

A Message to Catholic New Yorkers From the Bishops of New York State

We bishops share with so many of you deep disappointment in the presumption of our state's elected officials in the radical redefinition of marriage. Yet we are heartened by the vigor with which so many faithful Catholic New Yorkers fought to preserve the true meaning of marriage.

Many surely believed that Catholics would simply shrug their shoulders and go along with this radical act of social engineering. Yet you did not do that. Together with people of other faith traditions, you spoke out. Thousands of you, by phone, email, letter or in-person visits to your legislators, and through social media like Facebook and Twitter, as well as hand-signed petitions in the back of your church, let your convictions be known.

We are grateful to you, as we are to the many legislators in the state Senate and Assembly who voted to reject this bill. We know the pressure that was brought to bear on them, and we admire their courage and yours in attempting to defend marriage and protect religious freedom. Their integrity and yours was called into question by many. Both you and they were accused of bigotry for simply defending the timeless understanding of marriage.

The proponents of so-called "same-sex marriage" portrayed their cause as a matter of "civil rights." Redefining marriage has nothing to do with civil rights. The Catholic Church has a proud history in this country's civil rights movement for African-Americans. However, this situation is in no way analogous. In the first case, a race of people was shamefully made to endure hundreds of years of slavery and systemic persecution and discrimination. Today's debate focuses on a small group of persons, whose human rights must *always* be respected and defended by us all, but who claim a civil right to redefine marriage for all of society based on a private and personal preference.

As so many of you have let us know, this is not just a "Catholic issue." Yet for us Catholics, there is particular disappointment with those elected officials who publicly profess fidelity to our Catholic religion but whose public stance is at odds with a fundamental teaching of that faith. The definition of marriage resides in the plan of God for humankind. It is at the very least presumptuous for the state to attempt to redefine it.

From this sad moment in our state's history, let it be our prayer that we witness a new appreciation for *authentic* marriage as understood by our Catholic faith and revealed to us by God through nature. We have seen so many threats to marriage in recent years, from widespread cohabitation, to infidelity, to exploding out-of-wedlock birth rates, to pornography and other addictions that undermine family and married life. Sadly, we have even seen rates of Catholic marriages plunge over the last four decades by nearly 60 percent. And now we see the state presume to alter what God already has defined and common sense can recognize as right and true. While our culture seems to have lost a basic understanding of marriage, we Catholics must not. We must be models of what is good, holy and sacred about authentic sacramental marriage. Let this moment where marriage is being attacked from without become a moment of renewal from within – in our Church, in our communities and in our families – where marriage is indelibly marked by fidelity, sacrifice and the mutual love of husband and wife leading to children. The Church does not seek to be at odds with the society and culture. The Church welcomes the opportunity to be part of the public dialogue and listens respectfully to all positions. But the Church cannot do otherwise than stand against the claims of any culture and any society that attempts to define a relationship into being what it is not. To that extent we members of the Catholic Church are called to be in opposition to the prevailing culture. And sadly we are called to do so again. We know well that marriage always has been, is now and always will be the life-long, life-giving union of one man and one woman. No act of government can change that reality. With respect for the dignity of every person, we proclaim this truth and we will be faithful to its meaning and to its observance in all that we say and do.

--The Catholic Bishops of New York State

June 24, 2011

Feast of the Birthday of St. John the Baptist