

2,000 years ago, at the Council of Jerusalem, the Apostles gathered to deal with problems related to the growth of the church. One limiting factor was placing undue burdens on Gentiles who wished to become Christian. Many of the first Christians came from the Jewish faith and they valued their rich traditions. Many felt that converts to the Christian faith should also follow Jewish practice. Should a man be circumcised before becoming Christian? Was it necessary to abstain from eating pork? With the help of the Holy Spirit, they settled the issues in a beautiful way that helped the church to grow exponentially.

“It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities, namely, to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meats of strangled animals, and from unlawful marriage. If you keep free of these, you will be doing what is right” (Acts 15:28-29).

In our present age, there has been a lot of secular discussion about what is lawful and unlawful in marriage. God is the author of life and the author of marriage. Marriage is a gift from God to help a man and a woman grow in holiness in their relationship to God and to one another. Children are a blessing and a great responsibility. Let us try to understand marriage from God’s perspective.

When we speak of marriage as lawful or unlawful, we take a very juridical approach. Let’s try a different way. Marriage as God intends is about uniting the love of a man and a woman to the love of God. The church defines Marriage as “the intimate, exclusive, indissoluble communion of life and love entered by man and woman at the design of the Creator for the purpose of their own good and the procreation and education of children; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”

Jesus showed his love for humanity in offering his life for our salvation. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross established a new covenant between God and man. God never breaks a covenant; He always upholds his promises. United to Christ in holy matrimony, the bride and groom enter into a covenant with God. He is part of the wedding vows. He will uphold his promises. Bride and groom must do the same.

“God is the author of marriage. He inscribed the call to marriage in our very being by creating us as male and female. Marriage is governed by his laws, faithfully transmitted by his Bride, the Church. For marriage to be what it is, it must conform to these laws. Man, therefore, is not free to change the meaning and purposes of marriage.” In exchanging their vows before a priest or deacon, husband and wife promise to follow God’s plan for a joy filled marriage. This calls for the spouses to be open to children. Intentional exclusion of children goes against the very promises and purpose of marriage.

Marriage requires a lot of sacrifice and growth for spouses to truly grow in holiness, but God is part of the plan and he wants to help. “If men and women are to experience marriage as God intended it “in the beginning,” they must consciously renounce all that is contrary to God’s plan and continually surrender themselves to the grace of redemption. The cross of Christ, therefore, lies at the center of the Church’s theology of marriage.”

In Jerusalem, the Apostles invited the Holy Spirit to help settle the issues that divided them in a beautiful way that helped the church to grow larger and larger. Amidst the difficulties and struggles of marriage, husband and wife must often call upon God’s help to settle differences in order for their love to grow deeper. Love is a wonderful gift in which God calls us to holiness for our good, for the good of a family, and for the good of the world.