What Every Catholic Should Know about Marriage

Ben Fischer, August 2015

Introduction

The topic of marriage and divorce is difficult due to its personal nature. It is almost impossible to comment on a situation without being perceived as commenting on the person in that situation. Emotions run high. So I'd like to start with a disclaimer. I am not presenting myself as a guru, demanding that you follow my words so you can achieve enlightenment as I have. I present myself as a sinner – probably a greater sinner than some of those reading or listening to these words – who's found forgiveness in Jesus' arms and who encourages you to do the same. The morality I present is not mine, it is Jesus' as handed down by the Church. I do not stand in judgement of anyone, God stands in judgement of us all. And if you were to find that I had strayed from the Church's teachings in the past, or that I do so in the future, you will surely know that it's because I am a sinner. And if you find that I pick myself up, seek forgiveness and try again, then you'll know it's because I am confident in God's mercy. It is not my place to worry about how you have fallen or how often you've fallen, it is my place to get you back on your feet so you can follow Jesus to the Kingdom.

With that out of the way, let me begin with some historical background to my subject.

It would be a careless understatement to say that the nature of marriage and sex was a little loose in the Greco-Roman world. Sex with prostitutes or slaves was not considered adultery, and sex between men of all ages was considered normal. The poets and historians of the age document homosexual marriages in which one of the men plays the part of the bride. Marriage was seen primarily as a means of raising the next generation of citizens and provide for an orderly transfer of property through inheritance. Whatever restrictions existed on sexual relations were related to that concept of marriage. It would be more serious for a woman to commit adultery than a man, for instance, because in doing so a woman could bring another man's offspring into a family and cause her husband's property to be inherited by her lover's child. Furthermore, abortion was not considered murder, especially in light of the delicate situation just mentioned. Child abandonment, direct infanticide and so-called "magic potions" to prevent pregnancy were commonplace. Given these attitudes, extramarital relations were commonplace, along with the conflicts that these relations cause, leading to widespread acceptance of divorce.

It is likely that many if not the great majority of the young Roman citizens married for the same reasons we do: the love they share and their desire to express that love in raising children. But it is clear that the Roman Emperors were unconcerned with such issues. The Roman Empire had no incentive to honor the love between two people. Their concern was an orderly society. As long as the laws were obeyed and the taxes were paid, whether a husband and wife love each other was irrelevant.

In the Jewish world, by contrast, marriage was treated very differently. They shared the cultural notion that marriage was the ideal setting to raise the next generation, but they took the definition

further. Marriage was premised on the love that the husband and wife were assumed to share. Offenses against that love, including adultery, specifically, but "harlotry" in a more general sense of sexual license, was considered a great sin. The importance of this to Jewish society was found in Jewish scriptures where marriage was a common metaphor for the relationship between God and His people. God was a loving bridegroom who cared for and provided for His beautiful bride, Israel. And when Israel was unfaithful – when idolatry crept into Jewish life, when the Jews forgot the commandments – then the prophets condemned Israel as a filthy harlot flirting with her neighbors, who she found more attractive than her Spouse, who had given her everything. But even with that image in mind, the Jews were not immune to societal pressure to accept divorce and the process was codified in Deuteronomy.

The Jewish ideas of sex and marriage were incomprehensible to the Greco-Roman culture which surrounded them. As a simple example, Jews described sin as the equivalent of playing the harlot with God. However, in pagan cultures, it was common enough to have prostitutes employed at the pagan temples who were available for more exotic forms of "worship."

When Jesus began His public ministry, He clarified many aspects of Jewish Law. The best-known example of this is the Sermon on the Mount. A typical formulation would be "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes the prohibition against specific actions in the Jewish law and emphasizes what God originally had in mind when the law was given.

Jesus did the same with the question of marriage. "*It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife must give her a bill of divorce.' But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."* Jesus addresses later in an exchange with the Pharisees that while Moses permitted divorce, that was not the original intention. God's laws were not given in their totality all at once, but were gradually revealed over time. The Old Testament instructions on divorce were a step away from the practices of Israel's neighbors and a step towards God's intention for marriage. In the New Testament, Jesus reveals that divorce was not intended to be the norm and the Christian church would henceforth follow Jesus' instruction.

Jesus, speaking to a Jewish audience, only addressed the issues that needed to be updated. The gentiles did not have this baseline, so when speaking to the Greeks and the Romans, the apostles had to include all the rest. Abortion was condemned. Contraception was to be avoided. Sex was to be reserved to a man and woman who were married to each other. St Paul covered these ideas in his letters to the pagan cities of Corinth and Rome because these teachings would have been unknown there. Early church documents such as the Didache enumerate these teachings for the benefit of gentile converts.

In Jesus' day, this teaching was hard. His apostles wondered aloud whether it was possible to remain in marriage at all and whether it would be better to stay unmarried. Some of the apostles who were asking about this were, themselves, married! Today, the situation is no different. If we say that "Jesus taught that marriage is between one man and one woman for life and what God has joined together, let no man separate", we will find that every word of that sentence is disputed.

Modern society will dispute that Jesus said it, and even if He did then they will dispute that it's relevant. Society will dispute whether marriage is reserved to one man and one woman. Society will dispute whether marriage can come to an end. Society will dispute whether God has anything to do with marriage. Finally, society will dispute the distinction implied by the words "man" and "woman".

So what are we to say about marriages that don't fit this definition? Many people have been divorced, for instance. In short, people sin. Jesus came to save sinners. Jesus died for His executioners just as much as He died for His followers weeping at the foot of the cross. He certainly is not going to draw the line at people in non-traditional marriages. Far from condemning sinners as wicked, the Church was established to bring sinners to eternal life. Oscar Wilde, whose lifestyle is appropriate for this topic and who was also a Catholic convert, once contrasted the Catholic Church with the established church of his native England: "The Catholic Church is for saints and sinners alone. For respectable people the Anglican Church will do." The Church brings us from sinner to saint. Not by denying sin and not by making sin respectable. But by destroying the power of sin and healing sinners with God's grace.

The concept of forgiveness is perhaps the most alien today of all the Church's teachings. The idea that a good person can do bad things, is hotly contested. In the culture today, good things are done by good people and bad things are done by bad people and there is little overlap between the two. The essence of Christian life, on the other hand, is acknowledging sin and repenting of sin and, resolving to sin no more. Jesus doesn't expect perfection, He expects faithfulness and a contrite heart. He said Himself that there is more rejoicing in Heaven when one sinner repents than there is over ninety-nine people who never sinned.

This leads to an important distinction with regards to homosexuality. Same-sex attraction is not sinful in and of itself, just as opposite-sex attraction is not sinful in and of itself. Jesus does not say so. But, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, entertaining lust is sinful and acting on that lust is sinful, regardless of what or who our lusts are directed towards.

Many people have difficult marital situations that need to be resolved before they can enter the Church. It's frustrating and perhaps embarrassing. It can be a great cross. Just as Simon Cyrene helped Jesus carry His cross, the Church, both in the universal sense and in the sense of the local parish, can't remove this cross from you, but it can help you and walk with you so you don't feel alone.

Since the Church's definition of marriage is questioned from different points of view, I have separated this into three sections. Each is organized with common objections and answers to those objections.

Divorce and Remarriage

Objection 1: The grass isn't greener argument.

The objection runs something like this: The Church's objection to divorce is simply old-fashioned prudishness. The world isn't like "Leave it to Beaver" and "Ozzie and Harriet" and it never was.

That idyllic scene of a working dad, a stay-at-home-mom, a perfect house, and 2.3 children was concocted by Madison Avenue and never bore any resemblance to reality. The Catholics need to take off their rose-colored glasses and see things the way they really are.

Response

The Catholic Church's position on divorce and remarriage pre-dates the 1950's and no-fault divorce laws in the West. The Church's teaching on marriage is not based on how things were in some far-away time and place, it's based on the words of Jesus Himself, as depicted in Matthew 19:

> Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate."
> They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery."

The apostles themselves were skeptical and thought that Jesus should take off HIS rose-colored glasses.

> His disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept this word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

A key aspect of this passage is Jesus insistence that the spouses become "one flesh". This may be partly a euphemism for sex, but mainly it seems to be a simple statement that in entering into marriage, the couple become something new. In Jesus' words "they are no longer separate, but one flesh", they are a new person, a single unit of society. They have cooperated with God to be joined together in this way. Therefore, their continued unity is not dependent on their consent, but on God's creative will. As a new creation, they are no more inseparable than one part of your body is from another. That is, they can be separated but only by great injury or trauma, and the separated part is still your body: it contains your DNA and is identifiably yours.

Objection 2: The Annulment vs Divorce Argument

The objection runs something like this: Catholics say that marriage is for life and they don't recognize divorce, but they have this thing called an "annulment" which is basically the same thing as a divorce. Both get rid of a former marriage, so Catholics don't really believe that "marriage for life" stuff.

Response

Jesus' words on marriage seem to admit the possibility that what may look like a marriage to society is not, actually a true marriage. The relevant passage is "*But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) causes her to commit adultery."* The Church has studied this and other passages and developed an understanding of the true nature of marriage.

The Church views marriage as a sacrament. The classic definition of a sacrament is "an outward sign of an inward grace that affects what it signifies." What that means in this case is that God has joined the couple together and their marriage is a visible sign of that deeper union. Sacraments are covered in much greater detail in future classes, but for the purposes of this discussion I'll make a short point. Beyond the classic definition, a sacrament requires the proper form, the proper matter and the proper intention. If those elements are not present, then the sacrament does not take place. Specifically to marriage, the couple must pledge themselves with the proper wedding vows (the "form"), they must be free to marry and not under any coercion, emotional or mental defect (the "matter") and they must have the proper intent.

Marriage must be entered in with free will, for the life of the spouses, open to the production of new life, with the commitment to raise any children in the faith. In a broad sense we would say that marriage is a covenant, not a contract. The difference between those two is that a covenant is universal in scope and universal in duration. A covenant encompasses every aspect of your life. The spouses give their entire selves to each other, including their physical goods, physical selves including their fertility, moral support and emotional support. Marriage not only unites the two sexes, it unites generations. When entering into a marriage, each spouse accepts a familial relationship with the others' family and they are open to the procreation and raising of the next generation.

If these criteria are not met at the time of the wedding, then the Church can rule that no actual marriage was contracted. If one or both spouse didn't intend to enter into such a covenant, then the intention was not there, for example. In that case, the spouse in question would be free to marry for the first time, because although he or she lived as if married, there in fact was not a valid marriage at all. The church can find that the first marriage was "null and void", colloquially called "an annulment."

A question occasionally arises: what about the children that came from an annulled marriage? Were the children born out of wedlock? Are they illegitimate? These are categories that the Church does not recognize. Every child is a gift from God and must be valued as such. The question of "legitimacy" is a legal matter and not something the Church rules on or certifies. Perhaps in feudal Europe, the Church had a role in establishing legitimacy due to the intermingled status of Church and State in those days. But today, and certainly in this culture, categories such as "legitimate" or "illegitimate" simply do not exist within the Church's law or doctrine.

Objection 3: The Compassion Argument

The objection runs something like this: Isn't it cold-hearted to force people to stay in a loveless, unhappy or even dangerous marriage? Wouldn't it be better for society if people can get out of a marriage that isn't working out rather than make them suffer in a bad situation?

Response

St Paul dealt with this question in 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 "*To the married, however, I give this instruction (not I, but the Lord): A wife should not separate from her husband —and if she does separate she must either remain single or become reconciled to her husband—and a husband should not divorce his wife."* Justice requires that we alleviate our neighbor's sufferings.

Separation of spouses may be necessary for the good of the couple and the good of the children. In some cases, divorce may be necessary as well. This is certainly an unfortunate situation. However, the scriptures do not admit remarriage in this case. The Church, however, is called to help those people. Certainly, it may be appropriate to seek a declaration that the first marriage was null and void (an "annulment") but that is not the only avenue of support. Single parents have particular pressures on their time and money and Christians should find ways of helping. That may not happen as much as it should in today's society, but that is the standard that's laid down in the Bible.

The compassion argument takes particular urgency in the question of an innocent spouse. For instance, if a woman's husband abandons her for another woman, why should she suffer the aggravation of an annulment process because of the sins of her husband? If someone is the cause of the divorce, then perhaps it's appropriate that they go through a penitential process, but what about the innocent victim?

These situations, and others like them are heart-wrenching. The sense of betrayal is profound in these cases. But the image that the Church has about marriage does not admit anything like an "automatic annulment" in that case, however. The nuptial image by which the Church understands marriage is the relationship between God and His people. Namely God is faithful *even when we are not*. Again, it may be necessary to separate for the good of the spouses, but if a valid covenantal marriage was entered into, then it still exists even when one spouse abandons the other. We, as member of the Body of Christ, are called to help these people through their grief and anger. Their struggles are real and difficult.

Objection 4: The Not-my-problem Argument

The argument goes something like this: Catholics may think that marriage is between one man and one woman for life, but I'm not Catholic so that's not my problem. If I got divorced, when my church said it's OK to get divorced, how can Catholics say otherwise?

Response

The Catholic Church believes that marriage is between a man and a woman for life, when entered into with the proper intent. If someone entered into a marriage in that form then the Church accepts it. But not all arrangements that society enters into fit that definition. If someone gets married, gets divorced and gets remarried, the Church accepts the first marriage because without evidence to the contrary, the Church has to assume that the first marriage was entered into with the proper intent. Divorce is not evidence that the first marriage was invalid.

But it is possible, that the original marriage was not entered into with the proper intent. The Church can't assume that. To do so would be rude and elitist ("Only our marriages are real marriages!"). So an investigation into the validity of the original marriage is appropriate.

Gay Marriage

Objection 1: The Church and God hate gay people.

The objection runs something like this: The Church says that God is all powerful and that He created everything. But that means he created people with same sex attraction. But the Church won't let them get married which causes pain and humiliation if they are in a committed relationship. So either the Church is wrong about God, or the Church is wrong about what God wants, or both the Church and God have a spiteful hatred towards gay people.

Response

God loves everyone more than we love ourselves or each other. The depth of God's love is beautifully described in Isaiah 49: *Can a mother forsake the child at her breast, that she would have no compassion for the son of her womb? Yet even if she should forget [God] will never forget you.* The fact that people have same-sex attraction is entirely irrelevant to the question of God's love. God wants them to be happy, to grow in holiness, to love Him and serve Him on earth so that they may share eternal life with Him. The fact that they are drawn to behavior that is defined as sinful in the scriptures and Church tradition simply makes them human. Everyone is drawn to sinful behavior because of our fallen natures. Everyone is called to avoid sinful behavior. And everyone is offered forgiveness when they fail. God's grace in the sacraments will enable us to live a holy life, but all of us, gay or straight, are called to seek and receive God's grace so that we may have the strength necessary to avoid temptation.

Objection 2: The shellfish argument.

The objection runs something like this: Lots of things are forbidden in the Bible. For instance, eating shellfish is forbidden as is wearing cloth with multiple fabrics. If those passages don't apply to us today, why should the passages that condemn homosexual behavior?

Response

The Old Testament contains an exhaustive list of laws that the Israelites were expected to follow. Specifically the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy are full of rules and regulations that don't make a whole lot of sense today. Regulations related to diet and fashion were distinctive to the Israelites and marked them apart from their neighbors. Furthermore, these laws still serve as a distinctive mark of Jews today. Many Jews still follow these directives to the letter.

In the early days of the Church, as recounted in the book of Acts and the letters written by Saint Paul, there was debate about whether the gentile converts were required to follow the Jewish law. Jesus was a Jew and Christianity in its early days was essentially a Jewish sect and the connection between the followers of Jesus and the Jewish religion was sometimes unclear. There was a question as to whether Gentile converts obligated to follow the Jewish laws. Chapter 15 of the Book of Acts chronicles the Council of Jerusalem where this subject was discussed. In the end a message was sent to all the believers that read in part. "*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from*

food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. (Acts 15:28-29)"

The passage above highlights an important distinction between moral law and social discipline. If a person worships an idol, that's clearly different from eating pork. Jesus Himself dispensed with some of the disciplines that the Jewish establishment had developed over the years, most famously with regard to the sabbath but Jesus was stricter than the Jewish moral law when it came to sexual purity and charity towards one's neighbor.

Furthermore, Saint Paul himself condemns homosexual activity along with other sins in the first chapter of the letter to the Romans.

> Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. ... For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (this passage is Romans 1:22-26, fuller context is Romans 1:18-32)

Objection 3: My Marriage doesn't affect your marriage

The objection runs something like this: We don't agree about marriage. But we're supposed to be a free people and value equality. I'm not telling you that you can't get married so it's not fair that you can tell me that I can't get married.

Reply

The United States is a republic, with representatives democratically elected by the people. Christians, as members of society, have the same obligation to promote their cultural values as everyone else. Christianity is a mixture of personal and social piety. Put simply, we all have our own souls to save, but we're supposed to bring others with us.

To look again at Saint Paul's Letter the Romans, he is clearly concerned with the personal behavior of the people he's talking about. However, Paul's objection is not only that the people are prone to vice but that society accepted and celebrated these vices. "*They know God's decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them. (Romans 1:32)*"

The Catholic Church does not have the right to impose its standards on society as a whole. As was demonstrated by the recent Supreme Court decision, society can and will make decisions that conflict with the teachings of the Church and there's nothing the Church can do about it after the fact. But in a open society, the Church retains the right to advocate for its position, on the basis that we in the Church believe this is the most effective way for society to prosper. Furthermore, if the Church cannot impose its standards on society at large, then society at large surely shouldn't be imposing its standards on the Church. Religious liberty will be a problem not only for Catholics but Evangelicals, Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Jews and Muslims.

Objection 4: It's OK now because Pope Francis said "Who am I to judge?" when asked about gays.

The objection runs something like this: The Church has made some statements in the past that would rule out gay marriage, but it's a new day. Pope Francis is getting the Church up to date and has stated on more than one occasion that he doesn't wish to judge gays and, in fact, wishes that people in the Church would stop obsessing over "small minded rules".

Reply.

Pope Francis has been wildly misrepresented on this point. To the famous "who am I to judge?" statement, Pope Francis was specifically asked about a specific person who had previously been in a homosexual relationship. The Pope's response was.

> But sins, if a person, or secular priest or a nun, has committed a sin and then that person experienced conversion, the Lord forgives and when the Lord forgives, the Lord forgets and this is very important for our lives. When we go to confession and we truly say "I have sinned in this matter," the Lord forgets and we do not have the right to not forget because we run the risk that the Lord will not forget our sins, eh? This is a danger. This is what is important: a theology of sin. So many times I think of St. Peter: he committed one of the worst sins denying Christ. And with this sin they made him Pope. We must think about fact often.
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> But returning to your question more concretely: in this case [Ricca] I did the required investigation and we found nothing. That is the first question. Then you spoke of the gay lobby. Agh… so much is written about the gay lobby. I have yet to find on a Vatican identity card the word gay. They say there are some gay people here. I think that when we encounter a gay person, we must make the distinction between the fact of a person being gay and the fact of a lobby, because lobbies are not good. They are bad. If a person is gay and seeks the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge that person? The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this point beautifully but says, wait a moment, how does it say, it says, these persons must never be marginalized and "they must be integrated into society."
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> The problem is not that one has this tendency; no, we must be brothers, this is the first matter. There is another problem, another one: the problem is to form a lobby of those who have this tendency, a lobby of the greedy people, a lobby of politicians, a lobby of Masons, so many lobbies. This is the most serious problem for me.

http://www.ncregister.com/blog/jimmy-akin/7-things-you-need-to-know-about-what-pope-francis-said-about-gays/

Pope Francis starts off discussing a specific case, then veers into hypothetical language. He's expressing the fact that if someone has repented of his sins and experienced conversion and "seeks the Lord and has good will" then Francis will give him another chance.

Another chance to do what? "Mercy" is not another chance to continue in sin, but another chance to avoid sin. Showing mercy to a sinner does not mean that you condone the sin. Mercy is how the sinner is given the opportunity to correct his ways. This is covered a bit more in the last section.

Marriage in General

Objection 1: Why is Marriage different from everything else?

The objection runs something like this: I don't understand why marriage is so critical. If I understand your theology correctly, I could have committed any other sin and still be welcomed into the Church after Confession or Baptism, but since I've been divorced I have to go through all this paperwork! Why is divorce so hated by the Church?

Reply.

Marriage does have an outsized relationship in RCIA. It is not uncommon for people to require extra time to come into the Church because they have to wait for their paperwork. It is true that other situations can be resolved with a simple visit to the Confessional.

Divorce itself, while tragic, is not a barrier to the sacraments. The Church simply does not recognize divorce, so people who are divorced would be understood by the Church to be in the same situation as those who are separated – the marriage still exists but the couple is not living together. The barrier to the sacraments comes about when there is a new conjugal relationship. In this case, there is a problem because of the unique nature of marriage.

Marriage is unique because it represents a continuing situation. It is not that divorce is worse than any other sin. With any other sin, even a habitual sin, it's assumed that you are able to amend your life to not commit the sin again. For instance, if you are tempted to gossip and destroy the reputation of other people when you get together with certain friends, you can avoid getting together with those friends. That is, you may still commit the sin, but if you are committed to trying, with God's grace, to avoid that sin and take whatever steps are necessary to minimize the chances that you will sin again, then forgiveness is available in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Civil remarriage after divorce represents a continuation of a relationship that the Church cannot recognize. In the Church's eyes, the original marriage still exists and but the spouses in the original marriage are living with someone else. In the example above, I mentioned that reconciliation requires that a person amend his life to avoid sin. In this case, that would mean moving out so the temptations towards the "marital embrace" are not present. While they are living in this situation, the Church cannot admit the spouses to the sacraments because they are living in a way that contradicts the Church's view of marriage.

Lifelong Catholics also have to go through this process if they were divorced and entered into another marriage outside the Church (the Church would not officiate a "second marriage" so it would have to be done someplace else). RCIA has unique pressure in that there's a deadline. You want to get all that wrapped up before Easter. Certainly, that adds to an already stressful situation, and the parish and RCIA team and sponsors should be available to help, even if all they can do at a given moment is listen.

Objection 2: Why do Catholics care?

The objection runs something like this: You may not like it if marriage is redefined, but by your own admission, the Church has lived in such a situation in the past and it didn't hurt the Church. In fact, the Church grew rapidly during the times of Roman decadence. So, since you are such a fan of history, how can you complain if the Church finds itself in the same situation today that it found itself in during that turbulent, but prosperous time?

Reply.

One of the major events in the Old Testament is the defeat and subsequent exile of the Judeans by the Babylonians. This was an existential crisis for the Judeans: they'd lost the Temple, lost their homes, they were relocated to a strange land, possibly far away from their family and friends. They had no idea how long the exile would last and if they'd see the end of it. And they had no idea how to behave in Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter to the exiles that started

> This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

Of course the Church does care about its own rights. We've all heard stories of bakers and photographers sued because they wouldn't participate in a gay marriage. The Church obviously wants to avoid that fate, or to be branded "bigots" or "haters" by society. But the numerous appeals for religious liberty is motivated primarily so the Church can do it's job. We "seek peace and prosperity" and "Pray to the Lord" for our nation. We seek a virtuous society, not only for our own sake, but for the sake of our neighbors. Marriage is the bedrock of society and pre-dates society and marriage has been under attack for a long time. The Church recognizes the damage done to marriage in recent decades and recognizes the subsequent damage done to society. To weaken marriage further will surely damage society further.

The legality of an act has some effect on the perceived morality of the act, and the effect of leading others astray is something very serious. This portion is taken directly from the third part of a five-part series by Dan McLaughlin at TheFederalist.com. His series was specifically aimed at the gay marriage question but this portion applies to marriage in general.

http://thefederalist.com/2015/06/10/can-gays-and-christians-coexist-in-america-part-iii/

> ...The more serious argument among people who are more versed in Christianity is not what is right or wrong as a matter of scripture or doctrine but that Christians need less judging and more mercy and humanity towards gay people. We are told to follow the example of Jesus' injunction that he who is without sin should cast the first stone.
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> As a general rule for living the Gospels, this is indeed worthy advice, and conservative Christians have too often failed to heed it in dealing with gay men and lesbians. A spirit of toleration and Christian charity goes a long way to encouraging others to follow the Golden Rule, and even if they don't, it

remains our duty as Christians. “Hate the sin, love the sinner” is technically correct theology, but as a practical creed, it’s got the order backwards.

But there is a critical distinction between sin and what the Catholic Church calls scandal. It is a distinction that, again, comes directly from the Gospels, straight from the mouth of Jesus Christ. Without it, you can understand neither the traditional Christian dichotomy between the sinner and the sin nor the reason why same-sex marriage and other LGBT-rights controversies create direct threats to Christian conscience. Christians who are otherwise inclined to “live and let live” are increasingly faced with demands that they provide positive celebration and endorsement for sin. That violates the duty to avoid scandal.

To sin, to break God’s moral commands, is human. It is central to all Christian thinking, to the very purpose of the incarnation and the crucifixion, to recognize that every one of us is a sinner. No Christian can refuse to associate with sinners. Jesus made a point of doing so, and when the Pharisees questioned him for hanging out with prostitutes and tax collectors, he responded (at Mark 2:17): “Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

In a similar vein, his injunction when forgiving the adulterous woman, “let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,” was deliberately aimed at reminding the crowd that they were all sinners as much in need of his forgiveness as she was (John 8:3-11). Just as crucially, that story also ends with Jesus telling the woman to go and not commit this sin again. He pointedly gives her forgiveness and mercy, but not justification for her actions. His mercy separates her from her sin, rather than encouraging her to embrace it.

Scandal evokes the opposite reaction. Jesus says, at Matthew 18:6-7: “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come!” (see also Luke 17:1).

As the Catholic Catechism puts it, elaborating on these passages from Matthew and Luke:

> Scandal is an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbor’s tempter. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death. Scandal is a grave offense if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave offense.
>
> Scandal takes on a particular gravity by reason of the authority of those who cause it or the weakness of those who are scandalized….Scandal is grave when given by those who by nature or office are obliged to teach and educate others. Jesus reproaches the scribes and Pharisees on this account: he likens them to wolves in sheep’s clothing.
>
> Scandal can be provoked by laws or institutions, by fashion or opinion. Therefore, they are guilty of scandal who establish laws or social structures leading to the decline of morals and the corruption of religious practice, or to “social conditions that, intentionally or not, make Christian conduct and obedience to the Commandments difficult and practically impossible.”

Christ calls us to mercy towards sinners, in recognition that we are all sinners. But it is not hypocritical for sinners to profess virtue and denounce sin; it is precisely what the Gospel demands of us, sinners though we are. What Jesus denounces as hypocritical and cowardly is the opposite—pridefully refusing to admit sin and portraying sin as virtue, which causes others to be led astray when they emulate its

example. That is implicit in Luke 18:9-14, where Jesus notes that the tax collector who beats his breast in remorse and begs God's mercy goes home justified, while the Pharisee who proclaims his own virtue does not.

Likewise, we all are called to confession and repentance. Every sin, no matter how bad, can be forgiven, even those sins that we know (through our weakness) we will commit again. Except one: the refusal to admit sin and repent, the insistence that a sin is not a sin. God will not forgive us when we do not admit we were wrong. And to hold up sin in public as if it were virtue is scandal, called such because the church sees it not only as a personal sin but as leading others to sin.

This is the doctrine at the core of Christian resistance to any sort of public celebration of same-sex relationships. The problem is not that homosexuals are sinning, for all of us sin, and all of us have family and friends who sin, and all of us sit in pews listening to priests who sin. The problem is not associating with sinners, which is not just permitted but commanded to Christians. The problem is celebrating sin as if it were virtue.

To Christians who accept the New Testament's teachings—to Catholics who accept the Catechism—this is why things like "Gay Pride" events, or gay groups marching (as gay groups, rather than as individuals) in the St. Patrick's Day Parade, or taking part in an expressive way (such as a wedding photographer) in a same-sex wedding is wrong: it crosses the line from tolerance and mercy towards our fellow sinners to the perpetuation of the idea that a sin is not sin, but a thing to be celebrated. It crosses from forgiveness of sin, which Jesus' example commands us to offer, to justification of sin, which he condemns in the strongest language he uses anywhere in the Gospels.

Summary

Just as in the early Church, the Church today finds herself surrounded by people who don't share her views on marriage and sexuality. The views that the Church holds are even seen as offensive to many people. Just as in the early Church, it would be easy for the Church to change her teachings so as to win approval and perhaps win a few more converts. That didn't happen in the early Church and it can't happen now. The teachings of the Church are the teachings of Jesus and the Church doesn't have the authority to change them. Nor is the Church ashamed of them. They are the words of eternal life.