

## The Holy Bride

Sirach 3:2-7, 12-14  
Psalm 128  
Colossians 3:12-17  
Luke 2:41-52

“I, Jesus Christ, take you to be my wife.  
I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad,  
in sickness and in health.  
I will love you and honor you  
all the days of my life.”

Today is the Feast of the Holy Family. The term “Holy Family,” traditionally refers to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. However, this weekend, I want to look at another family that is called to be holy. In the Book of Genesis and in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark we read that, “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7). At the age of 30, Jesus left his father and mother and began His public ministry. During that public ministry, He met His Bride, the Church, known also as the “New Jerusalem.” The Book of Revelation testifies to this, stating—

The angel said, “Come here. I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” He took me in spirit to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

-Revelation 21:9B-10

Through His death and Resurrection, Christ gave Himself completely to His Bride to sanctify her and save her. Saint Paul explains this in his letter to the Ephesians, writing—

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

-Ephesians 5:25-27

All of us here, and all Christians throughout the world, are the Bride of Christ; He is our Bridegroom and He has given us His life that we might know freedom and choose to leave behind the false lovers of sin and become a Holy Family with Him. However, we struggle to do that; we see and hear every day the Church’s struggle to be a Bride without blemish. We have been reminded of this very recently in the Church scandal uncovered in Ireland.

Eight years ago, God began a purification process in the Catholic Church in the United States, calling her to be holy as He is holy. Now, God is challenging the Church in Ireland in a similar way. An investigation into the Catholic Church in Ireland turned up countless instances of child abuse. The 2,600-page report said that “consistent testimony from still-traumatized men and women, now in their 50s to 80s, had demonstrated beyond a doubt that the entire system treated children more like prison inmates and slaves than people with legal rights and human potential.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,520824,00.html>

Not only do we see sinfulness, brokenness, disobedience, and ungodliness in parts of the hierarchy of the Church, but we see it within ourselves. We are all-too-aware of our own sinfulness and struggles. We are all-too-aware that we are not yet the Bride Christ desires for us to be. We are so often more like the Bride described in the Book of Hosea. God used the prophet's own marriage to a harlot as an image of His relationship with His Chosen People, who were being rebellious. God spoke through the prophet, saying—

Yes, their mother has played the harlot; she that conceived them has acted shamefully. "I will go after my lovers," she said, "who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink." She has not known that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and her abundance of silver, and of gold, which they used for Baal...

-Hosea 2:7-10

Despite the imperfection of the Bride of Christ, the Church, Christ still loves her and continues to purify her just as God had done for the Chosen People. Through the prophet Hosea we read that God will "allure [His Bride]" and "lead her into the desert and speak to her heart" (Hosea 2:16). The desert is a Scriptural image of conversion and prayer. This passage is telling us that God will bring His Bride, the Church, into a place of conversion and prayer as part of the process of purification so that she might be "holy and without blemish." That process of conversion and prayer must begin with us. We are the Bride of Christ and Christ desires to have a Holy Family!

As we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, let's continue to pray for the purification and sanctification of the Church, beginning in our own hearts!

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:**

- ✚ Picture yourself as the Bride of Christ and read Hosea 2:16-25 as His words to you. What stirs in your heart? What response do you desire to speak or make after reading these words?
- ✚ Read Colossians 3:12-17. Which of the gifts mentioned do you most desire for the Bride of Christ, the Church?