

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

In a marriage, a man and a woman pledge themselves to one another in an unbreakable alliance of total mutual self-giving – a total union of love! This Love is not a passing emotion or temporary infatuation but a responsible and free decision to bind oneself completely ‘in good times and in bad’ to one’s married partner. It is the gift of oneself to the other. It is a love proclaimed before the eyes of the whole world. It is unconditional. To be capable of such love calls for careful preparation from early childhood. The love of husband and wife in God’s plan leads beyond itself and new life is generated, a family is born. Marriage is a holy sacrament. Those baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus are married in his name also. Their love is a sharing in the love of God. He is the source. The marriage of Christian couples are images on earth of the wonder of God, the loving, life-giving communion of three persons in God, and of God’s covenant in Christ with the Church. Christian marriage is a sacrament of salvation. It is the pathway to holiness for all members of the family.

Saint John Paul 11

A Natural Institution

Marriage is a practice common to all cultures in all ages. It is, therefore, a natural institution, something common to all mankind. At its most basic level, marriage is a union **between a man and a woman** for the purpose of procreation and mutual support, or love. Each spouse in a marriage gives up some rights over his or her life in exchange for rights over the life of the other spouse.

- The Church can never condone same-sex so-called 'marriage' because it contravenes the natural law and the teaching on marriage, rooted in Sacred Scripture.

The Elements of a Natural Marriage

1. It is a union of **opposite sexes**.
2. It is a **lifelong union**, ending only with the death of one spouse. Divorce strikes at the heart of marriage.
3. It **excludes a union with any other person** so long as the marriage exists.
4. Its lifelong nature and exclusiveness are guaranteed by contract.
5. Marriage must be open to **the procreation of children**.
6. Artificial contraception is incompatible with Christian marriage. (see article on contraception)

A Supernatural Institution

- In the Catholic Church, however, marriage is more than a natural institution; it was elevated by Christ Himself, in His participation in the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), to be one of the seven sacraments. A marriage between two Christians, therefore, has a supernatural element as well as a natural one. For their marriage to be valid, baptised Catholics must marry in the Catholic Church unless they have special permission from the bishop to marry outside it.

The Ministers of the Sacrament

- The ministers of the sacrament are the spouses themselves.

The Mark and Effect of the Sacrament

The spouses are the ministers of the sacrament of marriage because the mark—the external sign—of the sacrament is not the wedding Mass or anything the priest might do but the marriage contract itself i.e. the vows that each spouse makes to the other. As long as each spouse intends to contract a true marriage, the sacrament is performed.

- The effect of the sacrament is an increase in sanctifying grace for the spouses, a participation in the divine life of God Himself.

The Union of Christ and His

Church

- This sanctifying grace helps each spouse to help the other advance in holiness, and it helps them together to cooperate in God's plan of redemption by raising up children in the Faith.
- In this way, sacramental marriage is more than a **union of a man and a woman**; it is, in fact, a type and symbol of the divine union between Christ, the Bridegroom, and His Church, the Bride. As married Christians, open to the creation of new life and committed to their mutual salvation, they participate not only in God's creative act but in the redemptive act of Christ.

WHAT THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC SAYS ABOUT MARRIAGE

- **1659** St. Paul said: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. . . . This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:25, 32).
- **1660** The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education

of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament (cf. CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. GS 48 § 1).

- **1661** The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1799).
- **1662** Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love.
- **1663** Since marriage establishes the couple in a public state of life in the Church, it is fitting that its celebration be public, in the framework of a liturgical celebration, before the priest (or a witness authorized by the Church), the witnesses, and the assembly of the faithful.
- **1664** Unity, indissolubility, and openness to fertility are essential to marriage. Polygamy is incompatible with the unity of marriage; divorce separates what God has joined together; the refusal of fertility turns married life away from its "supreme gift," the child (GS 50 § 1).
- **1665** The remarriage of persons divorced from a living, lawful spouse contravenes the plan and law of God as taught by Christ. They are not separated from the Church but they

cannot receive Eucharistic communion. They will lead Christian lives especially by educating their children in the faith. (*The 'new' marriage can be validated by the church after an annulment or dissolution of the first marriage has taken place. The catholic party may then resume receiving Holy Communion, having first been to confession. Pope Francis has made the process of annulment less arduous*). Couples are not to be afraid to approach the church for an annulment.

- **1666** The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called "the domestic church," a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.