

MARRIAGE: CATHOLIC STYLE



Jesus said: *"At the beginning creation, God made them male and female; for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become as one. They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, let no man separate what God has joined."* (Mark 10: 6-9)

Marriage in Catholic tradition is an interpersonal relationship involving a man and a woman, a social institution, a sacrament, and a vocation.

Marriage is an interpersonal relationship involving a man and a woman. Catholic tradition sees the origin of marriage in creation. God created men and women with different bodies, different temperaments, different emotional balances and different spiritualities. He created men and women to complement each other and not to compete, to grow in mutual support, unity, and productivity.

Marriage is a social institution, the beginning of a family which most often extends beyond the husband and wife themselves. Families are the basic unit of our societies. Marriage brings these families about and is consequently a social institution. Marriage is good not only for the couple themselves but also for their children, their community, their county, our world. Stable families make healthier life for all. Stable families are the backbone of a stable society.

Marriage is a sacrament. Sacraments are visible physical, tangible signs of invisible realities. I can observe a hug or a kiss, but I cannot actually see the invisible friendship or love to which these visible signs bear witness. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, the relationship of marriage has been used to symbolize the relationship of God and mankind. God and man, by God's design, are meant to form a unity, a shared life where God is always faithful but where man has often wandered. We cannot actually see the relationship between bodily man and spiritual God, but we can understand the call to mutual love, shared life and unity in such a relationship.

Marriage is a sacrament. The relationship of one spouse to the partner can stand for the relationship of God with mankind. The effort to achieve unity in a marriage can be a sign that at least one of the married couple believes that God wants unity with mankind. The call to permanence in a marriage can be a sign that at least one of the partners believes that God is never going to withdraw his love for his spouse, mankind. Fidelity in marriage can express a belief on the part of one or both parties that God is not going to become unfaithful in his concerns for his people. The openness of a marriage relationship to the birth of children can be a sign of the couple's understanding that God is self-giving, not selfish, that He is willing to share life, goodness, with others and not selfishly hoard it for himself. The relationship of a husband and wife can consequently say much about what a couple believes about God, not just about what they believe about themselves and about the good, natural social institution of marriage.

Marriage is a vocation. A couple can continually bear witness to what they believe about life, God, themselves by how they live their marriage relationship. A married couple can ultimately "get to heaven" by responding well to God's grace and love as they live out the days of their sacramental relationship of marriage.

The more one becomes aware of the sacred depths of marriage, the more one can understand why Church communities ask engaged couple to do some marriage preparation before their weddings. His preparation is not likely to "make someone ready" if the individual is not basically ready on the basics of his/her life experience, but it can make some basically ready couples much more ready to get off to a good start in the magnificent mystery of marriage.