

Gifts of Finest Wheat

Spring 2010 - Sacraments

May 27th, 2010

Session 7 – Sacramental Marriage

Prayer –

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

V. Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created.

R. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations.

Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

What is Marriage?

- I. Written in our human nature
 - a. Our God, who is love, created man and woman and called them to an intimate communion of life and of love. (Created in the image and likeness of a Trinitarian God)
 - b. God who created man out of love also calls him to love the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God who is himself love. Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man. (CCC 1604)
 - c. Marriage existed before the time of Christ as a natural institution, natural to human beings as such.
 - d. "The intimate community of life and love which constitutes the married state has been 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. (CCC 1603)
- II. As an OT symbol
 - a. In the Old Testament, marital imagery is often employed to express the relationship between God and Israel.
 - b. Israel's disobedience is likened to a harlot or an unfaithful wife. This is particularly the case in the prophet Hosea.
 - c. The Song of Songs has long been interpreted as love poetry between God and His people.

- d. This imagery found its fulfillment in Christ who is the bridegroom of the Church, his bride.
- e. The book of Revelation depicts Heaven as the wedding banquet of the lamb, in which Christ is the Bridegroom, and His Church, the bride.

III. Raised to the dignity of a sacrament

- a. Christ, however, raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament. Of particular importance in the scriptures is the scene of the Wedding Feast at Cana. Christ uses the occasion of a wedding to change water into wine, and thus to show forth the superabundance of God's transforming grace and love. He gave to marriage a sacramental dimension.
- b. **"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)
- c. On the threshold of his public life Jesus performs his first sign - at his mother's request - during a wedding feast. The Church attaches great importance to Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana. She sees in it the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence. (CCC 1613)
- d. St. Paul said to the Ephesians referring to marriage: "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. So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave (his) father and (his) mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery [*mysterion; sacramentum*], but I speak in reference to Christ and the church (Eph 5:25-32)."
- e. "This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32). "Mystery" here is the same Greek word used to render the English "sacrament." Marriage, then, is a sign of Christ's love for his bride, the Church.
- f. Paul is telling us what the love between spouses ought to resemble; it should mirror or reflect the love that Christ has for the Church.
- g. 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 grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life (cf. Council of Trent: DS 1799). (CCC 1661)
- h. That love found its perfect expression on the cross in which Christ "handed himself over" for his bride, the Church.
- i. As such, when we see this love between man and woman, it should point beyond itself and remind us of the love Christ has for His people. If that be the case, then

to fully live out this reality, spousal love should reflect the qualities of Christ's love for the Church.

- j. As the Nuptial Blessing from the Rite of Marriage says: "Father, to reveal the plan of your love, you made the union of husband and wife an image of the covenant between you and your people. In the fulfillment of this sacrament, the marriage of Christian man and woman is a sign of the marriage between Christ and the Church."
- k. Man and woman also reveal to us something of God's inner life as Trinity.
 - i. If we turn to the creation narrative in the first chapter of Genesis, we hear: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them (1:27).
 - ii. That humanity was created male and female was not incidental, accidental or unintentional.
 - iii. God, a community of persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), created humans to reflect that life of communion with one another.
 - iv. God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image . . . God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the *vocation*, and thus the capacity and responsibility, *of love and communion*" (CCC 2331).
 - v. The Trinity has been described as Lover, Beloved, and the Love between them. The Father loves the Son, the Son returns that love, and the love between them is another Person, the Holy Spirit. So the family is an icon of the Blessed Trinity. A husband loves his wife (in that way particular to a husband and a wife), a wife returns that love, and the love between them is so real that (in nine months) it becomes another person.

IV. The "ends," or "goods" of marriage

- a. Over the course of time, the Church identified as the ends, or purpose, of marriage the **communion and good of the couple** as well as the **generation and education of children**.
- b. This is also referred to as the **unitive** and the **procreative** aspects of marriage.

V. The essential properties of marriage

- a. We also say that the essential properties of marriage are **unity** (fidelity) and **indissolubility**.
- b. "From a valid marriage arises a *bond* between the spouses which by its very nature is perpetual and exclusive; furthermore, in a Christian marriage the spouses are strengthened and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and the dignity of their state *by a special sacrament*." (CCC 1638)
- c. Marriage creates a perpetual and exclusive *bond* between the spouses.
 - i. Therefore, a marriage which is ratified and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved.
 - ii. Christ's words on divorce and remarriage are quite clear in the scriptures: what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.
 - iii. Thus *the marriage bond* has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free

human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's fidelity. (CCC 1640)

- iv. This unequivocal insistence on the indissolubility of the marriage bond may have left some perplexed and could seem to be a demand impossible to realize. However, Jesus has not placed on spouses a burden impossible to bear, or too heavy - heavier than the Law of Moses.¹⁰⁸ By coming to restore the original order of creation disturbed by sin, he himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves, and taking up their crosses that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ. This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life. (CCC 1615)
- v. The deepest reason is found in the fidelity of God to his covenant, in that of Christ to his Church. Through the sacrament of Matrimony the spouses are enabled to represent this fidelity and witness to it. Through the sacrament, the indissolubility of marriage receives a new and deeper meaning. (CCC 1647)

The Effects of a Sacramental Marriage

1641 "By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God." This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to **perfect the couple's love** and to **strengthen their indissoluble unity**. By this grace they **"help one another to attain holiness** in their married life and in **welcoming and educating their children.**"

- a. "...After the fall, marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, pursuit of one's own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving." (CCC 1609)

1648 It can seem difficult, even impossible, to bind oneself for life to another human being. This makes it all the more important to proclaim the Good News that God loves us with a definitive and irrevocable love, **that married couples share in this love, that it supports and sustains them**, and that by their own faithfulness **they can be witnesses to God's faithful love**. Spouses who with God's grace give this witness, often in very difficult conditions, deserve the gratitude and support of the ecclesial community.

What Makes a Sacramental Marriage?

I. Definition

- a. A marriage comes about when a man and a woman exchange marital consent.
- b. Marital consent is “an act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept each other through an irrevocable covenant in order to establish marriage.”
- c. Though the matter has never been settled by a definitive statement of the Church, it is commonly held that the matter of this sacrament is the mutual self-giving of the spouses, and the form is the mutual acceptance of that giving. So the exchange of consent itself is the matter and form of the sacrament.

II. Nullity

- a. Like the other sacraments, there are certain conditions for the validity of a marriage.
- b. Remember, validity means that the effects of the sacrament take place. For instance, in the case of the Eucharist, if an essential element is missing, like wheat bread, then the sacrament is invalid: it does not become the body of Christ, no matter how much we want it to.
- c. There is a similar reality in marriage. If marriage is formed by the consent of the couple, then if an essential element is missing at that time, it not a valid sacramental marriage.
- d. That means that the effects of the sacrament do not happen: the permanent sacramental bond between the spouses is not formed.
- e. This is the background to the Church’s teaching on annulments, or “declarations of nullity.”
- f. Marriages are always presumed to be valid unless the contrary can be proven to be the case.
- g. So, what kinds of this are required for a valid marriage?

III. Capacity

- a. First, the spouses must have the capacity, or be capable, of exchanging consent.
- b. They must be sufficiently mature, psychologically stable, their judgment not impaired in any grave way.
- c. The couple must also be free from what are called “impediments.”
 - i. They have to be a certain age, they cannot be related to a certain degree, they cannot be in another valid marriage or under vows of religious life etc.

IV. Consent

- a. The consent consists in a "human act by which the partners mutually give themselves to each other": "I take you to be my wife" - "I take you to be my husband." This consent that binds the spouses to each other finds its fulfillment in the two "becoming one flesh." (CCC 1627)

- b. There must also be nothing lacking in the consent itself. Consent cannot be forced, or entered into under sever duress.
- c. They cannot be excluding one of the ends or essential properties of marriage from their consent:
 - i. *“I definitely do not want to ever have children.”*
 - ii. *“I am not going to be faithful to this person.”*
 - iii. *“This marriage is not forever; it’s for as long as I want.”*
- d. They cannot be simulating consent altogether: “I’m not *really* getting married...this is just for a green card.”

V. Form

- a. In the Western Church, the ministers of the sacrament are the couple themselves, not the priest or deacon. They administer the sacrament to one another.
- b. However, since Matrimony is a public state of life in the Church, it takes place in a public liturgical celebration in the presence of a priest (or of a witness authorized by the Church) and other witnesses.
- c. If one of the parties is Catholic, he/she is bound by a certain “form” of marriage, meaning exchanging consent before a minister of the Church and two witnesses. If a Catholic fails to receive a dispensation and marries elsewhere, this is also grounds for a declaration of nullity.
- d. The priest (or deacon) who assists at the celebration of a marriage receives the consent of the spouses in the name of the Church and gives the blessing of the Church. The presence of the Church's minister (and also of the witnesses) visibly expresses the fact that marriage is an ecclesial reality. (CCC 1630)
- e. **1631** This is the reason why the Church normally requires that the faithful contract marriage according to the ecclesiastical form. Several reasons converge to explain this requirement:
 - i. - Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church;
 - ii. - Marriage introduces one into an ecclesial order, and creates rights and duties in the Church between the spouses and towards their children;
 - iii. - Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses);
 - iv. - The public character of the consent protects the "I do" once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it.

The point is that 1) something is not a sacrament just because we say it is; a marriage is a marriage for certain reasons and 2) an annulment is not just a Catholic form of divorce, but a painstaking process to determine if a couple truly entered into a lifelong covenant.

Communicatio in Sacris
Code of Canon Law 844

General Norm:

Catholic ministers administer the sacraments licitly to Catholic members of the Christian faithful alone, who likewise receive them licitly from Catholic ministers alone...

Catholics receiving from Eastern Orthodox Ministers:

- 1) Whenever necessity requires it or true spiritual advantage suggests it,
- 2) Provided that danger of error or of indifferentism is avoided
- 3) It is physically or morally impossible to approach a Catholic minister**
- 4) Are permitted to receive the sacraments of penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick from non-Catholic ministers in whose Churches these sacraments are valid.

Members of Eastern Orthodox Churches receiving in Catholic Churches:

- 1) The sacraments of penance, Eucharist, and anointing of the sick
- 2) If they seek such on their own accord and,
- 3) are properly disposed.

Protestants Receiving Sacraments from Catholic Minister

- 1) If the danger of death is present or,
- 2) If, in the judgment of the diocesan bishop or conference of bishops, some other grave necessity urges it
 - a. Catholic ministers administer these same sacraments licitly also to other Christians not having full communion with the Catholic Church, who:
 - i. cannot approach a minister of their own community and,
 - ii. who seek such on their own accord,
 - iii. provided that they manifest Catholic faith in respect to these sacraments and
 - iv. are properly disposed.