

Dear Parishioners,

In recent years, homosexuality has been frequently in the news. An increasingly nationwide effort to give recognition to so-called gay “marriage,” is only the latest matter to receive a lot of attention. Prior to this, the Episcopalian denomination ordained as a bishop a man who openly practices homosexual behavior. This action has divided the Episcopalian denomination in two. Prior to this, the last fifteen years have also seen the Episcopalian and other Protestant denominations liturgically celebrate gay “marriages” and unions. This too has caused great divisions in those denominations. Even among the Catholic faithful, mistaken notions about homosexuality and marriage have taken hold.

Hence, it is necessary once again to teach on this matter, and reassert what Scripture plainly teaches. Now the fact is, the Scriptures are very clear by unambiguously, and in an uncompromising way, depicting homosexual activity as a serious sin and a moral disorder. Attempts by some to reinterpret scripture to mean something else are fanciful, at best, and usually use theories that require twisted logic, and questionable historical views that set aside the very plain meaning of the texts.

I want to share a few of these Biblical texts with you. But before I do, let me state the context of this reflection and make two very important clarifications.

First, as to the context, I want to be clear here that my reflections are directed to fellow Christians, namely you. Hence I use Scripture as the main point of departure since we share a belief in the normative and authoritative status of God’s Word. In other settings, speaking for example to the secular world, Natural Law arguments are more suitable. But, here, the Scriptures are our main focus. And, as your pastor, I want you to have a clear, biblical understanding of what is taught in this matter. I have a duty to teach you on matters of the faith and morals and I do not want you to share in the confusion manifest in the world, and even among Christians.

As a second point of clarification it is important to note that it is homosexual activity that is condemned, not all persons of homosexual orientation. It is a fact that some individuals are attracted to members of the same sex. Why this is or how it comes to be is not fully understood, but it is, nonetheless, simply a fact for some individuals. Since sexual orientation is not usually a matter of direct choice or even immediate control, it is not itself an object of moral condemnation. Merely to be tempted to commit a certain sin does not make one evil or bad, or even guilty for that temptation. Rather, it is to give way to the temptation and commit the sin that makes one a sinner. Many homosexual persons live chaste lives, and, although tempted to commit homosexual acts, they do not in fact do so. This is courageous, holy and praiseworthy. Sadly, though, some with a homosexual orientation not only commit the sin of homosexual activity, but they openly flaunt this fact, and dismiss Biblical texts that clearly forbid such activity. For these, we can only hope and pray for conversion. I hope you can see, however, why we must distinguish between homosexual orientation and homosexual activity.

A third clarification that we must make is that we should be careful not to single out homosexual activity as though it were the only sexual sin God condemns. Clearly, all who are heterosexual are also called to sexual purity. The same Bible, which condemns homosexual activity, also clearly condemns acts of fornication (i.e. illicit sexual union such as premarital sex) and acts of adultery. The Bible describes these as serious sins, which can and do exclude people from the Kingdom of God and from Heaven (cf Eph 5:5-7; Gal 5:16-21; Rev 21:5-8; Rev. 22:14-16; Mt. 15:19-20; 1 Cor 6:9-20; Col 3:5-6; 1 Thess 4:1-8; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Heb 13:4). Sadly, many people today live in open violation of Biblical teaching. Many engage in premarital sex (fornicate) and say it is alright because “everyone’s doing it.” Many live together without benefit of marriage. This, like homosexual activity, is sinful. It is wrong, and should be repented of immediately. Hence, homosexual activity is not singled out by the Bible, or by Christians. Every human being, without exception, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is called to sexual purity, to chastity, and to self-control. Any violation of this is a sin. Put more

positively, God's command of chastity means that sexual purity is possible for everyone with God's grace. God empowers us to do what he commands!

With these two clarifications in mind, we can turn our attention now to the Biblical teaching on homosexuality.

As stated above, the Bible clearly and unambiguously condemns homosexual activity. For example:

1. *You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination* (Leviticus 18: 22)
2. *If a man lies with a male as with a female, both of them have committed an abomination* (Lev 20:13).
3. Likewise, the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah depicts, among other things, the sinfulness of homosexual activity. It is too lengthy to reproduce here in its entirety, but you can read about it in [Genesis 19](#).
4. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them...in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools...For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.* (Romans 1:18ff)
5. *Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.* (1 Corinthians 6:6-9)
6. *The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, for those who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.* 1 Timothy 1: 8-11

Note that, in many of these texts, homosexual activity is listed among other sexual offenses a person can commit. Again, it is not merely singled out. Here then, is what the Bible teaches: homosexual activity is wrong as are other sexual sins such as fornication and adultery. It is true that there are not a huge number of texts regarding homosexual activity. But, whenever it is mentioned, it is clearly and uncompromisingly condemned. Further, this condemnation occurs at every stage of biblical revelation, revelation right through to the end.

Sadly, today, many have set aside the Biblical and Church teachings on homosexual activity. They not only declare that it is not sinful, but they even celebrate it as though it were good. It is bad enough when non-believers do this, but it is even more tragic when people who call themselves Christians do such things. As we have seen, a number of the Protestant denominations (e.g., the United Church of Christ, the Episcopalian denominations and some of the Presbyterian and other mainline Protestant denominations) have begun celebrating and blessing homosexual unions and promoting clergy who are actively and publicly engaging in homosexual activity.

In effect they sanction such behavior and are setting aside the Word of God, or reinterpreting it to suit their own agenda. Psalm 2:1 laments: *And why do the people imagine a vain thing?* In the Gospels, Jesus knew that some would use him to promote their own wrongful agendas. And so He, too, lamented: *Take heed that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray* (Mark 13:5). St. Paul also knew that some would distort the Christian faith. And so he said: *I know that, after my departure,*

fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20: 29).

We live an era where there is often deep confusion about moral issues. In the area of sexual morality, the confusion is especially deep today. This confusion has touched even many Christians, who are living and promoting unbiblical lifestyles.

In such a climate, we must speak the truth that comes from God and live it. Suppressing the truth leads to great distortions, confusion, and suffering. The sexual promiscuity of our own day has led to great suffering: venereal disease, AIDS, abortion, teenage pregnancy, broken marriages, divorce, single parenthood.

The confusion about homosexual activity is just one more symptom of the general sexual confusion of our day. In suppressing the truth from God, many have become confused and spread error, and many among us call good that which God calls sin.

Some who oppose the teaching of Scripture and the Church have taken to calling opposition to their view “hatred” and “bigotry.” But we who are of faith must insist that the Church’s opposition to homosexual behavior is rooted in a principled obedience to the Word of God, which we believe to be revealed by God, and to which we owe docility and obedience. We can say and teach no other than what God has revealed consistently in his Word.

Perhaps it is best to conclude with a statement from the Catechism, which expresses clarity of doctrine but also respect for the homosexual person:

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.” They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God’s will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord’s Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection. (CCC 2357-2359)

I write to you with concern in these times of confusion in the hopes that you will in no way share the error and confusion of these times. We are not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (*cf* Rom 12:1). I pray that this letter has helped in some way to clarify and confirm you in the ancient and apostolic faith entrusted to the Church. Please share this letter if you have found it helpful.

Msgr. Pope