

The Sacrament of Marriage
Second Sunday of Ordinary Time
1/17/07
Presented by Michael Fetsko

Opening Prayer

The Gospel reading on the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time is the account of the wedding at Cana, where Jesus performs the first of his many public signs (miracles) at the request of Mary, turning the water into wine. It provides us the opportunity to analyze the importance of the Sacrament of Marriage in our Christian lives.

Sacrament – an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace. There are seven sacraments of the Catholic Church: 1. Baptism. 2. Reconciliation. 3. Holy Eucharist. 4. Confirmation. 5. Marriage. 6. Holy Orders (ordination of priests). 7. Anointing of the Sick.

Marriage is among the first of those, with the story of Adam and Eve. There is a sense, from the very beginning, that one person isn't complete without another. They understood that they were built for each other. It was physically and spiritually evident.

And Jesus makes it perfectly clear that marriage is more than just an “agreement” between a man and a woman.

The Jewish people of his time had condoned divorce, often leaving the women with nothing. Men could basically go as they pleased. Jesus rebukes this.

[Matthew 19:1-12](#)

When Jesus finished these words, he left Galilee and went to the district of Judea across the Jordan. Great crowds followed him, and he cured them there. Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss (her)?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another, commits adultery." [His] disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept [this] word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

So with these words, in this secular age we live in today with its more “relaxed” attitudes toward marriage, the Catholic Church holds firm in its feelings toward the permanence of marriage.

The heart of Christian marriage is made evident in Pope John Paul II’s [“Theology of the Body,”](#) which was the first major teaching project of his pontificate and comes from 129 short talks between September of 1979 and November of 1984. (See [Of the Unity and Indissolubility of Marriage](#))

The Church teaches us that we’re a unique combination of body and soul, and that sets us apart from all other species. We’re an act of unique love. We’re here to love him in his life and be with him in the next. We’re made in love and for love. He made two kinds of people and ordered them to “be fruitful and multiply.” Marriage stems from this, and all of humanity unfolds from there. Thus the importance of marriage. Married people are called to be co-creators. God acts through people, and this is one of the ways.

Through marriage, we become images of Christ, who is often referred to as the bridegroom with the Church as the bride. This relationship of Christ to His Church is unchanging, permanent and perfect. Thus there is a supernatural permanence to marriage as well. This is not just the Church saying people should get married. It’s part of God’s plan for humanity.

The Sacrament of Marriage is different than legal marriage. Legal marriage is essentially a contract, and contracts can be broken. The Sacrament of Marriage can’t be broken like that, but there is something called annulment.

Annulment:

- For any sacrament, the person entering into it needs to do so understanding what it means. It needs to be a free-will act
- Entry into a sacrament isn’t valid if someone is not aware of its permanence, or if they are coerced into it
- Annulment is requested of and granted by the church if certain aspects of the marriage can prove it to be invalid. If someone can say they were coerced into the marriage, then they might be granted an annulment. They might also be given an annulment by the Church if they can say they didn’t fully understand the nature of the commitment. Annulments are also given under other circumstances where it is shown that one or both spouses in a marriage didn’t enter into the sacrament properly, with the right intentions or an honest understanding of it.

Henry VIII started the Church of England because the Vatican wouldn’t invalidate his first marriage, to Anne Boleyn, which he sought because they hadn’t succeeded in producing a male heir to his throne. The Vatican refused, so Henry VIII broke off and started his own church, the Church of England. This church became the first to accept divorce. This shows the importance Catholics place on marriage: the Church then would rather face a major schism, the breaking off of England, than renounce its standards for marriage.

There are two purposes for Catholic marriage:

1. Begetting and raising of children
2. Unity of the man and the woman

Therefore, one of the aspects of marriage that the Church is notorious for is procreation and the use of birth control. It alone holds firm to these standards, that a married couple must always “remain open” to the fruitfulness of marriage, and that frustrating that process is damaging and interferes with God’s grace in our lives.

In 1930, the Church of England (once again) breaks with Catholic teaching and condones the use of birth control. The Catholic Church considered the matter, but in 1968, with his [*Humanae Vitae*](#), Pope Paul VI explains why the Church must uphold its historical teachings on the matter. Thus the Church stands alone in its position.

Lastly, marriage is a liturgical act, meaning that is performed in a communal setting among the faithful, and there’s a form to it. (Mass is a liturgical act in the same way.) And marriage is unique among the sacraments, in that it’s the only one where the priest does not confer the sacrament. He is a witness. The man and the woman confer the sacrament upon each other.