

Pope Francis Stresses Difference, Complementarity of Genders

By Caitlin Bootsma

Whether the mainstream media chooses to cover it or not, [Pope Francis' General Audience yesterday](#) (<http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/general-audience-on-man-and-woman>) confirmed once again that he upholds the Church's teaching on marriage. In fact, he unabashedly challenges us saying that it is the "great responsibility of the Church, of all believers, and first of all of believing families, to rediscover the beauty of the creative design that inscribes the image of God also in the alliance between man and woman."

There are those who would dismiss Pope Francis's previous statements that he is a "son of the Church" when it comes to traditional, sacramental marriage. I've heard it claimed that he is just biding his time, waiting to introduce a more "tolerant", more "accepting" teaching when it comes to marriage.

But those who are hoping that the Church will open the door to homosexual "marriage" and other unions will surely be disappointed. He says, "I wonder, for example, if the so-called *gender theory* is not also an expression of a frustration and of a resignation, which aims to cancel the sexual difference because it no longer knows how to address it." He goes on to lament that intellectuals have—for the most part—ceased to explore the importance of family and marriage bonds because they wish to pursue what they see as a more "free" and more "just" society.

God is the author of marriage and the author of the family. This fact, the Pope explains, can not be underestimated: "God has entrusted the earth to the alliance of man and of woman: its failure makes the world arid of affections and darkens the sky of hope."

The Pope encourages us to fight against this tendency in society to forget (or even to attempt to erase) the difference between sexes. The first action he suggests highlights one of the traits I like best about the Pope. He is unafraid to look at reality and Church teaching in a way that may not fit people's stereotypes of him and of the Church. In this audience, he encourages us to give more weight to women's voices. He draws our attention to the way that Jesus treated women and reminds us that "We have not yet understood in depth what things the feminine genius can give us, which woman can give to society and also to us."

What I love about this statement, though, is that while some might be tempted to label Pope Francis as a progressive, he is not buying in to that agenda. He points out that recognizing this feminine genius is not an end in itself. Rather, he argues "we must do much more in favor of woman if we want to give back more strength to the reciprocity between men and women." Giving more recognition to the unique talents and gifts of women should not make women the same as men, but instead add to the richness of human society by recognizing the essential difference and complementarity of men and women.

His second recommendation reflects centuries of Church teaching, but applies it to our modern understanding of "marriage". He points out that the union between man and woman is supposed to reflect communion with God. "The loss of trust in the celestial Father generates division and conflict between man and woman," the pontiff said.

He urges us to more fully recognize the unique gifts of each sex, the way in which they complement each other. Further still, the only successful unions are ones that are first entrusted to God. He gives us hope, saying, "The earth is filled with harmony and trust when the alliance between man and woman is lived well."

With these words, Pope Francis looks not only at theology or the world as a whole, but at each person, marriage and family. As usual, he speaks directly to the hearts of each one of us. We are reminded that we can make a difference in the world by the way we strengthen our relationship with God, living out our lives as a man or woman created in His image.



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