

# The Sacrament of Matrimony

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## Session II: The Origins of Marriage

### **Genesis 1:26-28**

*Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth*

### **Genesis 2:18-25**

*The LORD God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him. So the LORD God formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each living creature was then its name. The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be a helper suited to the man. So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The LORD God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. 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 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 his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.*

### **Questions for Reflection:**

How are man and woman created? How do they relate to each other?

What type of union of love does God intend between a man and woman in marriage?

What great privilege and responsibility does God give husband and wife?

### **Matthew 19:3-6**

*Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?’ He said in reply, ‘Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.’ They said to him, ‘Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss [her]?’ He said to them, ‘Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery.’*

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

What is Jesus’ teaching about marriage?

What does it mean to say that a marriage is “unlawful?”

### **John 2:1-11**

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” [And] Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.” So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.*

#### **Questions for Reflection:**

What does the presence and action of Jesus at the Wedding Feast of Cana indicate?

How is marriage an efficacious sign of Christ’s presence?

# Session II: The Nature and Purposes of Marriage

## The Nature of Marriage

Throughout the Scriptures, “covenant” (deep, intimate union) is used to describe God’s steadfast and exclusive love for his people. The Church uses the same image both to describe and to provide a model for the loving union of a married couple.

Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman.

The covenant of marriage is initiated by God and lived according to his plan.

The marital covenant creates – through consent and sexual consummation – a special, indissoluble, exclusive, faithful bond between husband and wife in which they know and love both each other and God.

## The Purposes of Marriage

Married love is ordered to the good of the couple and to the generation and education of children (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 1660).

Thus, the two equal purposes of marriage are:

The growth and mutual love between spouses (unitive)

The generation and education of children (procreative).

In marriage, the couple is one, no longer one man and one woman, but one love.

Married couples are co-creators with God and the power to create a child with God is at the heart of what they share with each other in sexual intercourse.

Parents and children form the domestic Church, the place where children receive the first proclamation of faith – a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity (CCC, 1666).

## Questions for Reflection:

Why is marriage a covenant and not simply a contract?

Discuss the nature of marriage: indissolubility, exclusivity, fidelity.

Discuss the purposes of marriage: unitive and procreative.

## Session II: Marriage as a Vocation and Call

### Lumen Gentium

39. *Christ sanctifies us and unites us to himself. He calls all of us, particularly in the Church, to holiness.*

41. *“Married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should imbue their offspring, lovingly welcomed as God's gift, with Christian doctrine and the evangelical virtues. In this manner, they offer all men the example of unwearying and generous love; in this way they build up the brotherhood of charity; in so doing, they stand as the witnesses and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church; by such lives, they are a sign and a participation in that very love, with which Christ loved His Bride and for which He delivered Himself up for her.”*

### Gaudium et Spes

48. *“The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their off-springs as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone. For, God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. (see Gen. 1:26; Wis. 2:23). All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole.”*

### Questions for Reflection:

What is the vocation of a married couple?

How can the vocation of marriage affect the family? The Church? Society?

## Session II: Marriage as a Sacrament

### Sacraments

*“The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions” (CCC, 1131).*

### The Sacrament of Matrimony

*“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” (CCC, 1601).*

Essential Elements: (1) two baptized persons, (2) consent, and (3) the presence of the Church’s minister.

Christ acts to communicate God’s divine life and love to the couple and so establish an unbreakable bond of love between them.

The Church acts to witness this love, communicate it to others (through the couple themselves), and to receive its benefits.

### The Effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony

Christ “strengthens” and “abundantly blesses” the couple so that they “may be faithful to each other for ever and assume all the responsibilities of married life” (Order of Celebrating Matrimony (OCM)).

*“Christ dwells with [the couple], gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another's burdens, to ‘be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,’ and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love. In the joys of their love and family life he gives them here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb” (CCC, 1642).*

Christ shares God’s divine, covenantal love with the couple, perfecting their love and strengthening their indissoluble unity so that they will love each other the way that he loves the Church.

*“Have you come here to enter into marriage without coercion, freely and wholeheartedly?”* (The Questions before the Consent, OCM).

*“Are you prepared, as you follow the path of Marriage, to love and honor each other for as long as you both shall live?”* (The Questions before the Consent, OCM).

Christ gives the couple the grace / help they need to live their marriage in him, by helping each other to both attain holiness and to welcome and educate children.

*“Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?”* (The Questions before the Consent, OCM).

Christ helps the couple to serve others through their example, particularly by being witnesses of his love. Hence, Matrimony is a “sacrament at the service of the communion of the Church.”

*“...And now, Lord, we implore you: may these your servants hold fast to the faith and keep your commandments; made one in the flesh, may they be blameless in all they do; and with the strength that comes from the Gospel, may they bear witness to Christ before all...”* (Nuptial Blessing, OCM).

### **Questions for Reflection:**

Why are we getting married in the Church? What makes marriage a sacrament?

What role does faith currently play in our lives?

What role do we want it to play in our married lives?

“Catholic teaching holds that sacraments bring grace to those who receive them with proper dispositions” (*foryourmarriage.org*). Are we properly disposed to receive the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony? If not, how might we become so?

How will we live the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony?

## Session III: Marital Spirituality

- “Spirituality” is a way to live out one’s religious beliefs.
  - Marital spirituality is a way of living out the vocation of marriage that is illumined by the light of faith.
- Marriage has a distinctive spirituality that is:
  - sacramental
  - communitarian
  - missionary
- Sacramental
  - sign of Christ’s love
  - reveal Christ’s loving presence to the world
- Communitarian
  - creates and deepens a permanent partnership of life and love
  - permanent and total commitments to another person bring special blessings
  - children become a part of the community and, therefore, a blessing
  - involves brokenness, a life of sharing, growing in love
  - leads to the enrichment of other/larger communities
- Missionary
  - show others what being in a loving, Christ-centered relationship looks like
  - show others what it means to embody the life of the Holy Spirit
  - serve neighbor, share talents, be a witness of Gospel values
- “A spirituality of marriage shows how couples reveal Christ, build community, and reach out to others in love. It is a powerful way to describe how Catholic couples live out their vocation of married life.”

### **Questions for Reflection:**

What might be the most difficult area(s) of marital spirituality? Why?



# Session III: Marital Sexuality – Cohabitation

- The Catholic Church has a positive view of sexuality in marriage.
  - Human sexuality is sacred. It expresses a deep, faithful, and exclusive love that is open to new life. It centers around complete mutual self-giving.
  - In marriage, husband and wife, “through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives” (*Humanae Vitae* (HV), 8).
  - “Married love is fully human, total, faithful and exclusive of all others until death, and fecund” (HV, 9).
- The Church teaches that marital sexuality achieves two purposes:
  - Expresses and deepens the love between husband and wife (unitive)
  - Creates new human life (procreative)
- The bond between these two purposes cannot be broken.
- Cohabitation does not respect the sacredness of marriage and marital sexuality.
  - Myths: lowers the risk of divorce; is a “trial marriage.”
  - Social science provides that marriages preceded by cohabitation are 46% more likely to end in divorce. There is an “open door” mentality.
  - The Church teaches that sexual intercourse outside marriage cannot express what God intended for marriage. It is contrary to the meaning of sexual intercourse, which has inherent meaning: fidelity and life-giving fruitfulness. Moreover, it says something false, namely, that the couple has made a commitment that they have not yet made, a commitment that is only possible in marriage.

## **Question for Reflection:**

Why is marriage the only proper context for sexual intercourse?

## Session III: Family Life

- “The teaching of the Church regarding the proper regulation of birth is a promulgation of the law of God himself” (*HV*, 20).

### Contraception

- “The transmission of human life is a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the creator. It has always been a source of great joy to them, even though it sometimes entails many difficulties and hardships” (*HV*, 1).
- “Married love requires of husband and wife the full awareness of their obligations in the matter of responsible parenthood” (*HV*, 10).
  - Responsible parenthood takes into account the biological laws that apply to the human person, demands the use of reason to exert control over innate drives and emotions, involves the decision either to have more or not to have additional children because of physical, economic, psychological, and social conditions, and the recognition of the objective moral order established by God – the duties of husband and wife toward God (the will of God, the creator), themselves, their families, and human society.
- “The sexual activity, in which husband and wife are intimately and chastely united with one another, through which human life is transmitted is noble and worthy” (*HV*, 11).
- Inherent to the marital act is its unitive and procreative significance
- Therefore, “the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children. Equally to be condemned, as the magisterium of the Church has affirmed on many occasions, is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary. Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation – whether as an end or as a means” (*HV*, 14).
- Contraception contradicts the moral order. It is contrary to and disrupts the meaning of the marital act. It separates the act of conception from sexual union.
- Also, artificial methods can lead to marital infidelity, the neglect of the reverence due to a woman, etc.

### Natural Family Planning

- There are well-grounded reasons for spacing births (physical or psychological condition of husband or wife; external circumstances).
- “A married couple can engage in intercourse during the naturally infertile times in a woman’s cycle, or after childbearing years, without violating the meaning of marital intercourse. This is the principle behind natural family planning (NFP)” ([foryourmarriage.org](http://foryourmarriage.org)).
- It is a family planning method based on a woman’s menstrual cycle.
  - It involves day-to-day- observations of the naturally occurring signs of the fertile and infertile phases of the menstrual cycle.
  - It takes into account the uniqueness of each woman.
- To avoid pregnancy, the couple abstains from intercourse during the fertile phase.
- This can also be used to identify the time of ovulation, to achieve pregnancy.
- 97-98% effective for couples who carefully follow all the rules that pertain to this method.

- This method allows couples to express their mutual love and safeguard their fidelity toward one another. In following it, they “give proof of a true and authentic love” (*HV*, 16).

## Reproductive Technologies

- There are a number of reproductive technologies that can assist married couples who are experiencing the painful reality of infertility. Certain ones are morally permissible while others are not.
- Human life is a gift from God for a number of reasons: it shares in God’s life, results from God, is sacred in itself, is entrusted to us with certain obligations and demands (i.e. being people who uphold the value of life and allow for that life to flourish), and is not subject to human domination or control.
- This means that when we turn to human reproductive technologies to help married couples there are certain criteria we must respect because life is a gift from God. These are: (1) the conjugal love between a man and a woman and (2) the dignity of the child. If these two fundamental principles are violated then a child is not viewed or treated as a *gift* from God and the fruit of conjugal love, but rather as a *product* of science.
- Technical procedures may enable it to be performed by removing obstacles that prevent it or provide active conditions that allow it to exercise principle causality.
  - Cannot stop process, remove sperm from body, conception cannot occur outside body and technical means cannot initiate the process once it has stopped.
- For more information, visit the National Catholic Biomedical Ethics Website: <https://www.ncbcenter.org/>

## Chastity

- “Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. Sexuality, in which man's belonging to the bodily and biological world is expressed, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, in the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift” (*CCC*, 2337).
- “The virtue of chastity comes under the cardinal virtue of temperance, which seeks to permeate the passions and appetites of the senses with reason” (*CCC*, 2341). It requires long and deliberate work.
- In marriage, it involves self-discipline and rather than being a hindrance to their love of one another, “transforms it by giving it a more truly human character.” It helps, “repel inordinate self-love” (*HV*, 21).

### Questions for Reflection:

What is the difference between moral and immoral methods of regulating birth?

Why should only moral methods of regulating birth be employed?

What is the value of the virtue of chastity in marriage?