

Archbishop Edwin O'Brien defends traditional marriage

Asserting that traditional marriage is “radically threatened” by some courts and legislatures intent on legalizing same-sex marriage, Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien called the defense of marriage “an urgent necessity to ensure the flourishing of persons, the well-being of children and the common good of society.”

In his homily text at the Oct. 25 Red Mass for judges and legal professionals, Archbishop O'Brien said it was the view of American Catholic bishops that marriage between a man and a woman is “the most basic” human and social institution.

“True, the institution of marriage is regulated by civil law and church law, but it preceded them both,” he said. “It originated from neither, but from God. Therefore, neither church nor state can alter its basic meaning and structure.”

Of all human relationships, Archbishop O'Brien said, “Western law has always regarded marriage with special significance and accorded to it special privileges.” It has done so with an eye toward promoting the welfare of future generations, he said.

The archbishop acknowledged that “formidable forces” are pushing to alter the traditional understanding of marriage, but he urged lawmakers and members of the justice system to resist altering current law that defines marriage as between a man and a woman.

Redefining marriage to respond to “secularist, non-traditional standards” is “to open the way, in principle, to a host of other ‘marital’ friendships, thus rendering the very uniqueness of marriage meaningless,” Archbishop O'Brien said.

While Catholic leaders are “unconditionally opposed to same-sex marriage,” Archbishop O'Brien emphasized that “we must unconditionally condemn unjust discrimination against homosexual persons whose dignity as daughters and sons of God we must accept, respect and defend.”

While the Maryland State Court of Appeals upheld the state's definition of marriage

as between one man and one woman in a Sept. 18 ruling, the court said the ruling did not imply that the General Assembly “may not grant and recognize for homosexual persons civil unions or the right to marry a person of the same sex.” Legalizing gay marriage is expected to be a hot topic in the upcoming General Assembly.

The Red Mass was held at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, marking the traditional opening of the court year.