

Defining and Celebrating Marriage

CCC 1621-1654

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Saint Leo the Great said that all that was visible of Christ, all that he lived and did has passed on to us through the sacraments.

II. The Celebration of Marriage

1621 In the Latin Rite the celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful **normally takes place during Holy Mass**, because of the connection of all the sacraments with **the Paschal mystery of Christ**. *In the Eucharist the memorial of the New Covenant is realized, the New Covenant in which Christ has united himself for ever to the Church, his beloved bride for whom he gave himself up.*¹²¹ It is therefore fitting that the spouses should **seal their consent** to give themselves to each other through the offering of their own lives *by uniting it to the offering of Christ for his Church made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice, and by receiving the Eucharist so that, communicating in the same Body and the same Blood of Christ*, they may form but "one body" in Christ.

1622 "Inasmuch as it is **a sacramental action of sanctification**, the liturgical celebration of marriage . . . must be, per se, valid, worthy, and fruitful."¹²² It is therefore appropriate for **the bride and groom to prepare themselves for the celebration of their marriage by receiving the sacrament of penance**.

1623 In the Latin Church, it is ordinarily understood that **the spouses, as ministers of Christ's grace, mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church**. In the Eastern liturgies the minister of this sacrament (which is called "Crowning") is the priest or bishop who, after receiving the mutual consent of the spouses, successively crowns the bridegroom and the bride as a sign of the marriage covenant.

1624 The various liturgies abound in prayers of blessing and epiclesis asking God's grace and blessing on the new couple, especially the bride. **In the epiclesis of this sacrament** the spouses receive the Holy Spirit as the communion of love of Christ and the Church.¹²⁴ **The Holy Spirit is the seal of their covenant, the ever available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity.**

III. Matrimonial Consent

1625 The parties to a marriage covenant are a **baptized** man and woman, free to contract marriage, who **freely express their consent**; "to be free" means:

- not being under constraint;
- not impeded by any natural or ecclesiastical law.

1626 The Church holds the exchange of consent between the spouses to be **the indispensable element** that "makes the marriage." If consent is lacking there is no marriage.

1627 The consent consists in a **"human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other"**: "I take you to be my wife" - "I take you to be my husband."¹²⁶ This consent that binds the spouses to each other **finds its fulfillment in the two "becoming one flesh."**

1628 The consent must be ***an act of the will of each of the contracting parties, free of coercion or grave external fear.*** **No human power can substitute for this consent.** If this freedom is lacking the marriage is invalid.

1629 For this reason (or for other reasons that render the marriage null and void) the Church, after an examination of the situation by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal, can declare the nullity of a marriage, i.e., **that the marriage never existed.**¹³⁰ In this case the contracting parties are free to marry, provided the natural obligations of a previous union are discharged.

1630 The priest (or deacon) who assists at the celebration of a marriage **receives** the consent of the spouses in the name of the Church and gives the blessing of the Church. the presence of the Church's minister (and also of the witnesses) visibly expresses the fact that marriage is **an ecclesial reality.**

1631 This is the reason why the Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form. Several reasons converge to explain this requirement:

- Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church;
- Marriage introduces one into an ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children;
- Since **marriage is a state of life in the Church**, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses);
- the public character of the consent protects the "I do" once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it.

1632 So that the "I do" of the spouses may be a **free and responsible act** and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, **preparation** for marriage is of prime importance.

The example and teaching given by parents and families remain the special form of this preparation.

The role of pastors and of the Christian community as the "family of God" is indispensable for the transmission of the human and Christian values of marriage and family,¹³³ and much more so in our era when many young people experience broken homes which no longer sufficiently assure this initiation:

It is imperative to give suitable and timely instruction to young people, above all in the heart of their own families, about the dignity of married love, its role and its exercise, so that, having learned the value of chastity, they will be able at a suitable age to engage in honorable courtship and enter upon a marriage of their own.

Mixed marriages and disparity of cult

1633 In many countries the situation of a mixed marriage (marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic) often arises. It requires particular attention on the part of couples and their pastors. A case of marriage with disparity of cult (between a Catholic and a nonbaptized person) requires even greater circumspection.

1634 **Difference of confession between the spouses does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle for marriage, when they succeed in placing in common what they have received from their respective communities, and learn from each other the way in which each lives in fidelity to Christ. But the difficulties of mixed marriages must not be underestimated.** They arise from the fact that the separation of Christians has not yet been overcome. **the spouses risk experiencing the tragedy of Christian disunity even in the heart of their own home. Disparity of cult can further aggravate these difficulties.** Differences about faith and the very notion of marriage, but also different religious mentalities, can become sources of tension in marriage, especially as regards the education of children. the temptation to religious indifference can then arise.

1635 According to the law in force in the Latin Church, a mixed marriage needs **for liceity the express permission of ecclesiastical authority**. In case of disparity of cult **an express dispensation from this impediment is required for the validity of the marriage**. This permission or dispensation presupposes that both parties know and do not exclude the essential ends and properties of marriage and the obligations assumed by the Catholic party concerning **the baptism and education of the children in the Catholic Church**.

1636 Through ecumenical dialogue Christian communities in many regions have been able to put into effect **a common pastoral practice for mixed marriages**. Its task is to help such couples live out their particular situation in the light of faith, overcome the tensions between the couple's obligations to each other and towards their ecclesial communities, and **encourage the flowering of what is common to them in faith and respect for what separates them**.

1637 **In marriages with disparity of cult the Catholic spouse has a particular task: "For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband." It is a great joy for the Christian spouse and for the Church if this "consecration" should lead to the free conversion of the other spouse to the Christian faith.**¹³⁹ **Sincere married love, the humble and patient practice of the family virtues, and perseverance in prayer can prepare the non-believing spouse to accept the grace of conversion.**

IV. The Effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony

1638 **"From a valid marriage arises a bond between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state by a special sacrament."**

The marriage bond

1639 **The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself.**¹⁴¹ **From their covenant arises "an institution, confirmed by the divine law, . . .**

even in the eyes of society."¹⁴² **The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love."**

1640 Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. **This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality**, henceforth **irrevocable**, and *gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity*. the Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom.¹⁴⁴

The grace of the sacrament of Matrimony

1641 "By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God."¹⁴⁵ ***This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."***

1642 **Christ is the source of this grace.** "Just as of old God encountered his people with a covenant of love and fidelity, so our Savior, the spouse of the Church, now encounters Christian spouses through the sacrament of Matrimony." **Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb:**

How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit.

V. The Goods and Requirements of Conjugal Love

1643 **"Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility.** In a word it is a question of **the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance** which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values."

The unity and indissolubility of marriage

1644 **The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses' community of persons, which embraces their entire life: "so they are no longer two, but one flesh."** **They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving."**¹⁵² **This human communion is confirmed, purified, and completed by communion in Jesus Christ, given through the sacrament of Matrimony. It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.**

1645 "The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife **in mutual and unreserved affection.**"¹⁵³ Polygamy is contrary to **conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive.**¹⁵⁴

The fidelity of conjugal love

1646 **By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses.** This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement "until further notice." the "intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, **demand total fidelity** from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them."

1647 **The deepest reason is found in the fidelity of God to his covenant, in that of Christ to his Church.** Through the sacrament of Matrimony the spouses are enabled to represent this fidelity and witness to it. Through the sacrament, the indissolubility of marriage receives a new and deeper meaning.

1648 **It can seem difficult, even impossible, to bind oneself for life to another human being.** This makes it all the more important to proclaim the Good News that God loves us with a definitive and irrevocable love, that married couples share in this love, that it supports and sustains them, and that by their own faithfulness they can be witnesses to God's faithful love. Spouses who with God's grace give this witness, often in very difficult conditions, **deserve the gratitude and support of the ecclesial community.**

1649 **Yet there are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons. In such cases the Church permits the physical separation of the couple and their living apart. the spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union.** In this difficult situation, the best solution would be, if possible, reconciliation. the Christian community is called to help these persons live out their situation in a Christian manner and in fidelity to their marriage bond which remains indissoluble.

1650 Today there are numerous Catholics in many countries who have recourse to civil divorce and contract new civil unions. In fidelity to the words of Jesus Christ - "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" The Church maintains that a new union cannot be recognized as valid, if the first marriage was. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God's law. Consequently, they cannot receive Eucharistic communion as long as this situation persists. For the same reason, they cannot exercise certain ecclesial responsibilities. **Reconciliation through the sacrament of Penance can be granted only to those who have repented for having violated the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ, and who are committed to living in complete continence.**

1651 Toward Christians who live in this situation, and who often keep the faith and desire to bring up their children in a Christian manner, priests and the whole community must manifest an attentive solicitude, **so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church, in whose life they can and must participate as baptized persons:**

They should be encouraged to listen to the Word of God, to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass, to persevere in prayer, to contribute to works of charity and to community efforts for justice, to bring up their children in the Christian faith, to cultivate the spirit and practice of penance and thus implore, day by day, God's grace.

The openness to fertility

1652 "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."

Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of the parents themselves. God himself said: "It is not good that man should be alone," and "from the beginning (he) made them male and female"; wishing to associate them in a special way in his own creative work, God blessed man and woman with the words: "Be fruitful and multiply." Hence, true married love and the whole structure of family life which results from it, without diminishment of the other ends of marriage, are directed to disposing the spouses to cooperate valiantly with the love of the Creator and Savior, who through them will increase and enrich his family from day to day.

1653 **The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life.**

NB:

Keep in mind too Natural Family Planning Methods.

1654 **Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice.**

Work and pray to have a happy marriage. Saint Ignatius of Loyola said: Work as if everything depends on you, and pray as if everything depends on God.