THE SACRAMENTS AT THE SERVICE OF COMMUNION

Sacrament of Matrimony

Sacrament of Holy Orders

What do we mean by the Sacraments at the Service of Communion?

While the other sacraments are celebrated and received in the communion of the church, they are directed toward the salvation in Christ of the individual Catholic.

Matrimony and holy orders enable individuals to direct their lives in a sacramental way for the salvation of others. Through service to others, they build up the Body of Christ. They are themselves being saved in the process, by their participation in the saving mission of Christ.

- The sacraments, Holy Orders and Matrimony, are directed towards the salvation of others.
- They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.
- Those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are consecrated in Christ's name "to feed the Church by the word and grace of God."
- Those who receive the Sacrament of Matrimony are strengthened and consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament.

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

The Catholic Church holds the institution of marriage in a very special position in the eyes of God. It has a special dignity and is respected for its sanctity.

The Catechism states:

“The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”

(CCC 1601)

Covenant

For many, marriage is understood to be a “contract,” which can be easily broken. In contrast, God’s design for marriage was for it to be a holy covenant.
A covenant is an agreement and a vow one person makes with another. And not just any agreement… this is a **solemn vow** before God. It is not breakable as is a contract.

A covenant is a commitment, which God initiates.

When the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a covenant, it is using an ancient and rich biblical concept to describe how God’s steadfast and exclusive love for his people is a model for the loving union of a married couple.

**Our scripture portrays marriage in God’s plan**

Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God and concludes with a vision of "the wedding-feast of the Lamb." (Rev 19:7, 9; cf. Gen 1:26-27.)

Scripture speaks throughout of marriage and its "mystery," its institution and the meaning God has given it, its origin and its end, its various realizations throughout the history of salvation, the difficulties arising from sin and its renewal "in the Lord" in the New Covenant of Christ and the Church.

**The Origin of Marriage**

"The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws. . . . God himself is the author of marriage."\(^{87}\)

The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they came from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes. These differences should not cause us to forget its common and permanent characteristics.

"The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life."\(^{89}\)

Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for one another: "It is not good that the man should be alone."\(^{92}\) The woman, "flesh of his flesh," his equal, his nearest in all things, is given to him by God as a "helpmate"; she thus represents God from whom comes our help.\(^{93}\)

"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh."\(^{94}\)
The Lord himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union of their two lives by recalling what the plan of the Creator had been "in the beginning": "So they are no longer two, but one flesh."\(^{95}\)

Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man.

But we know that this is a hard reality to achieve. Divorce is very prevalent in our culture

“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.

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

To heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of the grace that God in his infinite mercy never refuses them.\(^{99}\) Without his help man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them "in the beginning."

Fortunately, in his mercy, God has not forsaken the sinful man

In the Old Testament the polygamy of patriarchs and kings is not yet explicitly rejected. Nevertheless, the law given to Moses aims at protecting the wife from arbitrary domination by the husband, even though according to the Lord's words it still carries traces of man's "hardness of heart" which was the reason Moses permitted men to divorce their wives. (Mt 19:8; Deut 24:1)

Scripture often uses the metaphor of marriage to describe God’s covenantal relationship with the people of Israel. Seeing God’s covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People’s conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage.\(^{102}\)

The books of Ruth and Tobit bear moving witness to an elevated sense of marriage and to the fidelity and tenderness of spouses. Tradition has always seen in the Song of Solomon a unique expression of human love, insofar as it is a reflection of God’s love - a love "strong as death" that "many waters cannot quench." (Song 8:6-7.)

**Marriage and the New Testament**

The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel prepared the way for the new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him, thus preparing for "the wedding-feast of the Lamb." (Rev 19:7,9)
In the Gospel of John, on the threshold of his public ministry, Jesus performs his first sign, at his mother's request, during a wedding feast. (Jn 2:1-11.) 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.

In his preaching Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the beginning noting that the permission given by Moses to divorce one's wife was a concession to the hardness of hearts. (Mt 19:8.)

The matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble: God himself has determined it "what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder." (Mt 19:6.)

This unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realize. However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear... By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God.

It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ.109

This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life. I will speak more of this Grace later.

The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Christian marriage is an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant.

THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

In the Latin Rite the celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful normally takes place during Holy Mass, because of the connection of all the sacraments with the Paschal mystery of Christ.

In the Eucharist the memorial of the New Covenant is realized, the New Covenant in which Christ has united himself for ever to the Church, his beloved bride for whom he gave himself up.

It is therefore appropriate for the bride and groom to prepare themselves for the celebration of their marriage by receiving the sacrament of penance.

According to Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ's grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the
Church. The Holy Spirit is the seal of their covenant, the ever available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity.

MATRIMONIAL CONSENT

The parties to a marriage covenant are a baptized man and woman, free to contract marriage, who freely express their consent; "to be free" means:

- not being under constraint;
- not impeded by any natural or ecclesiastical law.

The Church holds the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that "makes the marriage." If consent is lacking there is no marriage. The consent consists in a "human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other": "I take you to be my wife" - "I take you to be my husband." This consent that binds the spouses to each other finds its fulfillment in the two "becoming one flesh." The consent must be an act of the will of each of the contracting parties, free of coercion or grave external fear. No human power can substitute for this consent. If this freedom is lacking the marriage is invalid.

The priest (or deacon) who assists at the celebration of a marriage receives the consent of the spouses in the name of the Church and gives the blessing of the Church. The presence of the Church's minister (and also of the witnesses) visibly expresses the fact that marriage is an ecclesial reality.

This is the reason why the Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form. Several reasons for this requirement:

- Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church;
- Marriage introduces one into an ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children;
- Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses);
- The public character of the consent protects the "I do" once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it.

So that the "I do" of the spouses may be a free and responsible act and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, preparation for marriage is of prime importance.

Special circumstances
Mixed marriage

- Marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic
- This is an impediment to a valid marriage and requires a dispensation from the bishop

Disparity of Cult

- Marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person
- This is an impediment to a valid marriage and requires a dispensation from the bishop

THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

"From a valid marriage arises a bond between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state by a special sacrament."

The Marriage Bond

The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself.

From their covenant arises "an institution, confirmed by the divine law, . . . even in the eyes of society." The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: "Authentic married love is caught up into divine love."

Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom.

The grace of the sacrament of Matrimony

"By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God." This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this
grace they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children."

Christ is the source of this grace. "Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love.

THE GOODS AND REQUIREMENTS OF CONJUGAL LOVE

"Conjugal love aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility."

The unity and indissolubility of marriage

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.

1645 "The unity of marriage, distinctly recognized by our Lord, is made clear in the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection." Polygamy is contrary to conjugal love which is undivided and exclusive.

The fidelity of conjugal love

The "intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them."

The deepest reason is found in the fidelity of God to his covenant, in that of Christ to his Church. Through the sacrament of Matrimony the spouses are enabled to represent this fidelity and witness to it. Through the sacrament, the indissolubility of marriage receives a new and deeper meaning.

The openness to fertility
"By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."

The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children.

Spouses to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both human and Christian terms.

The Domestic Church

Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than "the family of God."

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are "by word and example . . . the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation."

Summary

1659 St. Paul said: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. . . . This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church" (*Eph* 5:25, 32).

1660 The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman form with each other an intimate communion of life and love, has been founded and endowed with its own special laws by the Creator. By its very nature it is ordered to the good of the couple, as well as to the generation and education of children. Christ the Lord raised marriage between the baptized to the dignity of a sacrament

1661 The sacrament of Matrimony 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

1662 Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live a covenant of faithful and fruitful love.
1663 Since marriage establishes the couple in a public state of life in the Church, it is
fitting that its celebration be public, in the framework of a liturgical celebration, before
the priest (or a witness authorized by the Church), the witnesses, and the assembly of
the faithful.

1664 Unity, indissolubility, and openness to fertility are essential to marriage. Polygamy
is incompatible with the unity of marriage; divorce separates what God has joined
together; the refusal of fertility turns married life away from its "supreme gift," the child

1665 The remarriage of persons divorced from a living, lawful spouse contravenes the
plan and law of God as taught by Christ. They are not separated from the Church, but
they cannot receive Eucharistic communion. They will lead Christian lives especially by
educating their children in the faith.

1666 The Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of
the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called "the domestic church," a
community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity.