

The Catholic Sacraments

As long as the sun shall
rise goes the lover's vow.
But we are children of a
scientific age & have no
time for poetry. Still, I
offer a quiet prayer of thanks
for the sunlight each time
I see your face.

– Story People

Sacrament of Marriage

Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think it is possible to live a sacramental marriage?
2. Do you think we adequately prepare for marriage?
3. Do you think we, as a church, nurture marriages? What more could be done?
4. Do you think we deal with divorce well?
5. Is the sacrament of marriage a one time event?

Review

Outward signs that come from God to show God's favor.

- Symbols & ritual are powerful tools for building community and our relationship with God. Rituals help us to experience, celebrate, and pass on the ideals of our community.

Review

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■ Requirements for Sacrament

■ Presence

- Presence is a self gift. It is God's gift to us and we are required to respond with our gift if sacrament is going to occur.

■ Faith

- Sacraments require faith and build faith.
- Definition: "Faith is that by which a person freely and totally commits him/herself to God."
 - » Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*

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■ Marriage

- The Sacrament of intimate friendship.
- Some of you may be struggling – along with the Catholic Church – to deal with difficult questions related to marriage.

■ What exactly is marriage?

- Answer varies depending on the situation!
- Let's look at how the Church views marriage.

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■ What is marriage?

- For legal purposes, marriage is a contract.
 - It entitles a spouse to rights related to medical, financial, and social benefits.
 - It also invokes responsibilities
 - For care of children
 - Financial responsibility for family's actions

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■ What is marriage?

- Between the two people getting married, it is a sign of love and a desire for a public committed relationship.

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■ What is marriage?

- Often these first two answers (legality and love) are all that is intended by the marrying couple.
 - This is referred to as a secular marriage.
 - There is little understanding by the participants of including God or the Church in the marriage.
 - Other than maybe a blessing for the marriage and continuing to have a personal relationship with God.

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■ What is marriage?

- The Catholic Church agrees that these are important aspects of marriage,

BUT ...

- Also sees marriage as a covenant.
 - Covenant is *not* the same as contract.

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■ Covenant

- Contracts deal with things, covenants with people.
 - Contracts engage the services of people; covenants engage persons.
 - Contracts are made for a stipulated period of time; covenants are forever.
 - Contracts can be broken, with material loss to the contracting parties; covenants cannot be broken, but if violated, they result in personal loss and broken hearts.

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■ Covenant

- Contracts deal with things, covenants with people.
 - Contracts are secular affairs and belong to the marketplace; covenants are sacral affairs and belong to the hearth, temple, or church.
 - Contracts are best understood by lawyers; covenants are better appreciated by poets and theologians.
 - Contracts are witnessed with the state as guarantor; covenants are witnessed by God with God as guarantor.

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■ Covenant

- Contracts deal with things, covenants with people.
 - Contracts can be made by children who know the value of a penny; covenants can be made only by adults who are mentally, emotionally, and spiritually mature.

– Paul Palmer, S.J.

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■ Marriage is at its best when it is a covenant ...

- It is a natural symbol for Christ's covenant with the Church.
- In fact, marriage symbolizes the relationship of Christ and the Church so well that the Church elevated it to a Sacrament.

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■ So here is where the problem lies ...

- The Church assumes that all marriages are sacramental.
 - Marriage is a covenant entered into by two adults of faith who view their marriage as a sign of Christ's love for His church.
 - Anything other than this is an anomaly – an event surrounded by unusual circumstances.

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■ So here is where the problem lies ...

- This, however, is not the lived experience of many people in the USA.
 - 21% of Catholics experience divorce.
 - 34% of non-denominational Christians divorce.
 - 29% of Southern Baptists divorce.

Data is from http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_dira.htm

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■ So here is where the problem lies ...

- As we know – and the data shows – divorce is not unusual.
- People outside of the Catholic Church often have no idea that they are doing something “sacramental” when they get married.
 - Faith and presence are supposed to be requirements for sacrament.

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■ So here is where the problem lies ...

- Furthermore, people who divorce often find the Catholic Church approach to annulment disrespectful and unrepresentative of their failed marriage experience.
 - Many people believe that they had a “good” marriage, but it died.
- Thus, the annulment process is often hurtful instead of healing.

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■ There is no easy answer ...

- Most marriages are sacramental!
 - Lots of marriages become sacramental over time.
- Marriage may be the most important event in a person's life. The Church and God should be a part of it.
- On the other hand, we can't have a sacrament if people don't know that they are participating in it.

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■ There is no easy answer ...

- Some bishops in France tried to address this problem by asking the people getting married to pick one of three types of marriage:
 - A secular marriage outside of the church.
 - A blessed marriage (specifically not sacramental).
 - We wish you good luck!
 - A sacramental marriage.
- This approach was rejected by Rome.

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■ Difference between “secular” and “Christian” marriage (ref. Lawler)

- A couple entering into secular marriage say to one another:
 - I love you and give myself to you.
- In addition to the above, a couple entering into Christian marriage say:
 - I love you as myself, as God loves his people and as Christ loves his church.

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■ Christian marriage from the first ...

- Is more than just a union of this man and this woman – it is a religious covenant.
- Involves God and his Christ:
 - Modeling it
 - Gracing it
 - Guaranteeing it
- Would not be *Christian* at all without this!

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■ Christian marriage from the first ...

- Proclaims the love of the couple:
 - for each other
 - for God and their Christ
- It is extraordinarily difficult to live this understanding of Christian marriage.
- When are you married?
 - Thirty years later!

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■ **Divorce and Annulment**

- As a rule, the Church does not allow divorce.
 - Exceptions:
 - Pauline privilege: Divorce allowed if one spouse becomes Christian and the other spouse will not live peaceably.
 - If sexual intercourse has not occurred.

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■ **Divorce and Annulment**

- However, the Church does acknowledge that a marriage may not have been sacramental:
 - If the marriage was not entered into freely.
 - If either party entered into marriage in "bad faith"
 - They did not intend to be married for a lifetime.
 - They were psychologically unprepared.
 - They did not have a mature faith.
- An annulment is not a divorce – it states that a *sacramental* marriage did not occur, even though a secular marriage did occur.

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■ Conclusions

- Marriage is a gift from God the creator.
 - Woman and man are obviously created in a complementary way.
 - Not just physically, but also psychologically and spiritually.
 - A loving God has created woman and man to be in loving *partnership* with him.
 - This partnership is based on covenant.

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■ Conclusions

- As this partnership is lived among man, woman, and God it grows and becomes more complete.
 - It becomes harder to distinguish where one person stops and the other person begins.
 - This *trinitarian* union produces a “oneness.”
 - This oneness, although never perfectly achieved, is a powerful symbol of the oneness between Christ and the Church.
 - It is both present and unfulfilled.
 - It is a symbol of God's love for us.
 - It is an outward sign from God that shows God's favor for us.