

# Christian Marriage: Responsibility and Gift

## Key Concepts

- Natural Marriage
- Covenant and Contract
- Sacrament of Marriage
- Elements of Marriage
- Married Life
- Challenges
- Opportunities
- Marriage Enrichment
- When Marriage Breaks
- Witness of Love

**Natural Marriage** - When people think they have found that special person it is natural for them to want for their union to be permanent; so they publicly express their desire to be known as life mates, as husband and wife. The Church has always recognized these types of unions as good and natural.

## **Covenant – Contract**

We recognize that all marriages have the potential for holiness. For example, the prophet Hosea presents the love and communion between a husband and a wife in marriage as prophetic symbol of the love and communion between God and Israel. In recognition of this, the Church defends the bond even in civil marriages.

## **Holiness and potential for all all marriages – Mary and Joseph**

Need for Clear Catechesis - Teach the truth in a way that is inclusive and clear – skill for communicating

“Gaudium et Spes” (49): The Vatican II document states that marriage between a man and a woman has “been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent.”

“By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown,” the document reads.

“Thus a man and a woman, who by their compact of conjugal love ‘are no longer two, but one flesh,’ render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions.”

### **Sacramental Marriage**

Not a right but a calling – sacrament of service

The Church also recognized very early in our history that Christians are called to a deeper type of union. A union which when entered by two baptized persons reflects the very interior life of God which is self-giving and self-revealing and always open to life.

This union can only be entered by two baptized Christians, a man and a woman, and can only be entered freely and with complete understanding of what their responsibilities are. When done for the right reasons and with openness to life these unions receive great graces, and are what we call Sacramental Marriages.

Canon 1055, §1 - The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of

children, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized.

- That indissoluble bond is brought into existence by the consent that the man and woman exchange with each other. The consent causes the bond.
- The Latin Rite of the Catholic Church has, over the centuries, maintained that the ministers of the sacrament are the man and the woman.
- C. 1108 of the Code of Canon Law makes it clear that the priest and the other two people present are WITNESSES

**Triple Commitment** – self, marriage, God/be a sign

### **For the good of the spouses**

The interpersonal relationship which brings about and enhances the spiritual, intellectual, physical, moral and social horizons of each other

- More than just mutual support, it is a way of enriching the lives of each other
  - Including leading others to deeper religious practice, including interfaith couples. Religion is a bond, even if the religions are different, as long as there is understanding and respect.

### **Mutuality and respect for women**

**Sexual union is part of married spirituality.** In other areas of the spiritual life, such as prayer, practice, practice, practice is the key to improvement. Same with sex in marriage. Married couples should make love as often as they can.

- Some misunderstand and think the goal is to minimize eros.

- Studies reveal low frequency of intercourse in today's marriages, although Catholic couples seem to have more sex and have more fun doing it.
- Over the course of a marriage, the sexual relationship changes. Husbands and wives need to be aware of the physical and emotional needs of the partner and be generous in accepting their requests. Both men and women experience some fluctuation of desire, so sometimes it is a matter of charity to have sex when not as interested as the spouse.

**Open to Life – families** The domestic church – a share in the love of the trinity

What is imperfect can become perfect

**Holy in the Ordinary:** Confidence that ordinary life is the stuff of holiness

Vocations are born at home. The same maturity, relationship skills, and spiritual sense that prepare a person for marriage are needed in the ordained priesthood and diaconate. Children who see their parents give generously of their time, talent and treasure for the good of others, will be able to imagine a total gift of themselves to a future spouse and to the mission of Christ.

*Follow the Way of Love* (1994) reminded families that they carry on the mission of Jesus in the tangible expressions of care, particularly in times of illness and stress. When we visit grandparents in their declining years and take children to mourn their loss at the end, we prepare them to value the sacramental anointing in their own lives, when the time comes.

**When Marriage Breaks** - Although there is no such thing as a Catholic Divorce, the fact is that, many people (and here we might need to include ourselves) on the day of their wedding were not capable or willing to freely enter this type of spiritual bond.

in the culture in which we live, with what our children see about marriage in the media, what they learn in schools and even by what they experience in the divorce of their own families, the sad reality is... there are many, many people that are not capable of entering Sacramental Marriage the day of their wedding because of they live with a warped idea of what the Church means when she says "marriage". So after their divorce they find themselves lost, hurt and afraid."

Annulment advocates and pastoral ministers in parishes who help prepare couples need to present realistic picture of annulment process, but be positive about the benefits as well - healing from past mistakes and painful memories will bring new freedom to accept and give God's forgiveness and grace so next marriage can be a sacrament in fullest sense of the word.

Some abused women believe that Catholic Church teaching on the permanence of marriage requires them to stay in an abusive relationship. They may hesitate to seek a separation or divorce. They may fear that they cannot re-marry in the Catholic Church.

In *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*, the Catholic bishops emphasize that "no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage." Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage. Abused persons who have divorced may want to investigate the possibility of seeking an annulment.