

Marriage:

Do my thoughts reflect those of Christ and His Church?

The celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful usually takes place during Holy Mass due to the connection with the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Christ has united himself forever to the Church, His beloved bride, for whom he suffered and died and gave of himself. It is so fitting that the spouses should seal their consent to each other and unit it to Christ by receiving Him in the Holy Eucharist, communicating one body in Christ.

The Sacrament of Marriage signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life.

Scripture and Marriage

Genesis 1:27-28 God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth.

Genesis 2:21-24 Then, Yahweh God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And, while he was asleep, he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh up again forthwith. Yahweh God fashioned the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. And the man said: This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! She is to be called Woman, because she was taken from Man. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Marriage and the Vatican Council II

The Creator of all made the married state the beginning and foundation of human society; by his grace He has made of it too a great mystery in Christ and in the Church (Eph.5:32), and so the apostolate of married persons and of families has a special importance for both Church and civil society.

To give clear proof in their own lives of the indissolubility and holiness of the marriage bond; to assert with vigor the right and duty of parents to give their children Christian upbringing; to defend the dignity and legitimate autonomy of the family: this has always been the duty of married persons; today, however, it has become the most important aspect of their apostolate. They and all the faithful, therefore should collaborate with men of good will in seeing that these rights are perfectly safeguarded in civil legislation.

Marriage and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)¹

1605 Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: "It is not good that the man should be alone."

1613 On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign - at his mother's request - during a wedding feast. The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.

1644 The love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and indissolubility of the spouses' community of persons, which embraces their entire life: "so they are no longer two, but one flesh." They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving." This human communion is confirmed, purified, and completed by communion in Jesus Christ, given through the sacrament of Matrimony. It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.

2360 Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In marriage the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. Marriage bonds between baptized persons are sanctified by the sacrament.

2362 "The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude." Sexuality is a source of joy and pleasure:

The Creator himself. . . established that in the [generative] function, spouses should experience pleasure and enjoyment of body and spirit. Therefore, the spouses do nothing evil in seeking this pleasure and enjoyment. They accept what the Creator has intended for them. At the same time, spouses should know how to keep themselves within the limits of just moderation.

Matrimony is a sacrament and as such, it is a sign to the world of the invisible God living among us – the living God who bears fruit in the lives of two people. They are a continual sign of his power worldwide. There is a special grace and power in every couple God has joined together. Everything they do singly or together, is a living out of their sacrament. Simple things like washing dishes, running the sweeper, driving to work, struggling to make a living, budgeting a small salary to meet big expenses – yes, these and all other facets of life together have power hidden within them to make them holy. Married life is the ground of holiness, love is the seed planted by God. Life together with its agonies and joys, pain and sacrifices, frustrations and tensions, moments of exultation and despair, all act as the rain and sun, rainbows and thunder on life together.

The Question of Divorce

Mark 10:6-12 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'⁷For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife],⁸and the two shall become one flesh.'⁹So they are no longer two but one flesh.⁹Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate."¹⁰In the house the disciples again questioned him about this.¹¹¹¹He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her;¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." (The church recognizes that a civil divorce procedure is necessary to settle civil matters, including custody of the children. But divorced Catholics are not allowed to marry another until their earlier marriage has been nullified.)

Life Matters . . . continued

Divorce and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)¹

1606 Every man experiences evil around him and within himself. This experience makes itself felt in the relationships between man and woman. Their union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. This disorder can manifest itself more or less acutely, and can be more or less overcome according to the circumstances of cultures, eras, and individuals, but it does seem to have a universal character.

1607 According to faith the disorder we notice so painfully does not stem from the *nature* of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from sin. As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman.

1608 Nevertheless, the order of creation persists, though seriously disturbed. To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them. Without his help man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them "in the beginning."

Reconciliation and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

1649 Yet there are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons. In such cases the Church permits the physical *separation* of the couple and their living apart. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to contract a new union.

Annulment²

The Vatican is making it much easier for Catholics to annul their marriages following a push by Pope Francis for reformation of a process long criticized for being complicated, costly and out of reach for many. Rules unveiled on August 15, 2015 speed up the annulment process, with a fast-track procedure now available, and allow for appeals to be judged by a local church official rather than the Vatican in what represents a significant decentralization of power away from Rome. The rules were established by a panel of Vatican-appointed canon lawyers who have spent a year studying ways to simplify the process while at the same time ensuring that the church maintains its position that marriage is a lifelong and sacred commitment. These rules will take effect on December 8, 2015 and conclude with the Year of Mercy.

The pope said the changes would not encourage or "favor" the nullifying of marriage, but instead alter the time it took to complete the process. He also emphasized that annulment ought to be free of cost. The pontiff wrote that the changes were being made so that "the heart of the faithful that wait for the clarification of their state may not be oppressed for a long time by the darkness of doubt". The move marks a stunning departure from earlier efforts to make annulments more difficult to obtain, particularly by Francis's more conservative predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Under the guidelines, a couple seeking an annulment will no longer require a second confirming decision for their marriage to be nullified after it has already been decided by a church tribunal. Instead, there was "sufficient moral certainty achieved" with a single decision, the panel said. In a case considered to be straightforward, the panel said some annulment decisions could be made directly by a local bishop.

Francis urged bishops to create structures that would guide separated Catholics who were considering annulment or divorce. Among the reasons why a party could seek an annulment, the panel included the discovery that a person in the marriage was in an extramarital relationship at the time of the marriage, when a spouse procured an abortion, and when one party lacked religious faith.

The changes will make it easier for Catholics from all over the world who wish to remarry to have their second marriages recognized by the church, therefore allowing them to fully participate in church life.

Chastity vs Homosexuality and Catholic Teaching¹

2357 Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity,¹⁴¹ tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered."¹⁴² They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

2358 The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

2359 Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.

Marriage Statistics³

Catholic Families

- Most Catholic children are raised by married Catholic parents.
- 79% or 8 in 10 Catholic mothers and fathers are married.
- 76% of married Catholic parents have a Catholic spouse.
- 3% of parents are single and have never married.
- 13% of Catholic parents surveyed are single and living with a partner (of the opposite sex).
- 4% are divorced and 1% are separated.

Mass Attendance among Catholic Parents

- 22% of Catholic parents attend Mass weekly, compared to 24% of all adult Catholics.
- 53% of Catholic parents attend Mass at least once a month, compared to 43% of all adult Catholics.
- 66% of Catholic parents with 3+ children are much more likely than those with fewer children (48%) to attend Mass once/month.
- 26% of parents with a teen in the home are more likely to attend Mass weekly than those with an infant (18%).
- Parents who have separated or divorced or who are single and have never married are among the least likely to attend Mass weekly (15% for both sub-groups).

¹ *Catholic Church of Picayune, MS - Faith - Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997, sborromeo.org/cc.html.

² Kirchgassner, Stephanie. "Pope Reforms Catholic Church's Marriage Annulment Process." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 8 Sept. 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/08/pope-radically-reforms-catholic-churchs-marriage-annulment-process.

³ *Catholic Marriage and Family in the United States*, 2014, www.usccb.org/about/public-affairs/backgrounders/catholic-marriage-family-us-statistics.cfm.