

RCIA HO Class 22-23 Matrimony Basics

We begin our consideration of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony with a sobering statistic. The divorce rates for Catholics are the same for all other groups of people: roughly 50 percent. Everyone says, “It won’t happen to us.” It does happen to 50% of couples. How to keep this from happening to you? Why is the divorce rate so high? Perhaps because many couples do not understand what marriage is about. From our point of view as Catholics marriage is a sacrament, i.e. a source of grace. Grace is the divine life dwelling in us, which has the potential to change us into saints. If grace is not real, it can’t change us. But if it is real, it has the potential to make us saints. Saints don’t get divorced. Perhaps there are so many divorces because so many people only take into consideration the natural aspects of marriage and not the supernatural ones?

According to the Code of Canon Law, i.e. the Church’s Law (see CIC 1063, HV 29) pastors of souls (priests) are obliged to ensure that their own church community provides for Christ’s faithful the assistance by which the marriage state is preserved in its Christian character and develops in perfection. This assistance is to be given principally...

1) By personal preparation for entering marriage, so that the spouses are disposed to holiness and the obligations of their new state; **2)** by fruitful celebration of the marriage liturgy, so that it clearly emerges that the spouses manifest, and participate in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church...

This is to say that the supernatural aspects of marriage are the priority, not an afterthought. The purpose of all the sacraments is the salvation of souls. The Sacrament of Matrimony is the special sacrament whose single purpose is to help married couples to attain salvation. We will see how the Church sees the Matrimonial bond as a participation in the love between Christ and His Church.

1) Each Sacrament has two main parts: the matter (the material used) and the form (the words used). It involves a minister (either ordinary or extraordinary) and a recipient (the spouses). Or, more simply, the individuals themselves are the matter of the sacrament. Matrimony is the only sacrament that is not administered by the priest or deacon. The couples themselves give themselves to one another. This promise of self-giving is called the consent and is expressed by the marriage vows. **2)** The vows are the form of the Sacrament of Matrimony: “I, N. take you, N. to be my wife/husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad in sickness and in health. I will love and honor you all the days of my life.” **3)** The effect or purpose of Matrimony is to unite the couple in a sacramental bond which cannot be dissolved, and to give them the grace necessary to persevere in the Christian married life. **4)** The Sacrament of Matrimony also involves three intentions. That is, in order to exchange the sacrament, the couple must intend to do what the Church intends to do by means of the sacrament. They are as follows:

a) “N. and N., have you come here freely and w/o reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?” **b)** “Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?” **c)** “Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church?”

Each answers the questions individually, but at the same time, together. Answering, “I have”, “I will”, and “I will” make promises they to God, to one another, and to the entire Christian community (CIC 834, FC 56). This statement of their intentions corresponds to the questions asked of them in the process of their preparation to ascertain that they understand what the sacrament is about.

Pre-Marital Investigation: Questions the couple is asked under oath:

a) Do you understand that marriage is permanent and is dissolved only by the death of one of the parties? **b)** Do you understand that one of the main purposes of marriage is to have children and raise a family? **c)** Do you understand the teaching of the Church concerning marriage and family planning? **d)** With this understanding do you intend to enter a true marriage and accept all its obligations? To the best of your knowledge does your intended spouse also plan to enter a true marriage and accept all its obligations? When the individuals are the proper matter, i.e. a baptized man and a baptized woman, when they have the proper intentions, as stated above, and when they say the proper words (the vows) then:

The sacrament is exchanged and cannot be undone, or dissolved, just as baptism, confirmation, and holy orders cannot be undone. These sacraments impart a permanent character to the soul which lasts for eternity. The Sacrament of Matrimony however, does not impart a permanent character. It comes to an end with the death of one of the spouses because the matter (the baptized man AND baptized woman) is no longer present. For this reason, Catholics are free to marry again after the death of a spouse.

RCIA WKSH Class 22-23 Matrimony

- 1) How do we know that God made a man and a woman to become one together in the Sacrament of Matrimony?
- 2) What is the difference between a civil or legal marriage and the Sacrament of Matrimony?
- 3) What other sacrament **must** the man and woman have received before they can exchange the Sacrament of Matrimony?
- 4) What other sacraments **should** the man and woman have received before they exchange the Sacrament of Matrimony?
- 5) What do we call those sacraments together, or as a group?
- 6) What are the two purposes of the Sacrament of Matrimony?
- 7) What are the three intentions that a man and woman must have in order to exchange the Sacrament of Matrimony?
- 8) What happens if they get married in the Church, according to the laws of the Church, but don't have those three intentions?
- 9) If a Catholic man and woman are married civilly, or legally only (not according to the laws of the Church) may they receive any other sacraments?
- 10) Can they go to Confession? Why, or why not? Under what circumstances?
- 11) If a Catholic man and woman are married civilly, or legally only (not according to the laws of the Church) are they still obliged to attend Mass every Sunday?
- 12) How many times may a Catholic exchange the Sacrament of Matrimony? (careful)
- 13) Can a Catholic man and woman make up their own marriage vows? Why, or why not?