

What is Marriage?

(First, what it is *not*)

- We see all kinds of marriages on TV and movies and in our culture – some really good, others really bad – and we hear all kinds of things that people think about marriage. So, it's important to start with what marriage isn't. It's not a social contract, it's not a human institution, it's not a patriarchal construct, it's not "just a piece of paper".

So then, really, what is it?

1. Marriage is a Covenant

- A sacred agreement between people, or between God & His people
- Marriage is a covenant not just between a man and woman, but between the man and woman and God.
- Because it is a sacred covenant, it is exclusive and perpetual (it cannot be dissolved, and you cannot enter into the marriage covenant with more than one person)
- Authored by God – see Genesis – for the *good* of the spouses
 - "Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness."
(Made by love, for love)
 - God is a communion of persons; we are made in His image and likeness; we are made for community (for relationship, for sincere gift of self to others) Marriage is ONE way that we are called to communion, intimacy with others (family life, friendship)
 - "God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
 - God knew it wasn't good for Adam to be alone, because God made Adam for communion. So, he created Eve. She was the only one in all of creation who could truly receive and return Adam's love. "This one at last is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh"

2. Marriage is a Sacrament

- A visible sign of God's grace, instituted by Christ, entrusted to the Church
- By making it a Sacrament, God promises to bless the union, to give the couple grace to become holy, and to use their married love to bring them and others to heaven.
- Looking at the Catholic wedding rite tells us about the Sacrament
 - Man & Woman are the ministers
 - Community
 - Exchange of consent (free, total, faithful, fruitful)
 - *"(Name) and (name), have you come here to enter into Marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?"*
 - "Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?"*
 - "Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?"*

- This becomes a good “check list” when we’re examining what is good in marriage and in expressing our human sexuality – are we free? is it based in a total gift of self? is it faithful to the vows I’ve made? is it open to bearing new life? If we answer no to any of those questions...then we know it doesn’t honor marriage, or the proper use of our sexuality.
- Vows - A promise and gift of love no matter what and God makes a promise to us to give us the grace to live it day in and day out
- Rings – Sign of love and fidelity; the ring you place on your spouse’s finger is a sign of YOUR love, your promise of faithfulness and service (not a sign of ownership)
- Nuptial Blessing – prayer of the Church for the spouses, acknowledging their role in helping to get the other to heaven, and calls to mind those married men and women who play a great role in Salvation History

3. Marriage is a Vocation

- A vocation is a calling that God gives us for this life so that we can be with him in the next life. We are each given the vocation to love. This is the calling placed on everyone’s heart. How each person lives out that vocation to love is different;
- It is something we are called to, for our good, for the good of others

Purpose of Marriage

1. Unitive (as Christ and his Church)

- The first purpose of marriage is the indissoluble union between husband and wife
- Images and imitates the cross
 - Marriage is a visible sign of Christ’s love for His Church (Ephesians)
 - Good marriages imitate the love of Christ and His Church
 - Ephesians 5: “Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church... ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’”
- That one-flesh union is the love of the husband and wife expressed in sex. And that union is a visible sign of the vows they made – to give of themselves totally and receive the other totally

2. Procreative (as the Trinity)

- The most tangible fruits of sexual union is New Life. Procreation. Bringing children into the world (eternal souls)
- In their married love, man and woman image the fruitfulness of the Trinity man and woman share in the creative power to bring forth new life!
- Marriage is intended to bring forth life, (children, but also fruitful in other ways, giving spiritual life to the community) and that is another reason why marriage is so powerful.
- They become a gift to one another, and their marriage becomes a gift to the world.