

## SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

The Sacrament of Matrimony, together with the Sacrament of Holy Orders, are directed toward the salvation of others; they confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to strengthen the family as God intended and build up the people of God.<sup>1</sup> As such these two sacraments are referred to as the “**Sacraments of Service.**”

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life, is by its nature ordered towards the good of the spouses, and the procreation and education of offspring . . . and has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a Sacrament.<sup>2</sup>

1. As a Sacrament of the Church, Matrimony is not a purely human institution but is a covenant. A “covenant” is not merely a biblical name. Covenants are forever; they are religious realities witnessed by God. The designation of a marriage as a covenant is intended to imply the religious fact and echoes both the covenant between God and God’s people, and the covenant between Christ and His people, the Church. It is precisely this idea that designates the marital union as a Sacrament.
2. As a covenant, the sacramental bond between baptized persons can never be dissolved and is irrevocable.<sup>3</sup> From a valid marriage arises a bond between the spouses which, by its very nature, is perpetual and exclusive.<sup>4</sup>
3. Jesus performed His first miracle during the wedding feast at Cana when, at the urging of His mother, He changed ordinary water to wine of the finest quality. The Church attaches great importance to His presence at the feast and views it as confirmation of the goodness of marriage and that marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ’s presence.
4. Christian marriage announces and makes explicit the mutual love of a Christian man and woman and makes their marriage an image and symbol of Christ’s steadfast love for His Church. In this sense it is a Sacrament, an outward sign in the world, of the presence of the God who is grace.
5. The very union of man and woman in a mutual relationship is founded on creation itself, of man and woman in the likeness and image of God.<sup>5</sup> Hence God Himself is the author of marriage. “**It is not good that man should be alone.**” Man’s counterpart, the woman, is “flesh of his flesh,” an equal, a helpmate, and the two become one flesh.<sup>6</sup>
6. According to Catholic teaching, the spouses, as ministers of God’s grace, mutually confer

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<sup>1</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 426, para. 1534) Print.

<sup>2</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 446, para. 1601, citing Code of Canon Law, 1055) Print.

<sup>3</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 457, para. 1640) Print.

<sup>4</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 455, para. 1635) Print.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 1:27

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 2:18-25

upon each other the Sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent in the presence of a representative of the Church.<sup>7</sup> The Priest or Deacon solicits the spouses to orally express their mutual consents in the presence of witnesses and/or the congregation. The consent is further symbolized by the blessing and exchange of rings as a sign of love and fidelity.

7. By its very nature, the marriage covenant is ordered to the good of the couple as well as to the generation and education of children.<sup>8</sup> This Sacrament obliges marital fidelity between the spouses. It is more than a practical arrangement or a temporary contract. Marital intimacy and the good of the children require total fidelity to conjugal love. By their mutual fidelity, the spouses continue to make present to each other the love of Christ and lead each other to holiness through the graces of the Sacrament.

Married couples who are not blessed with children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning . . . and their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of love, of hospitality and of sacrifice.<sup>9</sup>

8. Grace received in the sacrament, “perfect the love of husband and wife, binds them together in fidelity, and helps them to welcome and care for children. Christ is the source of this grace and he dwells with the spouses to strengthen their covenant promises, to bear each other’s burdens with forgiveness and kindness,” and to jointly labor in the attainment of eternal life.<sup>10</sup>

9. At times, problems may arise which threaten the marital union of some couples. These problems may be caused by jealousy, infidelity, conflicts of various sorts, etc. - - - issues that arise in any relationship - - - resulting in a break in the union, be it a separation or civil divorce. When divorce is the only recourse, the Church offers her support to those involved and encourages them to remain constant to the faith especially through frequent reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

However, those who have undergone civil divorce and accepted a second marriage - - - a marriage considered as an invalid marriage in the eyes of the Church - - - the Church does not wish them to be alienated from her. By keeping the faith, and committed to bringing up their children in a Christian manner, the whole faithful community must manifest an attentive solicitude lest the divorcees consider themselves separated from the Church.<sup>11</sup>

10. The marriage of two baptized persons celebrated according to the laws of the Church, is always considered to be valid. However, upon investigation or review, it may be determined that, at the time of the marriage rite, there may have been adverse conditions

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<sup>7</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 452, para. 1623) Print.

<sup>8</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 462, para. 1660) Print.

<sup>9</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 461, para. 1654) Print.

<sup>10</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2006). *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (First ed., p. 285). Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing.

<sup>11</sup> Libreria Editrice Vaticana. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. First ed. New York City: Image/Doubleday, 1995. (p. 460, para. 1651) Print.

or reservations that were contrary to the standards required to enter into a valid sacramental bond. Such impediments could have been lack of discernment or maturity of judgment, marrying due to force or fear, or with intent to exclude fidelity, or other conditions which may be considered contrary to a free act of the will. When the Church, through its tribunal or court, determines such to have existed at the time of the marriage ceremony, the Church issues a declaration of nullity - - - a declaration that there was not a sacramental bond. As such, the individuals involved are free to enter into another and new marriage of a sacramental value.<sup>12</sup>

11. By the term “mixed marriage,” we refer to a marital union between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic (i.e. a Christian not of the Catholic faith). This type of marriage is considered a sacramental marriage.

A marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person is considered an “interfaith marriage” and is not a sacramental marriage yet a valid one.

The differences in faith adherence can present diverse problems in a marriage. Nevertheless, those very differences can be enriched for both spouses if they dedicate their union in the light of faith, sincere married love, humble and patient practice of family virtues and perseverance in prayer.

### **Key Points**

Because God Himself is the author of marriage, marriage is of its very nature a holy institution, requiring of those who enter into it a complete and unreserved giving of self.

In marriage, God sanctified human love and enabled man and woman to help each other live as children of God by sharing a common life under His fatherly care.

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<sup>12</sup> Code of Canon Law, 1095 – 1107