

# **Sacrament of Marriage**

## **Introduction**

Book of Genesis narrates, “God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’” At the onset of creation was the marriage. It was part of the creator’s plan from the commencement of all ages. It was the way through which God wished not only to continue the race of men which He had created, but to reveal the very mystery of His inner life in the Trinity.

The whole biblical revelation unfolds between the marriage of the first Adam & Eve (in Book of Genesis) and the marriage of the final Adam & Eve i.e. Christ, the bridegroom & His Church, the bride (in the Book of Revelation)

## **What is Marriage?**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that Marriage is the intimate, exclusive, indissoluble communion of life and love entered by man and woman at the design of the Creator for the purpose of their own good and the procreation and education of children; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

1. Established by God: The 2nd Vatican Council reminds us that, Marriage is not a purely human institution. The intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state has been established by the creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws and essential attributes, without which marriage cannot exist as he intends.
2. A unique relationship: Marriage is not like any other relationship. The Church has taught through the ages that marriage is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. Marriage thus created is a faithful, privileged sphere of intimacy between the spouses that lasts until death.
3. Social outreach: Marriage is not merely a private institution. It is the foundation for the family, where children learn the values and virtues that will make good Christians as well as good citizens. The importance of marriage for children and for the upbringing of the next generation highlights the importance of marriage for all society.
4. Mutual Commitment: Conjugal love, the love proper to marriage, is present in the commitment to the complete and total gift of self between husband and wife. Conjugal love establishes a unique

communion of persons through the relationship of mutual self-giving and receiving between husband and wife, a relationship by which —a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body [flesh] (Gn. 2:24).

### **Christian Marriage as a Sacrament:**

Marriage is one of the Church's mysteries, or sacraments. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: Christian marriage becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. An efficacious sign is one that does not merely symbolize or signify something, but actually makes present what it signifies.

The marriage of Catholics is a sacrament by virtue of the spouses' baptisms. In other words, marriage is a living sign that truly communicates the love of Christ and the Church. The spouses' vows lived out in their daily commitment, and most specifically in their "one flesh" union, constitute this living sign. As St. Paul says, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:31-32).

1. Love that surpasses natural human love: By using the image of the relationship between Christ and the Church to explain the relationship between bridegroom and bride, the Scriptures are appealing to a natural human relationship that is already well known. Christ's love for the Church is a love of complete self-giving. This love is most completely expressed by his death on the Cross. Christian marriage aspires not only to natural human love, but to Christ's love for the Church.
2. Gifting the self: As a sacrament, marriage signifies and makes present in the couple Christ's total self-gift of love. Their mutual gift of self, conferred in their promises of fidelity and love to the end, becomes a participation in the love to the end by which Christ gave himself to the Church as to a Spouse (cf Jn. 13:1). When Christian couples receive the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony, Christ dwells with them, 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.

### **Marriage as a Vocation:**

The Church teaches that marriage is an authentic vocation, or divine call. As a vocation, marriage is as necessary and valuable to the Church as other

vocations. For this reason, all of us should pray that men and women will enter into marriage with the proper understanding and motivation and that they will live it generously and joyfully. The 2nd Vatican Council teaches that “all the faithful, whatever their condition or state are called by the Lord” each in his or her own way “to that perfect holiness by which the Father himself is perfect”. Within this universal vocation to holiness, God calls some men to the priesthood and other men and women to the consecrated married life.

1. For the salvation of others: The Sacrament of Matrimony, like the Sacrament of Holy Orders, is directed toward the salvation of others. Personal salvation is achieved through the service to others. Those who receive these sacraments are given a special consecration in Christ’s name.
2. To grow in Love and Holiness: In Baptism, God calls the faithful to grow in love. This vocation to love, in imitation of God’s infinite love, is also a vocation to grow in holiness, for greater participation in God’s love necessarily entails a greater participation in God’s holiness.

### **The purposes of Marriage:**

Marriage has two fundamental ends or purposes towards which it is oriented, namely, the good of the spouses as well as the procreation of children. Thus, the Church teaches that marriage is both unitive and procreative, and that it is inseparably both.

1. Unitive: Pope John Paul II’s theology of the body speaks of the human body as having a spousal significance. This means that the human body by its very nature signifies that we humans are directed to relationship—that we are to seek union with others. God clearly made human beings to love and to be loved, to be in relationships wherein the act of giving oneself and receiving the other becomes complete.
2. Procreative: It is the nature of love to overflow, to be life-giving. Thus, it is no surprise that marriage is ordained not only to growing in love but to transmitting life. By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory.

### **Biological, Personal and Spiritual dimensions of Marriage:**

There are characteristics of marriage, which is fully human and at the same time elevated to the divine through the sacrament: it is a total gift of self, body and soul; it lasts throughout the spouses’ lifetime, “until death do us part”; it is faithful and exclusive; and it is fruitful, open to children according to God’s plan.

1. Biological: The roots of marriage can be seen in the biological fact that a man and a woman can come together as male and female in a union that has the potential for bringing forth another human person. This kind of union fills the need for the continuation of the human race.
2. Personal: Since human beings exist at more than a biological level, this union has further personal and spiritual dimensions. Marriage does not exist solely for the reproduction of another member of the species, but for the creation of a communion of persons. To form a communion of persons is the vocation of everyone. As Pope John Paul II teaches, all human persons are created in the image of God, who is a communion of love of three persons, and thus all are called to live in a communion of self-giving love: —to say that man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is called to exist for others, to become a gift. Marriage, however, is a unique communion of persons. In their intimate union as male and female, the spouses are called to exist for each other.
3. Spiritual: This communion of persons has the potential to bring forth human life and to produce the family. Then, family becomes another kind of communion of persons which is the origin and foundation of all human society. It is precisely the difference between man and woman that makes possible this unique communion of persons, the unique partnership of life and loves that is marriage. A man and woman united in marriage as husband and wife serve as a symbol of both life and love in a way that no other relationship of human persons can.

**Conclusion:**

By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church.

The 2nd century Church Father Tertullian sums up the greatness of this conjugal life in Christ and its beauty: "How can I ever express the happiness of the marriage that is joined together by the Church strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels and ratified by the Father? ...How wonderful the bond between two believers with a single hope, a single desire, a single observance, a single service! They are both fellow servants; there is no separation between them in spirit or flesh; in fact they are truly two in one flesh and where the flesh is one, one is the spirit."