

BULLETIN -- AUGUST 9, 2015

What do you do? Practical advice. The question pops up more and more, in confession, in pastoral consultation, in casual conversation: “Father, my grandson (or other closer or more distant relative, friend, neighbor, co-worker) has announced that he and his partner (of whatever sex) are getting married. I am invited to attend. He was brought up Catholic and should know better, but they’re not getting married in a Catholic church. Can I attend? *Should* I? I don’t feel right about it, but I don’t want to cause division in the family or lose a friendship.” This question can be adapted to whatever circumstances are pertinent. This is just a suggestion, but how about answering with a note like this:

“Dear (nephew, etc.), Thanks so much for the blessing of your kind invitation. I hope to greet you and (name of partner) at the reception. As part of my gift to you, as you are at the (park, courthouse, non-Catholic church, etc.), I will be spending an hour in church praying before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament with great love for both of you. I rejoice with you that God has allowed you to find joy in friendship and companionship, and I’ll pray that he will continue to lead you to be ever more generous in opening your hearts to him, his call to holiness, and to the service of all of our sisters and brothers. In his love,

A few notes about the note. The invitation *is* a blessing, for you and for them. It gives you the opportunity to do some gentle evangelization, and gives them an opportunity to receive some of the Good News of the Lord in a kindly way.

The reception? It’s a social event (as, in our eyes, is any “ceremony” which they have gone through). Your presence at the reception is simply wishing them both well, according to your interpretation of what that means. As a Christian, you should be wishing them the happiness of eternal life, and it’s rather difficult to do that in any meaningful way if you’ve cut off all communication and refused contact. Our inability to recognize the validity of their “wedding” need not result in a lack of friendliness and graciousness.

“As part of my gift to you . . .” “Father, do you mean it’s all right to give them another gift of some kind on this occasion?” You know what? I know people who give gifts to a sinner ALL THE TIME!! You know who they are? The people who send gifts to ME!! And I’ve never had any of them demand perfect virtue as a condition of my accepting their gift. (Believe me, I’d be flat broke!) And you know what else? I also GIVE gifts to sinners!! And who knows how they use them, or what they spend them on? I think sometimes we can get so bound up in worrying about whether we’re being misinterpreted that we do nothing to interpret! Heed St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 12:17-18: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.”

Your holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament will do them infinitely more good than your presence ever would. The fact that you are not at their “ceremony” speaks for itself, and need not be mentioned again. If they or other family members wish to read your presence at the reception as approval, let’s face it, people can misread our motives into all kinds of things. This won’t be the first nor the last time, and we have no control

over what others choose to think. If you are asked about this, by those who have invited you or by other relatives or friends, you can just say that you are a member of God's priestly people, that praying for others is what you are called to do and what you do best, and that it's far more important than your mere presence. You can add that you are sure that they considered what they were doing to be very important, and you believe in praying for things that are important for the people you love.

"God has allowed you to find joy in friendship and companionship." Is there any genuine good, holy marriage in which the partners have never sinned in any way? Why should we hold the friendship (and that is what it is) of people who marry outside the Church to a higher moral standard than sacramental marriage? Let me clarify. If people find joy in each other's friendship, that is a good thing. Should it happen that they slide from that into illicit sexual relations (not an uncommon sin among human beings), that is wrong. The companionship can often be a near occasion of sin, and the duty to resist temptation is incumbent upon all of us. But God does not expect us to face our trials alone. He knows our weaknesses, and he pursues us with his grace and forgiveness. Ask God to let your kindness in these circumstances remind others of the goodness of God, as well of his call to genuine, selfless holiness. I have known people who were in heterosexual relationships and in homosexual relationships who acknowledged, "I never could have made it through life without him / her." That joy of companionship extended far beyond the bedroom, and often enough to the deathbed. No relationship is perfect, and our struggle with the immorality of one aspect of our lives doesn't automatically nullify the powerful grace of God at work in us in other ways.

Finally, "I'll pray that he (God) will continue to lead you . . ." is a pledge of ongoing prayer for conversion. The decision to solemnize a union which is at odds with one's upbringing and the teaching of the Church is often, for a Catholic, an expression of excessive narcissism. This needs conversion, and a turning one's attention away from self and toward the needs of others in order to grow in wholeness and holiness. Your prayer can be that what is beginning in a sign contrary to the Scriptures and the teaching of the Church can grow into a means of real holiness for the parties involved, and become instrumental in their salvation. We do our best, and let God do the rest. And remember Jesus' own words: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). Mere condemnation will not save. Whatever you do or say, let it be something that can lead to the joy of salvation and eternal life.

The Assumption holyday, August 15, falls on Saturday this year. While therefore it is not a day of *obligation* in the U.S. as it is in most years, Catholics who recognize the importance of Mary's role in the history of our salvation will take pains to assist at a vigil Mass or at a Mass on Saturday morning. We shall have one of each, Friday evening at 7 p.m. and the usual Saturday morning at 8 a.m., but celebrated with due solemnity as befits the Queen of Heaven and Earth. Times of Masses at area churches appear elsewhere in this bulletin. Have you done anything special to honor the Mother of God lately? God bless you!

Fr. Den

Overheard by a parishioner at work: “Hey, I’m no gossip, but if somebody else screws up, I’ll be the first to admit it.”