

## SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: Class 4

### Sacraments of Vocation: Matrimony

**Mystery of Love:** We know from popular songs that "love is the answer." But, what is love? Is there any other question which has received as much attention over the centuries? Millions of books, plays, poems, movies, and songs have been written about love. Scientists and psychologists have tried to explain why people love. Wars have been fought for love. Peace has been made for love. Our own scriptures tell us that "God is love."

Still, we ask, "What is love?" Over 2,500 years ago a Jewish poet described the desires of love in this way: More delightful is your love than wine! Your name spoken is a spreading perfume-On my bed at night I sought him whom my heart loves - I sought him but I did not find him. I will rise then and go about the city; in the streets and crossings I will seek Him whom my heart loves. I sought him but I did not find him. The watchmen came upon me as they made their rounds of the city: Have you seen him whom my heart loves? I had hardly left them when I found him whom my heart loves. I took hold of him and would not let him go....

Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; For stern as death is love, relentless as the nether world is devotion; its flames are a blazing fire. Deep waters cannot quench love, nor floods sweep it away. Were one to offer all he owns to purchase love, he would be roundly mocked (Sg 1:2-3, 3:1-4, 8:6-7).

These words are part of the Song of Songs from the Old Testament. This inspired text has been viewed by both Jews and Christians as a description of the love between God and his people. It has also been understood as a God-given description of the sacredness, beauty, and wonder of married love: In the wonder of ideal human love God welcomes us into the mystery of divine love. When-we open ourselves to the mystery of divine love we are able to experience ideal human love. God has chosen to intertwine human and divine love to such an extent that when we know one - we will know the other.

The sacrament of Matrimony, or marriage, celebrates the universal human relationship of wedded life between a man and a woman and their relationship with

the divine. An understanding of the nature of Christian marriage, its history, and its rites are presented in this class.

Marriage imagery is used over and over in the scriptures to help us understand God's loving plan for creation. The Bible begins with the story of the creation of man and woman as partners made in the image of God and it concludes with the wedding feast of the Lamb in the book of Revelation (see 19:5-8). It is in human marriage that we get a glimpse of the tremendous love which Christ has for the Church and it is in human marriage and family life that we have a foretaste of the intimate communion and tremendous joy that will be ours in heaven ( CCC, 1642).

**Marriage in God's Plan:** According to the second story of creation in Genesis 2:4-25, when Adam was created he had a very close relationship with God. After God created Adam, he created all of the beauty of the earth. All was for Adam. God gave Adam the garden of Eden as his home and as a place that he could shape according to his own wishes. God made Adam comfortable, God conversed with Adam and he invited Adam to share his work. But still Adam was lonely.

God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him." And so God created the various animals and brought them one by one to Adam. Adam named the animals, but none of the animals could truly ease his loneliness. Finally, God put Adam into a deep sleep and created a woman from Adam's own flesh. When Adam saw the woman he said, "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." In Eve, Adam had at last found "his counterpart, his equal, his nearest in all things" (see CCC, 1605).

The message of this passage is that men and women are created for each other. God established the intimate communion of life and love which is the essence of married life (GS 48). God made married life the foundation of human society. From the beginning, one of the primary ways in which God has shared his love with men and women has been by giving them a way of sharing a deep and unifying love with each other. When a husband and wife truly become one they are given a glimpse of, the love and unity which is shared in the Trinity, a glimpse of the love that the first letter of John refers to in the words, "God is love" (4:16).

Marriage was given to people as a way for them to participate in the experience of divine love and divine unity. Too often, however, men and women experience

more discord and conflict in their relationships than they do pure love and unity. Pure love, the kind of love that results in true unity, is patient and kind; it is never jealous or pompous, rude or self-seeking. It is not quick tempered and it does not brood or sulk. The love which God intended for husbands and wives bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never fails (see 1 Cor 13:4-8).

The fact that this is not the love that we see all around us has led many to scoff at the notion of perfect love or complete unity, and to say that such a love is not in human nature. According to our faith, however, the discord between men and women is not the result of basic human nature or of some fundamental difference in the way men and women think.

Men and women have been created as one, to be one. The disharmony between the sexes and within marriages is not the result of our natures but the result of our sin. The first consequence of the original sin was the rupture of the communion between man and woman. After they ate the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve no longer saw their similarities, but rather their differences. They hid because suddenly the differences that were revealed in their nakedness were not a source of unity but a means of separation. No longer did they see themselves as flesh and bone of one another, instead they saw themselves as competitors.

Even though sin damaged the complete union between man and woman, God's plan for that union still remained. After the fall, the complete union of a man and a woman was not an automatic consequence of their coming together physically. Men and women needed and continue to need God's help to overcome the effects of sin in their lives so that they may find that unity for which they were created.

God has offered help to men and women through the institution of marriage. Marriage helps people to overcome their self-absorption and their tendency to put most of their energy into pursuing their own pleasure. Marriage by its very nature encourages spouses to give of themselves and to help each other.

**The Nature of Christian Marriage:** Jesus consistently taught that God intended marriage as a permanent union in which two people truly become one (see, for example, Mt 19:1-12). Although Mosaic law - which was understood as divine law - allowed for divorce Jesus said that was only because of the people's hardness of

heart. Jesus himself came to remove our stony hearts and give us hearts of flesh (see Ez 36:26). Jesus made it possible for men and women to achieve a permanent union. He made it possible for them to live as one, the way God intended from the beginning.

The fact that Jesus performed his first miracle at the wedding of Cana is understood by the Church as Jesus' confirmation of the goodness of marriage. It is also understood as a proclamation that from that time on Christ himself would be present in the marriages of his followers.

As with the other sacraments, Christ instituted the sacrament of Matrimony. Marriage was already a gift from God and a structure which could help people in their struggle against sin; Jesus made it an actual source of God's grace (CCC, 1609, 1613). When a man and a woman pledge themselves to each other before the Father and through the Son, the Holy Spirit seals their pledge and gives them the strength they need to keep it. Jesus restored marriage to its original state as a union confirmed by God. It holds then that what God has joined, no person has a right to separate.

From the Old Testament, fidelity in marriage was already seen as an image of God's fidelity to his people. The prophet Hosea was told by God to remain faithful to a wife who was continually unfaithful (see Hos 1-3). His faithfulness was to be a prophetic sign of God's own faithfulness. By raising marriage to a sacrament Jesus made every marriage a sign of God's faithfulness. The loving and faithful relationship between a husband and wife is now the visible sign of the loving and faithful relationship between Christ and His Church. The love which sustains the Church and makes it one is the love which allows a man and a woman to truly become one – one body, one heart, one mind, and one soul.

**The Two Shall Become One:** When God calls two people to become one, he is not calling upon them to give up their individual identities. A man and a woman do not become one flesh in the same way that two streams become one river. The model for the union of two people in marriage is found in the Trinity. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons, yet they are one God. They relate to each other as distinct persons. When the Father loves the Son he is loving another person; he is not just loving himself. When the Son is obedient to the

Father, he is doing the will of another. Yet even though they are separate, they are one. There is no competition among them and there is no division of will—one never wants something that the others would oppose. Furthermore, whatever one person of the Trinity does is owned by the other two persons as well.

The unity of the Trinity is total lack of selfishness and a total loving commitment to the other. When God calls two people to become one, he is calling them to give up their selfishness and seek what is truly best for the other and best for the family. When each person places the other at the center of his or her heart, when each person makes the well-being of the other his or her goal, the two will indeed be one.

The sacrament of Matrimony gives a husband and wife the grace that they need to work toward and ultimately achieve this unity. The sacrament gives husbands and wives the grace to love each other in the way Christ loved his Church. As with every other sacrament, however, the degree to which this grace bears fruit and accomplishes its purpose depends upon the dispositions of the ones who receive it. The sacrament of Matrimony makes true unity possible. The existence of sin in the world makes true unity difficult.

While it may be that no couple will ever experience perfect unity all the time in their marriage, those who open themselves to the grace of the sacrament will experience moments of perfect unity. Furthermore, even in their moments of disunity the sacrament will give them the strength to forgive one another and work through their difficulties, frequently deepening their unity in the process. The grace of the sacrament perfects the human love of the husband and wife, strengthens their unity, and allows them to grow in holiness on the way to eternal life.

**The Marriage Covenant:** The true nature of marriage is in the mutual self-giving of the husband and wife. This self-giving takes the form of a covenant as opposed to a contract. A contract involves the exchange of services. It establishes rights and responsibilities within a known context. If circumstances change significantly, a contract can cease to be binding. A contract is an agreement to do certain things for each other. A covenant, on the other hand, establishes a relationship which will be maintained even in the face of changing circumstances. A covenant is a commitment to work with each other to do whatever needs to be done. While contracts

do not change over time, covenants Can and should grow stronger and deeper over time.

When a man and a woman establish a covenant with each other in marriage, they establish a relationship of self-giving. Each one makes a commitment to give himself or herself to the other without reservation. This self-giving is not something that happens once and for all on the day of the wedding. The self-giving of marriage must be repeated day after day in big and small ways. With each act of self-giving the marriage covenant grows stronger. Since marriage involves the total self-giving of each spouse, fidelity and permanence are both necessary parts of the marriage covenant.

The intimate union of a husband and wife in marriage needs to be exclusive if it is going to continually grow stronger and deeper. Infidelity shows a desire to withhold something from one's spouse. It weakens the essence of marriage. Likewise an intention or openness to ending the union at some future time shows an incomplete self-giving and weakens the essence of marriage.

However the Church recognizes that there are some situations in which it becomes practically impossible for a husband and wife to live together, for a variety of reasons. In these cases, the Church permits the physical separation of the couple though the spouses remain husband and wife and are not free to begin a new relationship. Hopefully, reconciliation can take place. In any case, the Church is called to help these persons live their situation in a Christian manner in fidelity, to their indissoluble marriage bond. Catholics who are divorced civilly but continue to live chastely out of respect for their marriage vows can participate fully in the sacraments and in the life of the Church.

The sacrament of Matrimony makes each marriage a living sign of God's fidelity. The commitment of the spouses to each other becomes a part of God's commitment to his people. Since God's commitment is permanent and unending, all commitments which are caught up in his must also be permanent and unending.

**The Purpose of Marriage:** Marriage has been established by God for two reasons: for the good of the husband and wife, and for the procreation and education of children. Marriage offers a way for men and women to support each other and to

help each other grow in love. The deeper a person's understanding of and experience in love, the ' closer that person will be to God.

Marriage also creates a communion of love into which children can be born. The documents of the Second Vatican Council teach that "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory (GS 48§ 1; 50).

God creates each person out of love. God wants each person to experience that love from the moment of his or her birth. This is most likely to occur if the child is born into a permanent relationship of love. When God created the first man and woman, he told them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gn 1:28). God established marriage because it was not good for a person to be alone. God also established marriage because the loving union of a husband and wife creates the environment into which God wishes to send his children. Beginning with Adam and Eve, God called husbands and wives to join him in his creative work by creating an environment of love and by welcoming children into that environment.

Just as marriage has two purposes, sexual intercourse, which is the act that most clearly expresses the marriage covenant, also has two purposes. Indeed, it has the same two purposes: the unity of the spouses (mutual love and support) and procreation. Sexual intercourse involves the self-giving of the entire person. All" the aspects of the husband's and the wife's person enter into their sexual relationship. Their sexual relationship involves a giving of their physical selves, including their instinctual attraction to the opposite sex. It also involves a sharing of their emotions and feelings, a commitment of their spirit and a deliberate choice of their will.

Sexual intercourse aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul. Sexual intercourse can only be what it is meant to be if it occurs within a marriage. New life is the natural outcome of sexual intercourse. That is why the Church has always taught that every act of sexual intercourse in marriage t should remain open to the procreation of human life. Part of a married couple's responsibility to welcome children into their lives involves the regulation of procreation, or the spacing of births between children. For just and moral reasons, a couple may use NFP and regulate the spacing and

birth of their children. These reasons include the physical and psychological health of a spouse, family finances, or the current number of children. However, selfishness or greed - for example, not wanting a child in order to maintain a certain financial level - would be a sinful motive for practicing birth control.

The Church supports natural means of birth regulation based on the observation of a woman's fertility cycle. Part of this natural means also includes periodic abstinence from sexual relations. Most dioceses sponsor classes that help train couples in natural methods of family planning. Two popular and effective methods are the sympto-thermal method and the ovulation method. Oppositely, every artificial means of contraception is against Church law and contrary to God's will. Artificial birth control refers to pills or devices (like condoms or diaphragms) that interfere with the conception of a child. The Church also teaches that sterilization - rendering unfruitful the reproductive organs - is immoral unless the organs are diseased and the health of the person is at risk.

Children are "the supreme gift of marriage" (GS 50). For that reason, "each and every marriage act must remain open 'per se' to the transmission of life" (*Humanae Vitae*, 11). Children offer married couples a profound way of cooperating with and participating in God's creative love. The life-giving nature of sexual love is seen not only in the physical life which comes into being when a child is conceived, but also in the moral and spiritual life which parents pass on to their children through education. Parents are the first ones to teach their children how to live in the fullness of life that they received in baptism. As parents share life, love, and faith with their children the family takes its place at the heart of community life and at the heart of Church life.

**The Domestic Church:** The family is called the domestic church, meaning that the family is the "church of the home" (CCC, 2204). The family is the "original cell of society" (CCC, 2207) The family is where the church in its smallest form cultivates and shares the good news of Jesus. Relationships within the family create the foundation for all other relationships. The unity of heart that is learned in the family prepares us to embrace the unity of heart that is essential to the Church. In a world that is often hostile to faith, believing families are important centers of living faith. The majority of people who come to the Church come because they have

experienced the love and faith of a Christian family, be that the love and faith of their biological family or of another family that has welcomed them.

All married couples, whether they have children or not, are called to establish the kind of home - one that offers love, acceptance, and support - that welcomes those who would otherwise be without a family. All families are called to become domestic sanctuaries of the Church (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). In other words, the family is to be a place where the grace of God is clearly visible. Everything that family members receive in the sacramental life of the Church they are called to share with one another. Within the family parents and children exercise the priesthood of the baptized in a very special way. Together they establish a holy place in which the covenant of love among God's people and with God becomes visible and tangible.

More concretely, children have several obligations to their parents, first, children owe their parents gratitude for the gift of life. They do this by being respectful and obedient to their parents as long as they live in their parents' home. Even when they are grown up, children owe their parents respect. They should help their parents with their physical and spiritual needs in times of illness and loneliness especially associated with old age. Children are also obliged to live in harmony with their brothers and sisters, and to show special gratitude to others - besides parents - from whom they have received the gift of faith: grandparents, godparents, and catechists.

Parents are, of course, obliged to their children as well. Specifically, parents must "regard their children as children of God and respect them as human persons" (CCC, 2222). Parents are responsible for the education of their children. They do this by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are prevalent. The home is the natural place for parents to educate their children in the virtues, that is, good habits. This is primarily done by their good example, teaching them to follow the Lord and encouraging them to listen to how the Lord may be calling them to a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. In fact education in the faith should begin in the child's earliest years. Parents have the duty to teach their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The Catechism calls the home "the first school of Christian life" (1657). It is

in the home that all family members learn about the joy of work, love, forgiveness, divine worship in prayer, and the offering of one's life.

Beyond supporting one another and establishing a community of love, families also have a mission and responsibility with respect to the larger world. The sacrament of Matrimony sends husbands and wives and any children they have into the world to bear witness to the sacredness of marriage and the centrality of family life. Their lives should be a sign of the permanence of marriage and of the generous and life-giving nature of 'married love. They are to help others understand the type of relationship that God intended for men and women. Furthermore they should work within society to see that the dignity and the "legitimate autonomy" of families are always respected. It is part of our Christian responsibility to work for legislation, social policies, and employment practices that give consideration to the needs of families.

**Historical Development of the Sacrament of Matrimony:** Christ did not establish the institution of marriage. But Catholics believe that Jesus did bless the relationship between husband and wife and invest it with special meaning. Jesus' presence at the wedding feast at Cana shows his respect for the goodness, necessity, and naturalness of marriage (Jn 2:1-12). In his preaching, Jesus spoke of marriage, saying that marriage belongs in this world only and that there are no marriages "at the resurrection" (Mt 22:30); in fact, some may choose not to marry for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 19:12).

Christ also restored the model of marriage that was present at the beginning of creation. He said that the permission given by Moses for divorce was a concession to the hardness of hearts of the people. He added, "Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Mt 19:6).

The letters of St. Paul also contain some important teachings about marriage. Paul wrote that the rights of both husbands and wives must be upheld in marriage: "The husband fulfils his duty toward his wife, and likewise the wife toward her husband" (1 Cor 7:3). Other examples of New Testament attitudes toward marriage are more ambiguous. Paul tells the people of Corinth that, if they can contain their lust, it is better not to marry (see 1 Cor 7:8 ff.) Yet, Paul concluded that marriage is a great mystery that mirrors the Lord's relationship to the Church: "This is a great

mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and his church. In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself, and the wife should respect her husband (Eph 5:32-33).

By the fifth century, Church fathers like St. Augustine expanded on Paul's writings, teaching that marriage is a sacrament of the relationship between Christ and his Church. Augustine found sexual relations during marriage tolerable, but he did not see sex as the primary purpose of marriage. He held that sexual intercourse was only morally justifiable with the couple's intention to have children. He also believed that original sin had so affected human sexuality that intercourse always carried some moral evil. For Augustine, the primary purpose of marriage was to increase the couple's holiness.

During the twelfth century, theologians and canon lawyers named marriage as one of the seven sacraments. Both the Council of Florence (1439) and the Council of Trent (1563) taught this doctrine. Also at Trent, the Church reaffirmed Christ's teaching that marriage is a sacrament lasting until the death of a spouse.

**Changing Wedding Customs:** In the first century marriage rites presumably followed Jewish and pagan customs with the elimination of anything that was explicitly objectionable to Christians. The majority of marriages took place in the home and were private celebrations that did not require the presence of Church leaders. A marriage contract was publicly agreed upon by both families. The groom and the veiled bride were brought together and blessed by a family member, often the bride's father. A feast followed.

Late in the first century Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, said that it was better if Christians married with the approval of the local bishop so that "their marriage may be according to the Lord, and not after their own lust" (Letter to Polycarp). He did not, however, suggest any particular form for a Christian marriage and neither he nor the Church said that the bishop's approval was required for a marriage. In 866 Pope Nicholas said that marriage by mutual consent was valid without the presence of any clergy and without any type of ceremony.

It was not until the eleventh century that bishops started calling for the blessing of secular weddings, and not until the twelfth century that there was an established (although not required) liturgical wedding ceremony. It was only at the Council of

Trent in the sixteenth century that the Church declared that a marriage was only valid if it was celebrated before a priest and two witnesses. This significant development was primarily aimed at eliminating the problem of clandestine marriages, which disrupted society because they made legal rights and responsibilities difficult to assess particularly in relation to the inheritance of property.

Although a religious ceremony was not required for a Christian marriage before Trent, certain specifically Christian customs started to develop for weddings much earlier. After the fourth century, Christian weddings became increasingly common. The marriage blessing began to take on a definite liturgical structure and there was an increasing reluctance on the part of Christians to marry during Advent or Lent. In some places a celebration of the Eucharist followed the blessing of the couple, and on occasion the Eucharist actually replaced the traditional wedding feast.

The primary image of marriage through most of the first two millennia was that of a contract. In the Middle Ages the front steps of the church became the place where legal contracts were ratified before God and before the Church; therefore, marriages gradually moved from the home to the outside steps of the church. The push to have marriages take place inside the Church grew stronger as the need grew for written documentation to prove the man and woman's legitimate births and the rights of inheritance. Priests were the only people in most villages who could read and write; therefore it became necessary to have a priest present at the wedding. It was only around the sixteenth century that all marriages moved into the church and that the celebration of a nuptial mass became the norm.

During the Middle Ages there was a great deal of debate over the essential act that legitimized a marriage. According to Roman custom, the essential element for a marriage was the mutual consent of the couple. However, the Germanic custom saw families arrange the marriages of men and women of the right age. Under this custom, the marriage was ratified when the couple consummated the marriage, that is, as soon as they had sexual intercourse. Ultimately, a series of popes taught that the immediate cause and validity of marriage was a couple's consent, nothing else. Wedding vows had to be pronounced both freely and in public. Thus they became the first liturgical pieces in the vernacular, the common language of the people. Wedding vows themselves have changed very little over the centuries.

One of the major changes in the wedding ceremony since the Second Vatican Council has been the stress on the equality of the marriage partners. The pre-Vatican II rite included a prayer for the bride that she be "faithful to one embrace ... honorable in her chastity." There was no similar prayer for the groom. Today's rite contains no such inequalities.

As a sacrament, marriage must be something which God has given to us to both reveal God and to make God's presence a tangible reality. Marriage does not just limit something negative; it offers something positive. The Second Vatican Council said, "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love." Through mutual self-giving, the spouses sanctify one another and cooperate with the life-giving love of God (GS 48-50). Marriage is "ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring" (CCC, 1601).

**Catholic Marriage Today:** A good challenge question to stump a Catholic friend might be "Who is the minister of the sacrament of Matrimony?" In the Latin rite the ministers of the sacrament of Matrimony are the spouses themselves. The essential element of marriage remains the exchange of consent by the bride and groom. The priest or deacon who presides at the wedding receives the consent of the couple in the name of the Church and offers the blessing of the Church on the marriage.

The rite of marriage itself begins with the priest or deacon asking the couple to express their desire to marry and their understanding and acceptance of the permanence of marriage and of the two ends of marriage. The couple then makes a lifelong, unconditional covenant with each other through the exchange of vows. If the couple is exchanging rings, the priest or deacon blesses the wedding rings and the couple exchanges them as a sign of their love and fidelity. The wedding liturgy concludes with a blessing of the couple.

A sacramental marriage is important because as a liturgical act it establishes rights and duties within the Church. All who are baptized are members of the body of Christ, which is the Church. No member of the body can do anything without affecting and being affected by the rest of the body. When a member of the body marries, the body is changed. A Church marriage acknowledges the fact that the

marriage will affect the Church community and that the Church community will have a role in the marriage.

When two Catholics marry, the rite of marriage itself normally takes place during a Mass after the homily. When a Catholic marries an unbaptized person the rite of marriage takes place outside of Mass and is preceded by the liturgy of the Word. When a Catholic marries a baptized non-Catholic, the rite of marriage may take place within or outside of the Mass, although since the non-Catholic cannot receive the Eucharist many feel that it is preferable to have only a liturgy of the Word.

**The Rite of Marriage:** The rite of marriage begins with the priest (or deacon) asking the bride and bridegroom to state their intentions. He questions them about their freedom of choice, their faithfulness to each other, and their willingness to accept and raise children. He asks three questions like the following, with each person answering separately. “N. and N., have you come here freely and -without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage? Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives? Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?”

The priest then asks the couple to declare their consent before God and the Church. They join hands and take turns saying their vows. One of the two forms they may select is: “I, N., take you, N., to be my wife/ husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.”

Receiving their consent, the priest says: “You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God has joined, men must not divide.” The blessing and exchange of rings follows. Then the minister offers a blessing on each of them and their life together.

**Choosing Who to Marry:** Catholics are encouraged to marry other Catholics. When spouses do not share the same faith or the same religious practices, tensions can arise, especially when it comes: to educating children. When a Catholic marries a baptized non-Catholic, there is a danger that the couple will experience the pain of Christian separation even in the heart of their own home. When a

Catholic marries an unbaptized person the disparities are even greater and the resulting tensions can be more difficult to overcome. Couples with very different perspectives on faith may be tempted toward religious indifference.

If a Catholic wishes to marry a baptized non-Catholic, he or she needs the express permission of the bishop in order for the Church to recognize the marriage. If a Catholic wishes to marry an unbaptized person he or she needs a special dispensation in order for the marriage to be valid.

In order to receive either permission or a dispensation both members of the couple need to understand and accept the essential ends and properties of marriage. Both have to understand and accept the permanent and exclusive nature' of the marriage covenant, and the importance of mutual love and support. They must be open to having children. Furthermore, the Catholic partner has to promise that he or she intends to remain a Catholic and to do what is reasonably in his or her power to pass on the Catholic faith to any children that the couple might have. The non-Catholic partner must be made aware of the Catholic partner's promises.

Nevertheless, the non-Catholic remains free to do all that is reasonably in his or her power to share his or her own faith with the child. When the priest or deacon who will officiate at the marriage has questioned the couple about these things and received their consent, he applies to the bishop for the particular dispensation.

**Divorce, Remarriage, and Annulment:** Jesus spoke clearly on the permanence of marriage: "What God has joined together, no human being must separate;" and, "Whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery" (Mt 19:6, 9). The Church has consistently taught that divorce and remarriage is unacceptable.

Divorce, of itself, is a "grave offense against the natural law" {CCC, 2384). It is a serious offense against the sacramental bond of marriage. Sometimes it involves the desertion of a spouse and children, which is a particularly callous disregard for God's law. In many cases, one of the spouses is an innocent victim of a civil divorce. There is a great difference between a spouse who has consistently tried to be faithful to the promises of the sacrament of marriage, and one who has been unfaithful, abandoned the other, or through sin has destroyed a marriage.

One cause of divorce is adultery, or marital infidelity. When two people, at least one of whom is married to another partner, have sexual relations of any kind, they commit adultery. Christ called even the mere desire for sex outside of marriage adultery: "But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28). Adultery is a sin against the sixth commandment.

Due to adultery of one spouse or for other reasons in which a couple may not be able to live in harmony, the Church allows them to choose to live apart, but they are still married before God. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife, and they are not free to begin a new union with someone else. Even if a person receives a civil divorce, he or she remains fully in communion with the Church and is able to receive the sacraments. The best solution in this situation is the reconciliation of the spouses, if possible. The Christian community is responsible to help persons in this situation remain faithful to their marriage bond which is unbreakable.

The Church does not permit divorce and remarriage because Jesus forbade it. Although the state has authority to dissolve certain legal aspects of a marriage (called a civil divorce), it has no authority to dissolve a sacramental marriage. The Church teaches that a second marriage is not valid if the first marriage was valid. This is because a second marriage in such a case is seen as -a direct violation of the plan and law of God as taught by Christ. When divorced people are remarried civilly, they cannot receive the Eucharist as long as the situation remains the same.

Reconciliation through the sacrament of Penance is granted to those who repent, and who are committed to living chastely. The Church responds pastorally to divorced people who have remarried civilly in many ways so that they can keep their faith and bring their children up in the faith. Pope John Paul II taught in *Familiaris consortio* that these baptized members of the community should continue to listen to God's Word, attend Mass, pray, do works of charity, raise their children in the Catholic faith, practice penance, and seek out God's grace each day.

In some instances the Church recognizes that even though a couple was legally married, they were never in fact joined by God. In such cases the Church may grant an annulment so that the man and woman may marry again. The primary grounds for an annulment is found in an attitude which goes against the most basic

Catholic understanding of marriage. If one of the spouses rejected one of the purposes of marriage or one of the primary characteristics of the covenant relationship, that would be an indication that a true covenant was never established and sealed by God. For example, an annulment may be granted if one partner did not want children, if one partner never viewed marriage as permanent, if one partner did not think that fidelity was important, or if one partner had no intention of loving and supporting the other.

Annulments may also be granted if the original consent given by the couple was seriously flawed in some way. An annulment may be given if consent was the result of force or fear, if one or both people were incapable of understanding the true nature of consent, if one or both people were unable to fulfill the obligations of marriage, or if one or both people believed that they were giving their consent to someone other than the person to whom they were actually giving it. Finally, annulments may be granted when the two people contracted a marriage that was not legal according to the laws of the Church.

It is important to remember that an annulment does not affect the legitimacy of any children. What is more, an annulment does not imply that there was no good in the relationship. An annulment is simply a recognition by the Church that this particular union was never a sacramental marriage.

**Other Offenses Against Marriage:** The Catechism of the Catholic Church names three other offenses against the dignity of marriage. They are:

- Polygamy is the offense of a man who has more than one wife.
- Incest involves a person who has intimate relations with a relative or in-law within a degree of kinship that prohibits marriage between them. Connected to incest is any sexual abuse by an adult to children or adolescents in their care.
- Free union refers to couples who live together without exchanging marriage vows. A free union is contrary to moral law, as sexual intercourse must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it is always a serious sin keeping the person(s) from sacramental communion. Related to free union is the so-called "trial marriage" where the couple intends to get

married later. This behavior, too, is sinful and not permitted by the Church for the same reasons as described above.