

## The Sacrament of Matrimony

In this age so full of vice they first polluted the marriage bed, then families, then homes, and from this polluted source came the corruption of our land and our people. **Horace, died 8 BC**

**Question for the day:** What is the climax of Salvation History?

**Exodus 2:9-11** Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

**Isaiah 25: 6-9** On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

**Matthew 19:3-11** And Pharisees came up to [Jesus] and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

**Mark 15:21** And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

**Ephesians 5:22-33** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh,

but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

**Revelation 19:7-9** Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

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### **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

CCC 1601 “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.”

#### **Marriage in God’s Plan**

**CCC 1602** 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.”<sup>85</sup> 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.

#### **Marriage in the order of creation**

**CCC 1603** “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.” 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. Although the dignity of this institution is not transparent everywhere with the same clarity, some sense of the greatness of the matrimonial union exists in all cultures. “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.”

**CCC 1604** God who created man out of love also calls him to love—the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. Since God created him man and woman, their God who created man out of love also calls him to love—the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love.<sup>90</sup> Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. It is good, very good, in the Creator’s eyes. And this love which God blesses is intended to be fruitful and to be realized in the common work of watching over creation: “And God blessed them, and God said to them: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’”

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**Insights from Chapter VI: Loving One Another Like Christ and the Church**, Sarah, Robert Cardinal Sarah, *Catechism of the Spiritual Life*, EWTN Publishing, 2022.

### **The institution of marriage in danger**

Indeed, at this start of the third Christian millennium, we are witnessing a radical transformation of Western society and a worrisome weakening of marriage; proponents of gender theory, social engineers, and world governments are trying to give equal rights to “all forms of family” resulting from various sorts of unions and from homosexual practices. Any reference to God’s plan for mankind, as shown to us both by human nature and by divine revelation, and as the Magisterium of the Church proclaims it, has become a sign of contradiction on the continent of Europe, which not only has forgotten its roots but is seeking to develop legal systems aimed at systematically and definitively erasing all trace of Christianity. We are living in a full-blown dictatorship of relativism, characterized by the alleged absence of objective, compelling frameworks for thought and morals. ... Confronted by this project of demolishing the institution of the family, those whose mission is to express Church teaching have not always managed to remain strong and consistent, and they have taken refuge in ambiguous positions, so that there is great confusion on this subject among the faithful today.

Marriage is in crisis. It is shaken by the ever-more-radical modern logic of the rights of the individual, measured by his or her desires, which by nature are unstable. ... the Church today must confront two major challenges: one that consists of welcoming all who have been hurt in their marital love so as to dress their wounds and to lead them in truth toward the true physician and Shepherd of our souls, Jesus Christ, Who gives the true meaning of life and of genuine love; and another that consists of integrating and accompanying families that are in an irregular situation, without twisting or destroying the perennial, unchangeable teaching of the Church in matters of faith and morals. It is therefore urgent to rediscover an understanding of this teaching so as to respond to these two challenges.

## **The Christian meaning of marriage**

God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes.

By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown. Thus a man and a woman ... render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions ... growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them. Christ ... comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. ... The Church did not invent marriage. It has existed since the beginning of the world, in all civilizations and cultures, with the characteristic of a stable, definitive union, thus sealing a complete and irrevocable mutual gift of the spouses ...

## **The indissolubility of marriage**

Christ, Who loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, unites them indissolubly and gives them, until death, the grace that will help them to keep their mutual gift in the strength and zeal of the divine love. See Ephesians 5 above.

[T]he relations between Christian spouses are ruled by the mystery of salvation accomplished in the death and Resurrection of Christ, Who, renouncing Himself entirely, gave Himself up without reservation, ... Therefore, all relations between spouses ought to be inspired by this total giving of self for the other.

Saint John Chrysostom suggested that a young husband should make this speech to his wife: I have taken you in my arms, and I love you, and I prefer you to my life itself. For the present life is nothing, and my most ardent dream is to spend it with you in such a way that we may be assured of not being separated in the life reserved for us. . . . I place your love above all things, and nothing would be more bitter or painful to me than to be of a different mind than you.

## **Building faithful love in the long run**

Marriage is therefore a covenant between the man and the woman that refers to the irrevocable bond of love between Christ and His Church, and from that bond derives its stable, indissoluble character. It is no exaggeration to say that marriage, in its evangelical aim of absolute fidelity and indissolubility, is a kind of “madness”; no more and no less, in fact, than priestly celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is no exaggeration to say that marriage, in its evangelical aim of absolute fidelity and indissolubility, is a kind of “madness”; no more and no less, in fact, than priestly celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Inevitably the trials inherent in every human life cause sufferings that can lead to difficulties in relationships, or strong tensions that degenerate into conflict, even within a home where the spouses love each other tenderly. The spouses must

become attached to those features in the other that go beyond appearances and constitute a richness that does not pass away. Love, then, is no longer an instinctive outburst. It is a deliberate choice to love, whatever may happen, in success or failure, in health or in sickness, and to put this love into action through service, while sharing joys and sufferings, and having all their riches and all their poverty in common. This is the determination to lay down your life for those whom you love.

Divorce is a terrible cancer that simultaneously destroys the family and society, as it is opposed to the authenticity of human love, which goes beyond the variable states of the emotions to attain the status of an indestructible spiritual reality. This wholehearted, lasting love between a man and a woman is God's plan for the human family, and Jesus unambiguously reminded the Pharisees about this.

### **The situation of divorced persons**

This impossibility of remarrying after a separation is a teaching that the world does not want to hear or accept, but the Church is obliged to hold it firmly out of fidelity to Her Lord. This insistence of Scripture on the indissolubility of marriage has deep theological roots: by making spouses become one flesh, so to speak, God grants to them the opportunity to be witnesses by their unending union to the covenant between Him and all creation, to the friendship that He offers eternally to the human race.

Only the Catholic Church today maintains perfectly and faithfully not only the indissolubility of marriage but the conjugal reality as God willed it from the beginning, as a stable union of one man and one woman, whose mutual consent, expressed publicly before God and before human beings, implies between them a radical communion of gifts received, for the purpose of transmitting life.

The reservation formulated by Jesus ("except in the case of prostitution" or "unchastity") means that in some very serious cases of infidelity, the wronged spouse can separate from the other, but this does not give him or her license to contract a new union. A man or a woman who repudiates a spouse can never remarry.

### **The reasons for the Church's requirement**

The mission of the Church is a difficult mission that surpasses human strength. But for Her, proclaiming the gospel is not a cause for boasting; it is a necessity incumbent on Her (1 Cor 9:16). She absolutely must hand down this teaching that the world does not want to hear, not only when it is a question of marriage, but also about the Christian mysteries in general: the Incarnation, the death and the Resurrection of the God-Man, transubstantiation (the change of the substance of the bread and wine into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ) — all that is madness for the world. The world cannot manage to believe that Baptism with water confers on us a new birth and makes us children of God; neither can it accept the fact that

marriage, when entered into freely and with full consent, is so sacred and definitive that breaking this union is tantamount to separating what God Himself has joined, which makes any subsequent union adultery.

These things offend the world and cause it to describe Church teaching as “rigid,” “fundamentalist,” “intransigent,” and therefore “unacceptable.” But can the Church change Her doctrine on marriage because the modern world rejects divine revelation? The words of pastors — whether bishops or priests — may sometimes be ambiguous: then they should be compared with the source, that is, with the words of Jesus and with the Tradition of the Church since the beginning. Faith in Jesus Christ should guide us, not the opinion of a human being. On the day of our Baptism, we did not adopt Christian opinions, but we were adopted by the One Who alone can define Himself as “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6).

There is a strong temptation to usurp the authority of Jesus and to interpret His words according to liberal and relativistic principles, ... But ... As the steward of the mysteries of God, the Church is called to guard the deposit of faith. “

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### TAKING UP OF THE CROSS IN MARRIAGE

“According to Croatian tradition, when a couple gets married, the priest doesn’t tell them that they have found the perfect person. On the contrary! Instead, he says to them: “You have found your cross. It is a cross to love, to carry it with you, a cross that is not to throw away but to treasure.”



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In Herzegovina, the Cross represents the greatest love and the is the treasure of the house.

crucifix

When the bride and groom enter the church on their wedding day, they carry a crucifix with them. The priest blesses the crucifix. When the time comes to exchange their vows, the bride puts her right hand on the crucifix and the groom puts his hand on hers, so that both hands are joined together on the crucifix. The priest covers their hands with his stole as they exchange their vows, according to the rite of the Church, to be faithful to each other, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, till death do them part. Then, instead of kissing each other, the bride and groom kiss the crucifix. Those who witness the ceremony understand from it that if one of them leaves the other, he or she leaves Christ on the Cross.

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After the ceremony, the newlyweds bring the crucifix to their home and put it in a place of honor. It will forever be the point of reference and the place of family prayer. In times of difficulty, the family do not go to the lawyer or the psychiatrist, but kneel down together before the crucifix in search of help from Jesus Christ. They kneel down and maybe even cry and open their hearts asking the Lord and each other for forgiveness. They go to sleep with peace in their hearts because they have received forgiveness from the only one who has the power to save.



Husband and wife will teach their children to kiss the crucifix every day and not to go to sleep like pagans, without first giving thanks to Jesus. They know that Jesus is holding them in His arms and there is nothing to fear.”

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When Carlo Cardinal Caffara was asked by St. John Paul II to head the *John Paul II Institute on Marriage and the Family* he didn't really feel up to it and sent a request for prayer to Sister Lucia of Fatima. He reports that he didn't expect to hear from her at all. As a cloistered nun she would pray for him, but he didn't expect a response. This is what she wrote back:

“The final battle between the Lord and the reign of Satan will be about marriage and the family. Don't be afraid (she told him) ... because anyone who operates for the sanctity of marriage and the family will always be contended and opposed in every way, because this is the decisive issue... however, Our Lady has already crushed its head.” Sr. Lucia de los Santos (to Card. Carlo Caffara)

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Father Angel Perez-Lopez's book on JP II's *Theology of the Body (Procreation and the Spousal Meaning of the Body: A Thomistic Argument Grounded in Vatican II)* reasserts, in accord with JP II's own emphasis, that the ultimate matrimonial meaning of the body is the eschatological marriage. It's the glorified body which is the ultimate meaning of the body. We sometimes that the eschatological is the goal and indicates the full meaning of our human bodiliness. It's not just about *this* body *this* time. As Christians we believe that matter matters. God makes it the very means by which he communicates his life of grace to us in the sacraments. He uses matter as well as form, but matter is temporary, and we must ensure that we don't put the temporary before the eternal, the durable.

**Remember our RCIA mission statement:**

CCC 1 God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life.

Christianity orients us rightly towards our heavenly home, towards the beatific vision, but recognizing that what God has given us here is it is the very means by which we make that journey to God, so we emphatically stress, in accord with the Catechism's own emphasis, the importance of both the theological dimension and the historical dimension.

The Catechism paragraph 234 stresses the unification of the theological in the fullest sense in terms of the imminent Trinity, the inner life of God himself, but the way in which that God reveals himself and interacts with us in time, in history. Both of those elements must be held together.

**CCC 23** The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life. It is the mystery of God in himself. It is therefore the source of all the other mysteries of faith, the light that enlightens them. It is the most fundamental and essential teaching in the "hierarchy of the truths of faith." The whole history of salvation is identical with the history of the way and the means by which the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself to men "and reconciles and unites with himself those who turn away from sin."

To overstress history is relativism. To overstress the heavenly without recognizing the incarnational, the material, the temporal, and the importance of God's self-revelation in time results in religious escapism and never actually interacting with events in time. These always have to be held together in constructive tension.

Marriage is one of the ways in which we stress the importance of the bodily dimension of man, but it also reminds us that its ultimate meaning as an eschatological. The marriage feast of the lamb is our goal.

Marriage is an icon of that end which is why it is so valuable. It's by means of the body that we express our human communion with one another in this primordial way, in the matrimonial way, which is a source of all other forms of communion in human life.

### **The Climax of Salvation History**

**CCC 1115** Jesus' words and actions during his hidden life and public ministry were already salvific, for they anticipated the power of his Paschal mystery. They announced and prepared what he was going to give the Church when all was accomplished. The mysteries of Christ's life are the foundations of what he would henceforth dispense in the sacraments, through the ministers of his Church, for "what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries."

So what is the climax of Salvation History? It is when, at the Eucharistic Celebration, the minister presents the host and says, "The Body of Christ," and you respond, "Amen." It is here



that you consummate the wedding bond with Christ and receive the foretaste of what marriage points to – the Heavenly Banquet of the Lamb.