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Letter on *Fiducia Supplicans*

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Friday of the Third Week of Advent

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We have received a number of inquiries from the faithful concerning *Fiducia Supplicans*, a Vatican document published Monday on the topic of blessings. It specifically discusses the offering of a blessing by a priest to persons living in situations of unrepentant serious sin, such as same-sex sexual relationships, fornication, or adultery.

Blessings can have a liturgical or ritual expression (e.g., the blessing of the sick or the blessing of an altar), while others remain less formal (e.g., the prayer before meals or a parent's blessing of their children at bedtime). Blessings can be used to seek God's protection against evil, to set things aside for the worship of God (e.g., the blessing of a chalice), or to ask God's favor or mercy. *Fiducia Supplicans* describes the latter in the mode of the less formal expression of blessing.

Yet controversy has followed publication of this document, as some have hailed a supposed novel change in the Church's perennial teaching on sexuality, or praised it as a "step" towards such a change. These pronouncements, even celebrations, of a particular interpretation have been heard both within and outside the Church. It is important to understand that the document itself makes explicit that the Church's teaching on marriage and human sexuality is unchanged. Nor can it change. The teaching office of bishops and the Holy Father is at the service of, and has no authority over, the Deposit of Faith as found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition.

Our faith, received from God himself, holds that sexual activity is proper only to marriage between one man and one woman, and is ordered towards the deeper union of the spouses and the procreation and education of children (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, nn. 2360-2372). This is part of God's beautiful design for the human person! The call to conversion in Christ is a call to joyfully embrace the truth of the moral law. "If you abide in my word, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). The moral law is the pathway to freedom and happiness.

Some have further expressed concern that, as a practical matter, *Fiducia Supplicans* will have the impact of normalizing serious sin. Indeed it is troubling that some, even in the Church, may seek to use it for this purpose. Any misappropriation of the teaching office of the Church in a way that normalizes sin contributes to leading people further from Jesus' loving heart rather than closer to it, and must be repudiated. Thus we must have a clear understanding of what the Church teaches, even while the virtue of prudence helps us to know when and how to admonish sin in practice. There should be no ambiguity as regards this truth: the ministers of the Church have no power to bless sin. To do so

would be a perversion of the very purpose of a blessing. Any person or persons willfully choosing to act contrary to the teachings of the Deposit of Faith may receive a blessing asking God for the grace of conversion to live in full accord with his revealed truths in Scripture and Tradition. Any sort of blessing that would give the semblance of condoning sin is not to be granted.

When one receives a blessing with faith and good will, those parts of the heart, mind, and spirit that are burdened by sin are opened to a new experience of God's unconditional love, which is necessary for a sincere and fruitful repentance from sin. Repentance in turn opens the person to the possibility of forgiveness, reconciliation, healing, new life, and flourishing, which God desires for every person. In this way, persons desiring prayers of blessing are met with the generosity of the Church as a loving mother, who seeks to draw all souls to the nearness of the Father. It is our desire that all souls find ready aid on the path of salvation.

As we approach the great Feast of Christmas, may we recall the words of the angel of the Lord to the shepherds of Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to people of good will!" (Luke 2:14). With these words, the angel announced the birth of the Messiah, Jesus, who came to free his people from their sins and give them his peace. As Jesus himself would say on the day of his Resurrection, "Peace be with you" (John 20:19). Let us turn to the Lord and seek his peace in these days by living in the fullness of his revealed truths in the Deposit of Faith.



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