spiritualities. The initiative sees itself as a mouthpiece for all those Catholics who profess the beauty and truth of the Catholic faith as formulated by the Church's Magisterium and wants to make this faith known through the media.