

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

Marriage is a sacrament precisely because it is a sacred sign which brings grace and which is the image of the mystical union of Christ with the Church. But the form and image of this union consists precisely in this bond that joins man and woman to each other and which is none other than marriage itself.

In the sacrament of matrimony, a baptized man and a baptized woman vow their love in an exclusive, permanent partnership. This union is marked by love, respect, care and concern, and a commitment to share responsibility in the raising of a family if God should bless them with children.

Christian marriage is an extraordinary sign of God working through and in the ordinary. Christ Jesus has raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament. It is a holy covenant involving three persons. The couple is joined on their life journey by Jesus Christ who promises to bless, sustain and rejoice in their virtues.

THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The Second Vatican Council presents marriage as a specific vocation to holiness. Spouses are called to seek holiness in the fulfillment of their duties in their married life and to live heroically the practice of virtues.

The purpose of Christian marriage is to express mutual self-giving love, support and companionship, an intimate partnership for mutual good and the good of the society.

Also to accept children as an expression of this intimate and mutual love and to bring them up in their Christian life as a gift to society.

THE PROPERTIES OF A CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

The properties of a Christian marriage can be seen in Ephesians 5:25-32 and Genesis 2:25.

- Unity and indivisible love
- Indissolubility as in the eternal covenant and God's love (Mt.19:6)
- Sacramentality of Christian marriage – an eternal sign that promises an inward grace- this grace perfects the love of the couple for each other and strengthens the indissoluble nature of marriage.
- Fidelity – marriage proclaims an eternal, covenantal relationship through which they express the love of an ever faithful God and the everlasting love of Christ.
- Unfaithfulness undermines the very sacramental nature of marriage and leaves wounds in the couple, children and society.
- Responsibility towards each other, children and parents. What binds is love and not the law – matrimony' is from the Latin 'mater- monus' meaning the responsibility of a parent.

Marriage mirrors God's love to couples

Divine mercy would not allow God to forsake humans tainted by sin. Although pain in childbirth and the need to toil by "the sweat of your brow" were two effects of original sin, God uses marriage to help man and woman "to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self giving." (CCC 1609)

The prophets used marriage as an image to describe Yahweh's great love for his people Israel: "I shall betroth you to myself forever; I shall betroth you in uprightness and justice, and faithful love and tenderness. (Hos2:21)

The Prophet Malachi forcefully states the ideal: "Yahweh stands as witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have broken faith, even though she was your partner and your wife by covenant.

Did he not create a single being, having flesh and breath of life? (Mal 2:14-15)

Proverbs paints a picture of an ideal wife: “She is clothed in strength and dignity.” (Prov 31:25)

The books of Ruth and Tobit highlight the fidelity and tenderness of spouses. The Song of Songs describes love between a bride and a bridegroom. Because God has blessed marriage, affectionate, erotic love between a husband and wife is something good and holy and joyful.

MARRIAGE – A COVENANT

The Church teaches us that the sacrament of marriage mirrors God’s covenant of love with his people. By giving us his son, the Father loves us freely and faithfully keeps his promises to us. Jesus – the greatest sign of God’s love – draw us into community, showers us with unexpected gifts, relates to us as unique individuals, and invites us to grow in love by serving others.

In the covenant of Christian marriage, a husband and wife freely bind themselves together for life. theirs is an open-ended commitment to love exclusively. No time conditions or any other conditions are put on their relationship. In sickness or health, in poverty or wealth, in good times and in bad times, the couple promises to be faithful. Since the close of the Second Vatican Council, the Church has placed greater emphasis on marriage as a covenant while also re-emphasizing marriage as a sacrament. A marriage is established by the marriage covenant, the irrevocable consent that the spouses freely give to and receive from each other. This unique union of a man and woman and the good of the children, impose total fidelity on each of them and the unbreakable unity of their bond.

Conclusion

Couples should a pledge an promise the following commandments.

1. I shall not take my partner for granted.
2. I shall not expect perfection in my partner.
3. I shall be patient, loving, understanding, kind and true.
4. I shall tend the garden of love daily.
5. I shall not forget my wedding vows, remembering especially those words 'for better or for worse'
6. I shall not forget my true feelings. My true love will surely provided a bright sunlit room where things of the heart can be discussed freely and without fear.
7. I shall always respect my partner and shall never degrade my partner. I shall always use endearing terms, ennoble, lift up engender peace.
8. I shall take great care that my partner's trust is never violated or diminished in any way.
9. I shall give my marriage room to grow; we shall face the future together with confidence and trust.
10. We shall through all our days fear and pay due reverence to God, our Creator, never forgetting that it is He who has made us.

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