



From the Office of the Bishop

Statement from the Office of the Bishop to the Clergy and People of the Diocese of Erie Regarding the Declaration *Fiducia Supplicans*

December 22, 2023

The Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith recently released the document *Fiducia Supplicans* (FS). This document does not change the Church's longstanding teaching on marriage or the nature of priestly blessings. It does, however, remind us that certain of the Church's blessings are available to everyone – regardless of their state in life. Appropriate blessings should not be withheld from persons who request them – even if those persons are not in a state of grace or are living in a relationship the Church does not condone.

The document clearly reaffirms the Church's teaching that marriage is defined as an "exclusive, stable, indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children (FS4).

Fiducia Supplicans (FS) generally identifies three types of blessings in our Catholic tradition: a Sacramental blessing (such as the nuptial blessing in marriage), a liturgical blessing (such as rituals for specific occasions found in the Church's Book of Blessings), and the spontaneous blessing given by a priest to a person who requests it. It is this third kind of blessing that the document addresses.

Sacramental and liturgical blessings often have certain requirements. For example, blessings as part of the rituals for confirmation, marriage, and holy orders require recipients to be a certain age, a certain state in life, and have proper moral and intellectual preparation. Most liturgical blessings are for specific occasions.

Spontaneous priestly blessings, however, require only that the recipient be a son or daughter of our heavenly Father. When asked for such a blessing, a priest does not inquire about the person's state in life, marital situation, or other details. The priest simply bestows the blessing — communicating God's grace to the person in need. Such grace helps each person to overcome vice and weakness and to grow in virtue and holiness. The priest blesses the **person**, not the person's state in life or current moral condition. Priests are not to withhold such blessings even if the blessing is requested by persons in invalid marriages or same-sex unions, or other irregular relationships, presuming that scandal and confusion are avoided (see FS 39).

In summary:

- *FS* clearly reaffirms the Church's teaching that marriage is defined as an "exclusive, stable, indissoluble union between a man and a woman, naturally open to the generation of children (*FS* 4).
- These spontaneous blessings are given only by priests.
- Deacons may bestow Sacramental and liturgical blessings as prescribed by law (canon 1169). Deacons may pray with persons in irregular life situations, but they may not impart blessings as described by *FS*.
- These blessings are to be simple, brief, and generally private. They are not to be composed or follow any ritual.
- These spontaneous blessings may be bestowed upon persons known to be in irregular situations such as an invalid marriage, same-sex relationships, cohabitation, etc. The blessing is bestowed on the person, not the circumstance of the person's life. The words the priest chooses should reflect this fact.
- Priests are to be careful that such blessings be done at times and places such that they run no risk of being interpreted as Sacramental or liturgical. They are not to happen in conjunction with other events (such as a civil wedding or wedding reception) and are not to involve liturgical books, vestments or other symbols of liturgical celebrations.

We are to remember that such spontaneous blessings may be the only way some people are tangibly connected to the Church. These blessings may be the means by which God stirs into action his saving grace in hearts of those in most need of His mercy.

"The Church is thus the sacrament of God's infinite love. Therefore, even when a person's relationship with God is clouded by sin, he or she can always ask for a blessing, stretching out his hand to God, as Peter did in the storm when he cried out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" (Mt. 14:30). Indeed, desiring and receiving a blessing can be the possible good in some situations. Pope Francis reminds us that "a small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties (FS 43)."

The English translation of *Fiducia Supplicans* can be found here:

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dff_doc_20231218_fiducia-supplicans_en.html