

RCIA
The Sacraments of Service
Session 16

“Holy Orders and Matrimony are directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God. *Holy Orders* is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time: thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry. It includes three degrees: episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate. The *matrimonial covenant*, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life, is by nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring...”

(#1534, 1536, 1601 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*)



SACRAMENTS OF RELATIONS OR SERVICE

MATRIMONY

Since the thirteenth century marriage has been recognized officially as one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. Marriage is described in the revised Code of Canon Law as: "a covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life and which of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children." (can. 1055)

This description, which follows the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (n.48), provides headings to examine both marriage and the sacrament of marriage.

MARRIAGE

Everyone has probably been to and been moved by a wedding. Or a valid marriage, however, only one wedding moment truly counts, the solemn moment of giving consent. After each partner has declared the willingness to take the other as husband or wife ("to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part") they are pronounced husband and wife. ***If their free consent is missing or is seriously flawed, there is no marriage;*** for free consent establishes marriage (can. 1057). An apparent marriage is null and invalid from the moment a seriously flawed consent is given. A later declaration of nullity, called an ***annulment***, does not make such a marriage invalid, it merely declares that it was always invalid, despite appearances to the contrary.

Since the consent of the spouses establishes a marriage, in common with the other Western churches the Catholic church teaches that the spouses, not the witnessing priest or deacon, are the ministers of the sacrament. The Orthodox churches of the East, on the other hand, teach that the presiding priest is the minister. Though in the Catholic Church he may not be the minister of the sacrament, the presiding priest plays a central liturgical role in the wedding ceremony, accepting and blessing the marriage on behalf of the Church.

What is the marriage that free consent establishes? An ancient Roman definition, found in the *Digesta* of the emperor Justinian, has dominated the answer to this question in the West. "Marriage is a union of a man and a woman, and a communion of the whole of life." Marriage is a union of, and a communion between, a man and a woman by which they establish, as the canon law asserts, "a partnership of their whole life." The phrase "whole life" is ambiguous. It can mean as long as life lasts, and then it implies that marriage is a lifelong commitment. It can mean everything that the spouses have, and then imply that nothing is left unshared between them. Over the years, both meanings have been interwoven that marriage is looked upon as the union of a man and a woman sharing throughout the whole of their lives all their goods.

Marriage, then, is a partnership of the whole of life between a man and a woman. But what is the partnership for? Again, in other Western and Catholic

traditions, there is no doubt. Marriage has two ends, the well being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children. For many years in the Catholic tradition, these two ends of marriage were categorized as secondary and primary, respectively. Where a conflict between the ends arose, the personal and marital well being of the spouses, the secondary end had to yield to the primary end of the procreation of children. The Second Vatican council significantly altered that tradition.

The council taught, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, that both marriage and the marital love of the spouses "are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown" (n.48). It refused, however, to employ the traditional primary/secondary end terminology. It taught that procreation "does not mean the other ends of marriage of less account" and that marriage "is not instituted solely for procreation" (n50). That the omission of the traditional terminology was the result of deliberated choice was demonstrated beyond doubt when revised canon 1055, cited above, repeated the council's nonhierarchical formulation.

Marriage, therefore, is a loving partnership of the whole of life, established by the free consent of the spouses, and ordered equally to the mutual well being of the spouses and to the procreation and nurture of children. When such a marriage is between two believers, the Catholic Church teaches it is also both COVENANT and SACRAMENT.

MARRIAGE AS COVENANT AND SACRAMENT

Since marriage is established by the consent of the spouses, it was traditionally considered under the legal heading of contract. Since the Second Vatican Council it has come to be considered more under the religious heading of covenant. For Christians of all denominations, "covenant" echoes both the covenants between God and God's people and the covenant between Christ and His people, the Church. "Covenant" is not merely a biblical word. It is also a personal word. Covenants engage people and the mutual services of people. Covenants are forever. They are religious realities, witnessed by God. Only adults who are mentally, emotionally, and spiritually mature can make covenants. The designation of a marriage between Christians as a covenant, a common designation today in all the Christian churches, is intended to imply the religious fact that it is not only an echo of the two biblical covenants, but also an extension and a participation in both. It is precisely this idea that situates it also as a sacrament.

The partners entering into any marriage say to one another before witnesses "I love you and I give myself to you." Christian partners entering into the sacrament of marriage say that too, but they also say more. They say: "I love you as Christ loves the Church, and I give myself to and for you as Christ gives himself to and for the Church." A sacramental marriage is, therefore, more than the civil marriage of a man and a woman; it is more than human covenant. It is also a religious marriage and covenant. God and God's Christ are present in it, theologically third partners in it, from its beginning.

This presence of grace in its most ancient Catholic sense, namely, the presence of the gracious God, is not something extrinsic to the covenant of sacramental marriage. It is something essential to it. Without it the marriage is neither Christian nor sacramental. Christian marriage announces and makes explicit the mutual love of a Christian man and woman. It also announces and makes explicit in representation their love for Christ, as well as their covenant to make their marriage an image and a symbol of Christ's steadfast covenant with His Church. It is in this sense that it is a sacrament, an outward sign in the human world of the presence of the God who is Grace. This two-storied meaning is what the Catholic Church intends when it teaches that the marriage covenant has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

The Love that is at the root of sacramental marriage is the same love that is at the root of covenant, "steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exod 34:6). It is with such love that God loves Israel and Christ loves the Church. It is such love that is enjoined upon Christian husbands, who are to love their wives "as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). We can be sure that the same love is also required from Christian wives. Christian spouses are to love one another steadfastly and faithfully.

This steadfast love, traditionally called fidelity, makes sacramental marriage exclusive and permanent (can 1056). Christian marriage is indissoluble because Christian love is steadfast and faithful and indissoluble. Indissolubility is a quality of Christian marriage because it is first and foremost a quality of Christian love. If marital love exists only in germ on a wedding day, and it surely does, then so also does indissolubility exist only in germ. Marital love, the mainspring of indissoluble partnership of the whole of life is not a given in a Christian marriage. It is an ongoing challenge; an eschatological challenge theologians call it, to which the spouses are called to respond as followers of the Christ who is for them the sacrament and the Incarnation of God.

Though the Catholic Church teaches that all marriages are indissoluble, in practice it does dissolve valid marriages. It dissolves non-sacramental marriages in the ancient procedure known as the Pauline Privilege, first enunciated by the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 7:15). It also dissolves valid marriages that have not been consummated (can 1142). It never dissolves marriages that are both sacramental and consummated. These marriages are held to be absolutely indissoluble, only these marriages, in practice, are held to be for the whole life.

HOLY ORDERS

Priesthood as we know it in the Catholic Church was unheard of during the first generation of Christianity, because at that time priesthood was still associated with animal sacrifices in both Jewish and pagan religions. The first Christians continued to recognize the legitimacy of the Jewish Temple and priesthood at Jerusalem. In their

local communities they continued a style of community leadership common in Jewish communities, looking to elders to provide leadership and to preside over their Eucharistic assemblies. These were chosen in a ritual that included being prayed over and having hands laid on them. In the Greek Scriptures, these elders are called *presbyteroi*. Other ministers were chosen in a similar ritual (see Acts 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22)

In 70 CE Jerusalem and its temple and Jewish priesthood were destroyed by Roman armies. Jews were scattered. Christians began to look to Jesus as the priest, a development in their thinking reflected clearly in the Letter to Hebrews. All the baptized shared this special priesthood because all had become one with Christ.

A clearly defined local leadership in the form of elders, or *presbyteroi*, became still more important when the original apostles and disciples of Jesus died. The chief elder in each community was often called the *episkopos* (Greek, "overseer"). In English this came to be translated as "bishop" (Latin *episcopus*). Ordinarily he presided over the community's Eucharistic assembly.

Someone had to be responsible to preserve and preach the true beliefs when heresies began to evolve. Consequently, local leaders began to consider themselves the successors of the apostles in the sense that they preserved the teaching of the apostles. By the end of the 2nd century the local bishop was considered the source of true teaching.

When the Eucharist came to be regarded as a sacrifice, the role of the bishop took on a priestly dimension. By the 3rd century bishops were considered priests. Presbyters or elders sometimes substituted for the bishop at the Eucharist. By the end of the third century people all over were using the title "priest" (*Hiereus* in Greek and *Sacerdos* in Latin) for whoever presided at the Eucharist. The establishment of the hierarchy of the priesthood evolved with much influence from the Roman Empire when Constantine declared Christianity to be the state religion.

Holy Orders is the sacrament by which a man is consecrated to service in the Church, particularly for sacramental ministry. Holy Orders also grants teaching authority, for example preaching the Gospel, and the right to exercise pastoral leadership, most commonly at the parish level. A priest may be given additional duties and responsibilities by his bishop or religious superior. The Church teaches that Holy Orders imprints an indelible character upon the recipient's soul, making the sacrament a lifetime commitment.

Deacons, priests and bishops go through ordination rituals that include the laying on of hands and a specific prayer for each order. Acts 6:1-6 describes the laying on of

hands when the first deacons were commissioned. From that time on, leadership has been conferred by the imposition of hands.

The hierarchical order of the priesthood developed gradually as the ecclesiastical institution grew and more specialized ministries became necessary. Presbyter (from which "priest" is derived) originally belonged to the council of elders who assisted the overseer (episcopos or bishop) of each community.

Deacons were appointed in the earliest days of the Christian community to meet the practical needs of people in their community, leaving the apostles free to preach the gospel. Deacons also began to assist in liturgical functions, for example, the Baptisms of new Christians. Over the centuries, the diaconate eventually became merely a step toward priesthood. Today we refer to this as the transitional diaconate. After Vatican II, the permanent diaconate was restored.

The rite of Ordination typically takes place in the cathedral of the diocese where the newly ordained will serve. In addition to the laying on of hands and prayer of consecration said by the bishop, a priest is invested with a stole and chasuble 9a deacon is invested with a stole and dalmatic). The new priest's hands are anointed with chrism. Usually, more than one priest is ordained at the same time, and they concelebrate Mass with their bishop. A priest traditionally celebrates his first Mass in his home parish.

A bishop is ordained by other bishops. He is anointed on the head, presented with the Book of Gospels and invested with a ring, pastoral staff and miter – all symbols of his Episcopal power. A miter is a tall hat shaped somewhat like a double cone and is worn for ceremonial occasions.

The two sacraments Christ left the Church to insure its continuance until the end of time are holy orders and matrimony. Both are sacraments of state, that is, both create a definite state of life by conferring a divine mission – increase the number of adopted sons! Both states are dedicated to spreading the kingdom of God. Orders and Matrimony work together, by means of different functions, for the same end.