

Matrimony

United in Love, Strengthened for Service

In Christian marriage, spouses model the love and self-gift of Christ. By giving of themselves and serving one another, their family, and community, they help one another live out Christ's call to discipleship, love, and service. Marriage provides a foundation for a family committed to community, solidarity, and Jesus' mission in the world.

The love between spouses in marriage reflects the love of Christ for the Church.

The mutual love of spouses reflects God's own love for humanity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], no. 1604). In Scripture, God's "communion of love" with his people is seen in the covenant he forms with them, as well as in Jesus' self-offering on the Cross. The covenant of love into which spouses enter in marriage reflects the love of Christ for the Church and his self-gift on behalf of humanity (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* [*Compendium*], no. 219).

Marriage reflects the communion and union of the Trinity.

During the Rite of Marriage, the couple exchanges rings as a sign of love and fidelity in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Like the members of the Trinity, the united couple also becomes a "community of persons." Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit are united in "pure relationality," mutual love, and self-gift (Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [*Charity in Truth*], no. 54), Christian spouses are called to give of themselves to one another (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* [*On the Family*], no. 19).

Marriage frees us for sacrifice and self-gift.

During the exchange of vows, the couple promises to give of themselves to each other and to love and support each other despite their shortcomings and failings. Spouses help each other "overcome self-absorption, egoism, [and] pursuit of one's own pleasure" so that they can serve others in imitation of Christ (CCC, no. 1609; *Compendium*, no. 219). With Christ's help, spouses are able to love, forgive, and serve (CCC, no. 1642). The Nuptial Blessing especially highlights how the couple is called to care not only for each another but also for children, family, and the wider community.

Marriage strengthens us for service in the world.

The love between spouses helps them to be signs of Christ's love in the world (*Compendium*, no. 220). Their love for one another is realized in "the common work of watching over creation" (CCC, no. 1604). They help each other live their vocation as lay people, seeking God's Kingdom in their daily lives by working for justice, peace, and respect for the life and dignity of all (*Compendium*, no. 220; *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 47). Christian spouses, the *Compendium* notes, are to be "witnesses to a new social consciousness inspired by the Gospel and the Paschal Mystery" (no. 220).

Marriage provides the foundation for family and the formation of “new citizens of human society.”

From marriage comes the family, “in which new citizens of human society are born” and made children of God through the grace of the Holy Spirit in Baptism (*Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], no. 11). The home is called the “domestic church” (CCC, no. 1666)—the place where parents teach faith, love, justice, and concern for others to their children. Parents are “the principal and first educators of their children” (CCC, no. 1653). The family is the community where children “learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom” (CCC, no. 2207).

The family gives testimony to faith, love, unity, peace, and justice.

The married couple—itsself a sign of grace—works to form a family that is a “sign of unity for the world” and a “witness to the Kingdom” of justice and peace (*Compendium*, no. 220, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 48). The home is the place where each person learns “solidarity and communal

responsibilities” (CCC, no. 2224). Parents train children, from childhood on, to recognize God’s love for all, to care for “their neighbors’ needs, material and spiritual,” to share in common with others, and to be involved in the local community (*Apostolicam Actuositatem* [Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People], no. 30).

Marriage and the family inspire solidarity with the human family.

In the section called “The Family and Society,” the *Catechism* notes that being a member of a family helps us to broaden our definition of who is included in our family. In our fellow citizens, we learn to see “the children of our country,” in the baptized, “the children of our mother the Church,” and in every human person, “a son or daughter” of the Father. Our relationships within the immediate family provide a foundation so that our relationships with all our neighbors become “personal.” We come to recognize our neighbor not as a “unit” but as a “someone” who “deserves particular attention and respect” (no. 2212). In this way, the work for justice, life, and dignity begins in the family.

The rights of families and married couples should be prioritized in public policy.

The well-being of individuals and societies is linked to “the healthy state of conjugal and family life” (*Gaudium et Spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], no. 47). Therefore, we must “enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman” and that “assume responsibility for [the family’s] economic and fiscal needs” (*Cariitas in Veritate*, no. 44).

In particular, we should preserve the rights of the family in civil laws and policies and work to ensure “that in social administration consideration is given to the requirements of families in the matter of housing, education of children, working conditions, social security and taxes” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 11). We should also work to ensure that migrants’ right to live together as a family is safeguarded.

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- As a spouse or family member, how can you imitate the love of Christ and communion of the Holy Trinity in your own relationships?
- What can you do in your family to provide a strong foundation for faith, peace, solidarity with the global human family, and a commitment to the life and dignity of the human person?