

## The Sacrament of Matrimony

Matrimony is the second "sacrament of service"; the first as we have already learnt is the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Marriage is the oldest form of community among man. It was given to us by God, right after he created the first man, saying: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him. . . So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs. . . The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called 'woman', for out of 'her man' this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame

Refer: (Gen 2:18, 21-25).

After having joined Adam and Eve as husband and wife, God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it"

Refer: (Gen 1:28).

### The Purpose of Marriage

From these two passages from Genesis and from the teachings of Christ and His Church we learn that there are two special purposes of marriage.

God gave the man and wife to each other as partners. By their love for each other they support one another in life. They help each other to know, love, and serve God on earth so that they will live with him in Heaven. This partnership is often called mutual love.

The other purpose of marriage is the bearing and bringing up of children in a loving family. Through the holy gift of their bodies to one another, husband and wife cooperate with God in bringing new human life into the world.

This second purpose is often called procreation. The marriage commitment of the man and woman makes sure that the children will have a home and family to grow up in. It protects the little ones and provides for their true development as children of God.

### The Sacrament of Matrimony

Even before Jesus made marriage a sacrament, it was seen as a life-long union of husband and wife, in which they promised to love each other and live with one another until death. Of course, we human beings do not always go along with God's plan. Our weak human nature sometimes destroys his plan for marriage by such things as divorce

and adultery. But this does not change the purpose of matrimony as our Creator meant it to be.

One day, some leaders of the Jews asked Jesus what his teaching on marriage was. He answered them, saying: *Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and declared, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become as one"? Thus they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, let no man separate what God has joined. . . I now say to you, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Mt 19:4-6, 9).*

At the beginning of Jesus' public life, he attended a wedding feast and worked his first miracle there. He did this in order to bless the marriage with his presence. He made marriage a sacrament and a symbol of the love He has for His body the Church. Just as Jesus will always love His Church and never leave her, so the husband must always love his wife and stay with her until death.

### **What is Christian Marriage?**

In order for a couple to have a sacramental Christian marriage, both of them must be baptized. They must intend to live their marriage according to God's plan, which means a *life-long* relationship and openness to whatever children God may send them. On their wedding day they agree to remain with one another through good times and bad, in riches or in poverty, in sickness or in health.

To help couples live a good Christian marriage the Church has made some laws concerning the celebration of this sacrament. If a man and woman do not agree to marry according to these rules or with respect for God's plan, then their marriage is called *invalid*. This means that a true union never took place, and they are single people in the eyes of God.

### **The Rite of Matrimony**

The wedding rite, or ceremony, usually takes place during Mass, but this is not required for the celebration of the sacrament. Unlike the other sacraments (except Baptism which can be administered by anyone in case of emergency), the priest is not the one who administers the sacrament to the couple. He is there to witness it for the Church and to bless it in God's name. The man and wife are the ones who give the sacrament to each other by the words of the solemn *wedding promises*.

After the homily at Mass, the priest asks the couple if they have come to the wedding freely, without anyone or anything pressuring them to do so. He then asks if they agree to live their marriage according to God's plan. If they can truly say "yes", then the ceremony continues.

The bride and groom join hands and pronounce the vows to one another. **This is the sign of the Sacrament/Matrimony.**

As you know, a vow is your solemn promise to do what you say. To break it would be a mortal sin.

**The wedding vows** are usually worded like this: *I, (name), take you, (name), to be my wife (husband). I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.* **(Rite of Matrimony)**

After this, the newlyweds usually give rings to one another. The priest blesses these rings so that they may be signs of their love and fidelity.

The Mass continues as usual until before Holy Communion when the Nuptial (Wedding) Blessing is given. This is a special blessing which only two Christians may receive. It asks God to make their life holy, to keep them faithful to one another, to send them the gift of children, and to bring them to Heaven when they die. At the end of the Mass another blessing is given and the ceremony ends.

Through this sacrament God makes the two people one flesh. This means that they cannot be separated in His eyes, any more than a human body can be separated and still live. God also gives them all of the graces they will need to be faithful to each other and to be good parents. He calls them to be witnesses for Jesus and the Christian life among their relatives and friends.

### **Modern Day Attacks on Marriage**

Unfortunately, many people today do not think of marriage according to God's plan, because the world has different values from those of Christ. It attacks the sacrament of Matrimony in many ways. How?

By approving of divorce and adultery, by worshipping money and possessions - as false gods in society, by teaching young people that premarital sex, masturbation, and same sex unions are not wrong; by encouraging a negative attitude toward large families, and by encouraging the use of contraceptives.

Every Christian couple - married or engaged - must be aware of these false values and they should try to understand God's true plan for marriage by studying the teachings of the Church. Daily prayer together will help couples and families to be strong as they try to live out their lifelong vows. Young people can prepare themselves for marriage by asking God to send them good Christian friends. In this way, they will be insistent to marry only someone who really loves them and who loves God.

**Words to know:** Sign of Matrimony; mutual love; invalid marriage; procreation; wedding vows.