

MARRIAGE & THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Marriage is one of the most serious and yet most loving steps anyone can ever take. It is a commitment for life, which very often is 40 years or more, to bind oneself in a unique relationship and partnership of life with another person. It is filled with wondrous and joyous moments. It is also filled with moments of forgiving and being forgiven. It is additionally filled with gotta do this and gotta do that moments. Marriage begins with seeing something unique and different in another person, and having a desire to always be with that person which leads to engaged commitment and then to marriage. As a marriage begins, it starts with dreams and expectations, which usually end up being fulfilled beyond one's wildest expectations.

To survive, marriage partners must have and must reflect the love of our God for us, His People. Namely, that love must be patient; it must be caring and kind; the love must be forgiving and also forgetting of hurts; it must not be jealous nor should it put on airs; the love must not be snobbish, nor ever rude or self-seeking; nor must the love be prone to anger, or must it ever brood over injuries; there must be no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, to its power to endure. The love involved must never fail! The love given in marriage must imitate and emulate the love, which Jesus has for us. [cf. I Corinthians 13:4-8].

We, as Catholic Christians, believe that marriage is not a mere human social invention. Rather, we believe that marriage is a sacred and a holy gift because it has its origin and design in God's wisdom and plan for mankind, as we read in the very first book of the Bible. Furthermore, we believe that Jesus Christ added to the holiness and to the grandeur of marriage by making it a Sacrament when it is entered into between two baptized persons.

Thus, marriage is not just a ceremony. Nor is marriage merely some piece of paper or legal action. Marriage, rather, is a sacred covenant entered into between God and one man and one woman. Marriage is a sacred commitment to live together in a life-long inter-personal relationship and partnership of life based upon conjugal love. As St. Paul tells us, every marriage is to be modeled on the covenant between God and His People, the Church. Therefore, marriage necessitates a permanent commitment for as long as both of the partners shall live. Marriage also necessitates life-long fidelity to one another. It is a three-sided covenant involving God, one man, and one woman. Marriage is not just an action agreed upon by the man and woman alone. Since God is a part of marriage, it cannot be dissolved for any cause by the parties themselves willing it or by any human authority, since God Himself is its author.

Children also are an integral part of marriage. They are the personification of the love of the wife and of the husband. Namely, that the couple's love is so strong and so fruitful that their love and commitment tone another is made human. Children are not just some result of a biological function; rather children are much, much more than that. Children say to the world: "See how much my daddy and my mommy love each other, for I am

their love made like them.”

God’s plan and design for a life-long union is not made without an offer on His part for divine help and assistance as the marriage partners live out their marital covenant. For this reason, it is essential that each couple develop a real closeness to God. God can only be a part of married life and a home if the marriage partners put Him there. While He wants to be part of each and every family, He does not force Himself upon them. Rather, He must be invited to be a part of the family!

Couples enter marriage as members of both the Church and of civil society. Thus, marriage is a social reality and is regulated by laws formulated for the good of the community of God and also for the good of human society. Catholics enter marriage to be part of the Catholic Christian Community of Faith. Thus, Catholics must respect and fulfill the laws set forth for the good of the Gospel Community of Faith. These Laws, known as Canon Law, are meant not to be a burden on a bride and groom, but rather are a help for all of people in respecting and honoring marriage as the wonderful, sacred gift from God that it is.

The wedding ceremony is not the marriage, nor does it by itself make a couple married. The ceremony takes only a few minutes. The ceremony is only the beginning of a wonderful, love-filled adventure with another person, which has its ups and its downs. It is not always easy. It often needs support from family and friends. Fellow parishioners too promise to be with each couple and support them through their years of struggles and triumphs, tears and joys. Every married couple should call upon their family and their friends, and also on their local priests, deacons and fellow parishioners for help and support, as all love God’s wonderful gift of married love. In fact, many parish communities have programs and activities to offer married couples so that they may live out this most sacred and loving gift. All are encouraged to use the resources possible to help them make their dreams come true, including programs and activities offered by their local parish so that their dreams and hopes may become a reality tomorrow and every day.

Among the programs offered are the *“Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend”* (a weekend experience to re-enkindle emotional attachment and communication arts so as to draw a couple closer together) and *“Retrouaille”* (also a confidential weekend experience with five once a week follow-up sessions for couples who are experiencing difficulties in their relationship and are possibly even thinking of separating).