

Homily of Father Peter Mitchell  
June 28, 2015 – Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception, Greenville, WI

"To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards out of men." - Abraham Lincoln

My dear parishioners, I had hoped I would not have to give this homily. But as your pastor and shepherd, I must speak today, lest I sin by silence and act in cowardice. This past Friday, June 26, by a 5-4 decision, the US Supreme Court has told us that our entire nation must accept the redefinition of marriage. The decision is being hailed by many as a victory for love. Our President's twitter account acclaimed the decision as victory for freedom with the signature #LoveWins. It is no secret that the Catholic Church opposes this decision, and so it would seem to many in this confused cultural moment that we are now part of a church that is opposed to love, and is in fact a church that proclaims hatred by its teaching. For a long time now our society has been being prepared to celebrate and affirm this decision as a victory for love - the press, the entertainment media, our schools, the medical profession, business associations, the military - every aspect of our society has very aggressively been told that to oppose this decision is to be against the free expression of love. Why would we withhold the right to happiness and love from fellow citizens? Why would we tell others they cannot fulfill themselves in the way they choose to? Everyone is now forced to accept this redefinition by means of judicial rewriting of the law. And - here is the crux of the issue for us as the church - if we will not accept this redefinition, **we are expected to be silent**. And it is in this light that I wish to take President Lincoln's challenging words - "To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards out of men" - and ask how we may respond courageously and joyfully to the present challenging cultural moment.

Let's be clear about what happened on Friday in terms of the big picture of the history of Western Civilization. I've brought a few books along for dramatic effect. Let's see... Socrates...out the window. Plato...out the window. Aristotle...out the window. Roman law...out the window. Notice we haven't gotten to Christian sources of law and culture yet. The Old Testament - Genesis 19, out the window. The New Testament - Romans 1 - read it, it is so clear! "While claiming to be wise they became fools...God handed them over to their undiscerning mind to do what is improper" - out the window. St. Augustine, out the window. Thomas Aquinas, out the window. The entire legal precedent of the United States up to 2003, out the window. The implication of course is that all of these sources of our law had a blind spot of prejudice when it came to the definition of marriage. All of these wise men were unenlightened, and it is only as of June 26, 2015, that we can say that we truly live in a free and loving society. Hence the hashtag, #LoveWins.

What was the reason for all of these foundational sources of our culture condemning the behavior associated with the redefinition of marriage, for calling such behavior a sin and a crime? Let's say this very simply - with great wisdom, **they understood that such behavior is destructive**. It is destructive of the human body because it goes against human nature - it causes disease and death, and no less importantly it is destructive of the human soul. It leads to depression, anxiety, loneliness, mental illness, and even suicide. It is destructive of families and of children's happiness. This was the established consensus of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), until 1973, when it removed such behavior from its lists of mental disorders in a change that had absolutely no scientific or medical basis but was pushed through by pressure from a small group of activists.

Now, however, we are told that the entire society must legally accept the redefinition of marriage and thus affirm the rationalization that what is bad and destructive is actually good and fulfilling. My dear people, let's say this simply and clearly - **to call what is bad good is a lie**. And the redefinition of marriage into something other than a permanent covenant between a man a woman for the purpose of raising a family is a lie. Why would we be opposed to Friday's decision? The simple answer is- because it is based on a lie.

If someone would ask us, "Why is it a lie?" we need to be able to connect the dots as to how we got here. There is a very simple thread of logic running through the Supreme Court's decisions since 1966 concerning, first contraception, then abortion, and finally the redefinition of marriage. All three issues are intertwined, and ultimately to embrace one as a right is to embrace the others. We need to be able to understand that logic so as to refute it. First, in 1961 Planned Parenthood sued the State of Connecticut for the right to distribute contraceptives, which was at that time against the law. In 1966 in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the US Supreme Court defined the right to contracept as part of the "right to privacy" it claimed to find in the Constitution. This decision was then invoked in the decision with which we are all familiar, *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, which legalized the right to abortion as part of the "right to privacy." It made logical sense. If children intrude upon our right to privacy, we need to have a way to eliminate them. To fully embrace the use of contraceptives, many of which

act as abortifacients by killing the developing embryo in the mother's womb, is to affirm abortion, which is the ultimate act of contraception. The Church's beautiful teaching has always seen this connection and proclaimed it, even as our culture has scoffed. This brings us to 2015. Friday's decision was entirely consistent with the precedent of *Griswold* and *Roe*. If we as a culture have sterilized married love by legalizing contraception and abortion, it is logically consistent that we would redefine marriage so that it no longer has any necessary connection with procreation, based on the "right to privacy." A culture where everyone is contracepting and in which anyone can get an abortion, must, to be consistent, redefine marriage. Our Supreme Court acted consistently on Friday. It invoked its own language defending the right to abortion: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life" (*Planned Parenthood v Casey*, 1992). Justice Kennedy's opening sentence in Friday's decision reaffirms this definition of liberty: "Liberty includes the right to define and express one's own identity." This is the heart of the lie. But there can be no freedom divorced from the truth of God's law, which is also the law of human nature. In ignoring the natural law, our Supreme Court has proclaimed that we must all accept a lie.

What is to be our response as disciples of Jesus Christ to the lie? It is the same joyful witness that we always give: living lives of poverty, chastity, and obedience and mercifully inviting others, with us, to heed the first words of Jesus in the Gospel, "Reform your lives, and believe in the Gospel!" (Mark 1:15). Our witness needs to be joyful and compassionate, convicted and committed. No less than we are convicted that we would never let our little ones play with matches, because they are potentially destructive, so we must be convinced that the redefinition of marriage is destructive to individual people and to our entire society. If we are so convinced, we will joyfully invite others as fellow sinners to turn to the Merciful Jesus and know his healing grace as the woman with the hemorrhage did in today's Gospel.

We can turn more than ever to the intercession of some of the great martyrs of our faith who were called on to witness to the truth of God's law in the face of legal redefinition of the truth. I am thinking of the joyful witness of St. Thomas More and the Martyrs of England in the 1500's. When King Henry VIII wished to deny the truth of his marriage, he ordered Parliament to pass the Act of Supremacy, which proclaimed Henry head of the Church and thus able to redefine marriage. The vast majority of bishops in England acquiesced to Henry's demand. The law was changed and persecution followed for those who did not remain silent. The courageous martyrs of that storied moment in English history are interceding for us. They stood firm as they were accused of hating their King and hating their country. St. Edmund Campion's powerful words ring clear - at his sentencing to execution, he said simply, "In condemning us, you condemn all of your own ancestors, all that was once the glory of England." The present redefinition of marriage has indeed condemned all the great figures in American history as having been fundamentally opposed to freedom and rights in their understanding of marriage as a God-given gift between a man and a woman.

I am thinking of the joyful witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the martyrs of the Third Reich. All of the reforms of the 1930's were accomplished legally as the German nation was told to embrace a lie about the human person - that the Jews were not truly persons. As long as people were silent, the lie had room to grow. Anyone who loved Germany was expected to support the Fuhrer. The law was changed and persecution followed for those who did not remain silent. Those who spoke out paid the ultimate price. Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor who dared to speak out in protest and to resist, wrote before his execution, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

I am thinking, lastly, and perhaps most powerfully, of the courageous witness of John the Baptist, whose birth the Church just celebrated this past week. Face to face with King Herod, who had redefined marriage by taking his brother's wife to be his own wife, John spoke the truth about marriage: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife" (Mark 6:18). John chose not to remain silent, and persecution followed. Because he spoke the truth about marriage, John was beheaded.

"To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards out of men." My dear people, all we have to do today is to remain silent in the face of the lie and we will be able to remain comfortable. May this comfortable silence never be our response. In the words of the great Russian dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "Let the lie come into the world, let it even triumph. But not through me." The Church in America in 2015 needs to call upon the intercession of all of these holy martyrs, asking them to obtain for our bishops and priests and for all of us the courage to bear witness to the truth about marriage.

So many are confused and hurting in their search for love today - they are searching for Christ without even knowing it. It falls to us at this moment to show forth Jesus by our witness of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

This witness will mean having the courage to face whatever persecution, large and small, will come to us as a result of our refusal to remain silent. It will mean enduring accusations that we are opposed to love and hateful of those who celebrate and promote the redefinition of marriage. Let's be confident that the Holy Spirit is with us and is raising up a great generation of witnesses - joyful, loving, compassionate, merciful, courageous witnesses. I am confident that I am looking at those witnesses as I preach to you today.

Saint John the Baptist, pray for us.

St. Thomas More, Edmund Campion, and the martyrs of England, pray for us.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the martyrs of the Third Reich, pray for us. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit!

Father Peter Mitchell