

You Won't Believe What Pope Francis Just Said About Divorced Catholics

Pope Francis told priests on Wednesday to be more merciful to Catholics who have divorced and remarried outside the Church, saying they should not be treated as if they had been excommunicated.

The delicate subject of how the Church should treat divorced Catholics will be a major issue at a meeting of world bishops at the Vatican in October.

Current Church teaching says such Catholics cannot receive communion unless they abstain from sexual relations because their first marriage is still valid in the eyes of the Church.

Progressive bishops have been pushing for change and Francis has been dropping hints that he too favors more accommodation and wants the synod to come up with proposals.

Speaking at his general audience, Francis said it was urgent that the Church develop ways to offer a "real welcome" to Catholics who have found happiness in a second marriage after their first ones failed.

"These people have absolutely not been excommunicated ... and they should absolutely not be treated as if they had been; they are always part of the Church," he said.

He said it was particularly important for priests to be welcoming to the many children of such couples.

"They (the children) are the ones who suffer the most in these situations. How can we urge these parents to do everything to raise their children in the Christian life ... if we keep them at a distance from the life of the community as if they had

been excommunicated?" he said.

The children of Catholic parents who have remarried outside the Church should not have to bear the "additional weight" of being made to feel like outcasts in local parishes because of their parents' failed first marriages, he said.

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