

Marriage Preparation

Session 2

Marriage as the Original Sacrament

- Diocese of Colorado Springs

Marriage as the Original Sacrament

- Although marriage was not made a proper sacrament of the New Covenant until Christ, it has been an image of God from the beginning.
- A sacrament is a visible sign that points to, and in a way makes present, a greater invisible reality.
- All creation is a “sacrament” of the Creator; its beauty, order, and goodness all reveal his beauty and goodness.
- The human body as male or female is also a “sacrament” because it reveals God.
- The capacity for personal communion written into human flesh precisely as male or female reveals the inner life of the Trinity as an external communion of persons and the invitation to man and woman to share in this exchange of love. (CCC 221)
- The one-flesh union of man and wife in marriage, and the new life it bears, is the most perfect created image of the communion of Divine Persons (TOB, 12/30/81)

Marriage as the Original Sacrament (con't)

- Scripture begins and ends with a marriage (Gen 1:26-27; Rev 19:7).
- Nuptial imagery is the interpretive key, not just to Scripture, but to the whole meaning of human existence and God's interaction with man.
- Marriage is the key to interpreting reality!
- Saint Pope John Paul II therefore calls marriage the “primordial,” or original sacrament:

Saint Pope John Paul II

“The sacrament, as a visible sign, is constituted by man inasmuch as he is a “body,” through his visible masculinity and femininity. The body, in fact, and only it, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be its sign.” (TOB, 2/20/80)

Marriage as the Original Sacrament (con't)

- **Fertility as an image of the Trinity**
 - The blessing of fruitfulness is part of the divine image in man.
 - Man and woman in their fruitful communion reveal God more perfectly than anything else in creation. (Gen 1:27-28)
 - Sexual love is an icon of the Trinity precisely because it generates new life.
 - Trinity: union of two persons in one loving communion from which proceeds a third person who is the fruit and symbol of their unity.
 - By the sincere gift man and woman make to each other, they establish a communion of persons not only between the two, but with the third, who proceeds from them both.
 - So the third (at least openness to the third) is essential for a marriage to be a true marriage and for sex to truly be a marital act.
 - To give life is to imitate God! Love is essentially fruitful.

Marriage as the Original Sacrament (con't)

- **An image of God's love for man**
 - The mutual love between man and woman becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. (CCC 1604)
 - This is why God used nuptial imagery to describe his love for his people throughout the Old Testament (CCC 1611; cf. Hos 1-3; Is 54,62; Jer 2-3, 31; Ezek 16, 23; Mal 2:13-17).
 - He prepared his people for a deeper understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage. (CCC 1611)
 - This is why marriage was elevated by Christ to a Sacrament of the New Covenant.
 - He was going to restore the power of marriage to symbolize his Father's love for man by enabling spouses to live the truth of their unbreakable one-flesh union.
 - Christ made marriage an effective sign of God's unfailing love through the grace of matrimony.

Marriage as the Original Sacrament (con't)

- **An image of Christ's love for the Church**

- This is why St. Paul compares human marriage to the mystical marriage of Christ with his bride, the Church (Eph 5:21-33).
- Christ has united himself with the Church by giving up his body for her on the cross.
- By this gift, he gives the Church (humanity) a new identity as his bride.
- This total gift of self (including the body!) forms a union that is unbreakable.
- Hence, the indissoluble bond of marriage between a husband and wife in Christian marriage is the visible sign of the mystical union between the bridegroom (Christ) and the bride (Church).
- Earthly marriage is a foretaste and foreshadowing of the heavenly marriage.
- St. Paul says, "This is a great mystery. And I mean in respect to Christ and the Church." (Eph 5:33)

Institution of Marriage as a Sacrament

- As discussed in the previous class, marriage was created by God from the beginning to be an image of His love for man.
- The nuptial covenant between God and Israel prepared the way for a new and everlasting covenant. (CCC 1612)
- Christ fulfills the Old Covenant by becoming a man and laying down His life for us, thus joining divinity to humanity in an eternal bond.
- Through His sacrifice, Christ fulfills the original “sacramentality” of the union between man and woman making marriage a sign of His own life-giving union with His Bride, the Church.
 - Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11)
 - The Great Sacrament (Ephesians 5:21-33)

Principle Effects of the Sacrament

- **An Indissoluble Bond**

“By matrimony, therefore, the souls of the contracting parties are joined and knit together more directly and more intimately than are their bodies, and that not by any passing affection of sense or spirit, but by a deliberate and firm act of the will; and from this union of souls by God's decree, a sacred and inviolable bond arises.” (Casti Connubii 7, Vatican edition)

- The primary effect of the sacrament of matrimony is the bond (sacramentum) formed between the spouses. (CCC 1638)
- This bond is perpetual: it endures as long as the spouses live.
- This bond is exclusive: it exists only between these two and forbids that a third enters in.
- Although only the mutual, free consent of the spouses causes them to be married, it is God who seals the bond between to make it irrevocable. (CCC 1639)

Principle Effects of the Sacrament

- An Indissoluble Bond (con't)

- In every marriage two wills are involved: the human will, for each individual marriage only arises by the free consent of the spouses, and the divine will, for the nature of marriage itself as a permanent union. Once a couple has contracted marriage, they are subject to its essential laws and properties. In other words, it is the freedom of the couple which actually makes them be married, but it is beyond the power of their freedom to “unmarry” themselves while both spouses live.
- “God is the Author of the perpetual stability of the marriage bond, its unity and its firmness.” (CC 5, cf. Council of Trent, session 24)
- “A Christian marriage which is valid and has been consummated. . .by the will of God [has] the greatest firmness and indissolubility, which may not be destroyed by any human authority.” (CC 34)

Principle Effects of the Sacrament (con't)

- **Consummation**

- A marriage concluded and consummated can never be dissolved. (CCC 1640)
- As the New Covenant is everlasting because Christ gave up His Body once and for all, so “giving up” the body in a consummated marriage seals its indissolubility.
- “Giving up” the body completes marriage as a true image of Christ’s union with His Church, effected through His Body given up on the Cross. (CC 34)

Principle Effects of the Sacrament (con't)

- **Divorce**

- Divorce is not only not an option for Christians, it is not a reality. Divorce does not exist.
- Divorce is a purely human and civil invention that does not have the power to dissolve that perpetual bond instituted and guaranteed by God Himself.
- Although the couples promise fidelity, it is God's own faithfulness that guarantees the covenant between them. (CCC1640)
- Even when Israel was unfaithful to God, He never forsook them and always sought reconciliation. Likewise, Jesus will never "take back" His sacrifice on the cross which united Him forever with the Church.

Principle Effects of the Sacrament

- Divorce (con't)

- “The Church...living with Christ who lives forever, may never be divorced from Him.” (St. Augustine, *De nupt. et concup.*, lib. I, cap. 10)
- Therefore, no Christian marriage, which is the image of Christ and His Church, can be dissolved while both spouses are alive.
- Even if one spouse breaks the vows of marriage, the marriage bond itself is not broken. Violation of the covenant does not break the covenant. It simply brings punishment.
- As a matter of fact, indissolubility (along with the other essential properties of marriage) is so contained in the marriage pact itself that to express or intend anything contrary in the consent would invalidate the marriage. (CC 6, cf. St. Thomas, ST III, sup. 9, 49 art. 3)

Principle Effects of the Sacrament (con't)

- **Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18**
 - Jesus Himself taught the original indissoluble unity of the spouses.
 - In the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5) and when answering a specific questions by the Pharisees (Mt 19; Mk 10) He abrogated the concession of the Mosaic Law which allowed a husband to put away his wife (Deut 24:1-4).
 - He reminded them that “in the beginning it was not so”— that God willed marriage as an unbreakable union of two lives therefore, “what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” (Mt 19:6)

Principle Effects of the Sacrament

- Mt, Mk and Lk (con't)

- To divorce one's wife (or husband) and marry another or to marry a divorced person is adultery.
- The reaction of His apostles (Mt 19:10) is perhaps the modern reaction as well: it seems better not even to begin the apparently impossible task of lifelong fidelity to one person.
- But God does not ask the impossible. Christ Himself gives the strength to live marriage in its "new dimension" (as a true Sacrament).

Principle Effects of the Sacrament (con't)

- **Grace**

- The second immediate effect of the sacrament is marital grace. (CCC 1641)
- “Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the new covenant.” (CCC 1617)
- Marriage increases sanctifying grace in spouses (who place no obstacle to it). (CC 39)
- Spouses also receive a special “grace of state,” unique to the married state. (CCC 2004)
- This grace strengthens the unity between the couple, perfects their love, helps them to be holy, to execute the duties of their state, and to lovingly welcome and educate children.
- Unless the spouses consciously cooperate with this grace, however, “it will remain for the most part an unused talent hidden in the field.” (CC 40)

Principle Effects of the Sacrament

- Grace (con't)

- If spouses do all that lies in their power and cooperate diligently, “they will be able with ease to bear the burdens of their state and fulfill their duties.” (CC 40)
- Spouses should strive with all their might to make their marriage, not only through its own sacramental power, but through their own spirit of living it, be “always the living image of that most fruitful union of Christ with the Church.” (CC 41)
- Divine life is poured into the world through Christian marriage, which makes God’s love for man visible to all humanity.
- Divine life is also poured into the Church, as the Body of Christ is edified, strengthened, and increased by holy marriages and the children who come from them.
- Christ Himself is the source of the grace of matrimony and remains with the couple throughout their lives.

Principle Effects of the Sacrament

- Grace (con't)

“Just as God once encountered his people in a covenant of love and trust, so now as the Savior of the world and the Spouse of the Church, he encounters faithful spouses in the sacrament of Christian marriage. Moreover, he remains with them; just as he loved the Church and gave himself up for it, so do married partners, by a mutual surrender, love each other with a lasting fidelity.” (GS 48)

Principle Effects of the Sacrament (con't)

- **Natural Marriages**

- Every true (free consent without impediment) marriage between two baptized people is a sacrament, whether they intend it or not. (CCC 1601, 2360, GS 48)

Baptized persons are not capable of contracting “natural marriages.” Because Catholics are bound by canonical form they must be married in the Church in order to contract a valid (true) marriage. Catholics who attempt to contract marriage outside the Church (civil marriage) will always fail to do so. Therefore, they are not married at all. But non-Catholic Christians are not bound by canon law and are therefore sacramentally married if they are married at all. Therefore, Protestants married civilly are considered to be sacramentally married by the Catholic Church. Catholics married civilly are considered not married at all by the Catholic Church. Mixed marriages and disparity of cult are addressed in CCC 1633-1637.

Principle Effects of the Sacrament

- Natural Marriages (con't)

- Every true marriage is indissoluble, even when it is not a sacrament, since indissolubility is a fundamental property of marriage itself. (Casti Connubii 34)
- “Marriage even in the state of nature - long before it was raised to the dignity of a sacrament - carr[ied] with it a perpetual and indissoluble bond.” (Pope Pius VI as quoted in Casti Connubii 34)
- Only in Christian marriage is the indissoluble bond between a man and a woman elevated and made holy to be an effective sign of divine life.
- This is by virtue of baptism, which unites spouses to God and renders them capable of receiving divine life (sanctifying grace).

Credit

- **This material has been graciously provided to us by Dr. Marlon De La Torre, Senior Director of Evangelization for the Diocese of Columbus. He was previously the Director of Evangelization and Catechesis for the Diocese of Fort Worth where he was heavily involved with developing their diocesan marriage preparation program.**