

## **MARRIAGE IS IMPORTANT: THINK BEFORE YOU VOTE**

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### **A Message From Bishop Leo O'Reilly**

**My Dear People,**

I have asked all the priests of the diocese to read out this message in place of the homily at Masses this week-end, the last week-end before the referendum on same-sex marriage.

In a few days we will be asked to vote in a referendum to change the meaning of marriage in the section of the *Constitution of Ireland* dealing with *The Family*. I am aware that this referendum is a very sensitive issue. I hope that my words will not give offence to anybody and that is certainly not my wish or my intention. I respect the views of people who think differently than I do, and I trust that the views that I express, which are grounded in my faith as a Catholic, will also be heard and respected. My hope is that you will give this very important decision the attention it deserves and that you will think carefully about the issues involved:

- **I ask you to think about the issue of equality** which has been put forward as the reason for the referendum. Pope Francis faced a similar referendum in Argentina when he was Archbishop of Buenos Aires. This was his advice on the matter:

"A marriage (made up of man and woman) is not the same as the union of two people of the same sex. To distinguish is not to discriminate but to respect differences... At a time when we place emphasis on the richness of pluralism and social and cultural diversity, it is a contradiction to minimize human differences. A father is not the same as a mother."

- **I ask you to think about children.** We have recently passed a referendum on children's rights. The first paragraph of the new text says: "The State recognises and affirms the **natural** and **imprescriptible** rights of all children and shall, as far as practicable, by its laws protect and vindicate those rights."

Now every child has a **natural** mother and father. It is surely a fundamental right of a child that he or she should have the right to know and enjoy the companionship of its **natural** mother and father, where that is possible. Sometimes, through death or for other reasons this is not possible, and that is always painful and regrettable. This referendum, if passed, taken together with the provisions of *the Children and Family Relationships Act*, will deny the fundamental right of some children to a mother and a father - in plain contradiction of the recent children's referendum.

The referendum on same-sex marriage would put the wishes of adults ahead of the rights of children. As Pope Francis, then Archbishop of Buenos Aires, put it:

"Let us also be aware that, in seeking to advance a supposed claim on behalf of the rights of adults, we may be setting aside the far greater right of children (who are the only ones who should be privileged in this situation) to rely on models of father and mother, mum and dad."

- **I ask you to think of the wider consequences of this referendum passing.**

I have serious concerns about the blunt refusal to give any real guarantees regarding freedom of religion in relation to the referendum. To give but a few examples:

- Will teachers be obliged, against their conscience, to teach the new understanding of marriage in schools?
- Will marriage counsellors and others who offer couples Catholic marriage care be required to provide services to those who are manifestly at variance with our ethos?
- Will priests, who are now generally registered as official solemnisers of marriage on behalf of the State, be obliged to marry same-sex couples who request it? If a baker can be brought before the courts in Northern Ireland on such a trivial matter as refusing a request from a same-sex couple to supply a cake with a gay slogan, we can be sure that a priest will soon find himself in the same position here.

I ask everyone to pray to the Holy Spirit for a renewal of those gifts of wisdom, understanding, courage and right judgement that we received at Confirmation as we think about these issues in preparation for voting on May 22nd. May is a month of special devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and I ask you to pray also to her for all our families and for the renewal and strengthening of family life as we prepare for the Synod on the Family in October.

Leo O'Reilly  
Bishop of Kilmore.

**NOTE:** You will find some copies of this message at the back of the church. It is also posted on the website of the diocese of Kilmore: [www.kilmorediocese.ie](http://www.kilmorediocese.ie)

Further information and statements on [www.meaningofmarriage.ie](http://www.meaningofmarriage.ie)