

THE SACRAMENTS OF VOCATION HOLY ORDERS AND MARRIAGE

SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

Dear People of St. Andrew the Apostle:

A Sacrament is an outward sign (something we can see) instituted by Christ to give grace (to draw us more deeply into the mystery of God's love for us and to grow our personal relationship with Jesus.) In the case of Holy Matrimony, God the Father instituted it in ancient days. We read in Genesis 2:22-24: "Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man. The man said 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' ...for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." As Catholics we see Matrimony as the one blessing that was not washed away by the flood and is the chief building block of Jewish and Christian culture.



Jesus attended a wedding feast in the town of Cana and worked His first recorded miracle there. His presence and the fact that He performed a miracle show that marriage was an important element of the faith He was proclaiming. We believe that he elevated marriage to become the Sacrament of Matrimony in Matthew 19:4-6 when he quoted from Genesis and added, "So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what ***God has joined together*** no one must separate." The reality that it is God who is joining the couple together in Holy Matrimony creates a Sacrament—a living sign of God's life-giving love. St. Paul writes much about Holy Matrimony in his epistles, especially in 1st Corinthians 7:1-16.

What is the External Sign of Holy Matrimony?

The couple themselves are the outward sign. They pledge their love and fidelity to one another, and promise to create a family through their love. Other signs are the exchange of rings with a pledge of faithfulness.

How does the Sacrament give Grace, and to Whom is it Given?

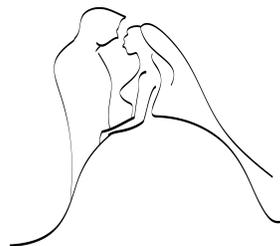
The couple is inviting an unseen guest into their relationship and into their home—asking Jesus to be at the center of their lives. The vows that the couple make to one another to be true to each other carries with them an unspoken promise to allow Jesus to love them through their spouse for the rest of their lives. In turn, they are asking Jesus to love their future family through them as parents. Married couples are also a source of grace for the Christian community. They remind us of God's unconditional love, of the vastness of His mercy and forgiveness, and in their cooperation with God in creating family, they remind us of God's life-giving Spirit and the fact that He is not finished with us and not abandoning us.



What is Required of Couples to be Celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony?

Actually a wedding is not a one-day celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Rather, it is the day upon which the Sacrament of Matrimony is created out of the couples' love for one another. It is a living Sacrament—the couple becomes the Sacrament. Each day of their marriage is a celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, and their intimate sexual relationship (which we do not see) is the sealing of that relationship—over and over again. In fact, the Sacrament does not come into being in the wedding, but rather it is brought to life after the wedding when the couple consummates their marriage.

As opposed to a civil marriage, which creates a contractual relationship between the couple, the Sacrament of Matrimony is a covenant—entered into freely by a man and a woman with the intention of loving each other for the rest of their lives. It is not a piece of paper, it is an exchange of promises that creates an inseparable and life-long partnership of equals.



What requirements must be met for a Valid Sacrament to be Created?

For a valid Sacrament to be created the following requirements must be met:

1. Both the bride and the groom must be baptized Catholics, or if only one is Catholic, a dispensation for a mixed marriage of a baptized Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic can be obtained. A different type of dispensation can be arranged for the marriage of a baptized Catholic and a non-baptized person.
2. The marriage must take place in a Church and the exchange of vows (called “consent”) must be witnessed by a bishop, priest or deacon and two witnesses (usually the best man and the maid of honor).
3. The couple must consummate the marriage and intend to have children and raise a family, unless there is a physical impediment preventing it.
4. The couple must give 9 months prior notification to their parish of their desire to be married and complete a process of preparation that includes classes in practical marriage issues, what the Church teaches about Holy Matrimony, and a course in Natural Family Planning.
5. Both bride and groom must be free to marry, and if either has been married in the past their prior marriages must in some way be resolved to become free to marry. *This applies to prior marriages both of Catholics and of non-Catholics.*

What does the Preparation Process Involve?

1. A meeting with our Marriage and Family Life Coordinator begins the process. Barb Lishko will go over the process, determine if the couple is free to marry, administer a FOCCUS (an instrument that encourage communication on important issues affecting marriage).
2. A review of the results of the FOCCUS and identification of any areas that need further discussion and review.
3. A Marriage “Life Skills” Class that reviews issues that often break up marriages in their first five years such as healthy communications, forgiveness, finances, etc.
4. “God’s Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage” - a review of how we understand Marriage as part of God’s plan for a couples’ well-being and joy.
5. Natural Family Planning—learning the techniques of Natural Family Planning so that the couple will have tools for family planning that are safe, natural, and in keeping with the moral teachings of our Church.

Why does the Church Require Preparation and How does it Benefit a Couple?

We are not asking couples to “jump through hoops” in order to get married. We are asking engaged couples to invest in their future. The divorce rate in the United States is alarmingly high. We do not want our couples to become another statistic but rather to find happiness, satisfaction and fulfillment in their marriage. We believe that the Church has two thousand years of wisdom to offer. Statistics tell us that when couples understand how they are to become a living Sacrament, are given tools to keep their faith alive, and practice Natural Family Planning, the divorce rate goes down to less than 2%.

What about Divorce and Re-Marriage?

One of Jesus’ strongest teachings is on the indissolubility of the marriage covenant. He even suggests that adultery is involved. We want to honor His teaching, and we want to be compassionate towards those who experience the pain and suffering of a broken marriage. I always suggest to couples that they contact a priest or Marriage and Family Life minister immediately following a divorce to look at what the Church can offer for healing and for seeing if there is a process available that would result in freedom to marry again in the Church. We cannot promise that there will be, but we see our jobs as removing obstacles so we will do whatever we can to help. The process can be lengthy, so the earlier we get it started the better, rather than waiting to see if another person captures your heart.

When a person is divorced, nothing changes in their status with the Church. They are free to receive Communion and to engage in ministry and to raise their children as Catholics. Re-marriage is the issue. Please contact us and see what we can do to help.

Why is Marriage Indissoluble, and What if a Marriage fails?

A Sacrament is a permanent reality. When one is baptized, for instance, they cannot reverse their baptism and become unbaptized. When bread and wine are transformed into the Eucharist, we cannot reverse the action and return it to bread and wine. It is permanently the Body and Blood of Christ. So, too, in the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Sacrament cannot be undone. A man and wife are a permanent Sacrament and called to help each other grow in faith. If a marriage fails the Sacrament cannot be reversed. What we can do is look to see if either or both the husband and wife somehow prevented the Sacrament from coming into being due to something lacking at the time of the marriage. More on that later.