



HOLY MATRIMONY



“For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.” Ephesians 5:31-32 (NABRE)

Matrimony, along with Holy Orders, is one of the two Sacraments of Service. Both are directed toward the salvation of others and the building up of the Church (CCC 1534). In Matrimony, a baptized man and woman are united in a covenantal bond, ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children (CCC 1601).

Marriage as a Covenant

Matrimony is not merely a human institution but a sacred covenant. A covenant, unlike a contract, is a lifelong, irrevocable bond witnessed by God. This reflects the covenant between God and His people and the love of Christ for His Church. The sacramental bond of marriage between baptized persons is perpetual and exclusive, symbolizing Christ's steadfast love (CCC 1640).

Biblical Foundation

Marriage is rooted in creation itself. In Genesis, God declares: *"It is not good for the man to be alone"* and creates woman as his equal and companion (Gen. 2:18). The union of man and woman is established as a reflection of God's love: *"The two become one flesh"* (Gen. 2:24).

Jesus affirmed the sanctity of marriage during His earthly ministry, performing His first miracle at the Wedding at Cana, turning water into wine (John 2:1-11). This act signifies Christ's blessing on marriage and its elevation to a sacrament.

St. Paul further deepens the understanding of marriage by comparing it to the union between Christ and His Church: *"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her"* (Eph. 5:25).

The Sacrament of Matrimony

In the Sacrament of Matrimony, the spouses themselves are the ministers of the sacrament. Through their mutual consent, exchanged before a representative of the Church and witnesses, they confer the sacrament upon each other. The priest or deacon acts as the Church's witness and blesses the union (CCC 1623).

Marriage is ordered to the mutual good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children (CCC 1660). It calls for total fidelity and self-giving love, requiring lifelong commitment and openness to life.

Grace and Mission

The sacrament provides spouses with the grace to:

- Love one another as Christ loves His Church.
- Bear each other's burdens with forgiveness, patience, and kindness.
- Welcome and care for children as gifts from God.
- Sanctify their daily lives, helping each other grow in holiness.

Christ dwells with the spouses, strengthening their covenant promises and empowering them to reflect His love in the world (CCC 1642).

Challenges and the Church's Support

Marriage can face difficulties such as jealousy, infidelity, or other conflicts. The Church encourages struggling couples to seek help, offering spiritual support through the sacraments and prayer.

For those who experience separation or civil divorce, the Church remains a source of healing.

Divorced individuals who have not entered a second union outside the Church are encouraged to participate fully in the sacramental life, including receiving Holy Communion, provided they are in a state of grace.

However, those who enter a second marriage outside the Church, without a declaration of nullity (annulment) for the first marriage, are asked to refrain from receiving Holy Communion until their marital situation is resolved. This can include obtaining an annulment, seeking pastoral guidance, or convalidating the second union. The Church invites such individuals to remain connected to the faith and encourages participation in prayer and community life (CCC 1651).

Declarations of Nullity

A declaration of nullity (commonly referred to as an annulment) is not a “Catholic divorce.” It is a determination by the Church that a valid sacramental bond was never formed due to conditions such as lack of maturity, coercion, or intent contrary to marriage’s essential purposes (Code of Canon Law 1095-1107). When granted, it allows individuals to enter into a new sacramental marriage.

Special Cases: Mixed and Interfaith Marriages

- **Mixed Marriage:** A union between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic is sacramental but requires special permission from the Church.
- **Interfaith Marriage:** A union between a Catholic and a non-baptized person is not sacramental but can still be valid.

Differences in faith can present challenges but also opportunities for growth. Couples are encouraged to foster unity through love, respect, and shared family virtues.

Key Points

- Marriage is a sacred covenant instituted by God.
- It reflects the love between Christ and His Church.
- The sacrament provides grace to spouses, helping them live holy lives and fulfill their mission of love and service.
- Separated or civilly divorced Catholics can receive Holy Communion if they are in a state of grace and have not entered into an irregular union.