



## **The Catholic Church and Marriage**

*(June 2, 2020)*

Marriage is an intimate community of life and love, 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 purely a human institution. The marriage covenant is a relationship between husband and wife, a permanent union of persons, capable of knowing and loving each other and God.

The Hebrew Scriptures speak to the fidelity and perpetuity of marriage and likens Yahweh's covenant with Israel to that between husband and wife. God created man and woman out of love and commanded them to imitate His love in their relations with each other. Man and woman were created for each other: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him. ... The two of them become one body." (Genesis 2:18, 24)

The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana as indicative of the goodness of marriage and its sacramental nature. A baptized bride and a baptized groom administer this sacrament of Matrimony to one another; they are the ministers of Christian marriage. 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 Catholic Church, in its canon law and theology, describes marriage as a lifetime, exclusive partnership between one man and one woman, who give and receive mutual help and love and, from their union, bring forth and rear children. Marriages always are presumed valid until proven otherwise. If a marriage involves two baptized Christians, it is presumed not only valid but also sacramental. If one or both parties is unbaptized, the marriage still is presumed to be valid and a good and natural bond. The 1983 Code of Canon Law says about marriage:

Canon 1055, 1°:

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.

Canon 1056:

The essential properties [of marriage] are unity and indissolubility; in Christian marriage they acquire a distinctive firmness by reason of the sacrament.

Canon 1057, 1°:

A marriage is brought into being by the lawfully manifested consent of persons who are legally capable. This consent cannot be supplied by any human power.

Canon 1057, 2°:

Matrimonial consent is an act of will by which a man and a woman by an irrevocable covenant mutually give and accept one another for the purpose of establishing a marriage.

The exchange of consent between the spouses “makes the marriage.” If consent is lacking, there is no marriage. Consent must be canonically expressed between two persons who are capable of giving it. The couple, by their free, mutual consent, makes the marriage covenant; and on that covenant they build a life partnership. The officiant has an important role as the official witness at the wedding, representing the entire community; but spouses bring into being the marriage by their exchange of consent. While the sacrament is received at one moment, the grace of the sacrament continues to be administered and received throughout their lives. Thus, their gift of themselves to each other is a gift of grace.

Marital consent is a “human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other.” This consent then binds the spouses to each other.

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 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 human beings.

Conjugal love involves a totality in which all the elements of the person enter. It 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 love of the spouses requires, of its very nature, the unity and the indissolubility of the spouses’ community of persons, which embraces their entire life. They “are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.”

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. In this sense, the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life.

Thus, marriage, whether sacramental or a good and natural marriage, is created by God, and the spouses are called to a perpetual, faithful, fruitful union directed toward the well-being of the spouses and their offspring. Marriage as a covenant relationship between the spouses exemplifies God's love for His people.

The Catholic Church believes marriage is a lifetime, exclusive partnership between a man and a woman, who give and receive mutual help and love and, from their union, bring forth children. When Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Christians marry according to the requirements of their Churches, and when people of other religions marry according to the requirements of civil law, the Catholic Church presumes they marry validly.

Because marriage is a lifetime commitment, the decision to marry is one of the most serious decisions most people ever make.

For specific information concerning marriage in the Diocese of Dallas, see ***“Getting married in the Catholic Church.”***

For more detailed information concerning marriage preparation in the Diocese of Dallas, see ***“Sacramental Policy Handbook”*** document.

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Sources:

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