

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-gender so called 'marriage' because it goes against her teaching on marriage, based on Sacred Scripture.
- Slavery, for instance, was legal and considered legitimate in the 16th and seventeenth centuries but later people had a conscience about it and it was abolished. In decades to come the same is likely to happen with abortion, euthanasia, same gender marriage and contraception. I would say that future generations will abolish all these things. Smoking was very socially acceptable for at least the first half of the 20th century but now it is taboo – another example of being wise after the event.

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)

- So, even at a natural level, divorce, adultery, and "homosexual marriage" are incompatible with christian marriage.

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.