

Journey of Faith



In Short:



- Matrimony reflects Christ's paschal mystery and the love of the Trinity.
- Married love is an expression and sign of God's love.
- Married love is self-giving, forgiving, faithful, intimate, and creative.

The following Scripture passages illustrate how Jesus honored marriage:

Luke 2:41–52

John 2:1–12

Matthew 5:27–30

Mark 10:2–12

Ephesians 5:22–30

- *What can we learn about marriage from the life and teachings of Jesus?*



The Sacrament of Matrimony

The Catholic concept of Christian marriage involves more than holding the wedding ceremony in a church. What makes a marriage Christian isn't a Church blessing added to a legal contract.

Christian marriage is a relationship of life-giving love in which a man and a woman make the love of Christ present to each other and become a sign of the love of Christ to those around them. Through their love and faithfulness, they help each other grow in holiness.

Jesus gave the sacraments to his Church so that he could continue to touch us in our daily lives. In marriage, the relationship of the couple is the sacrament that reveals the love of God for all of us.

The Importance of Marriage

The Church didn't invent marriage. At first, there wasn't even a special Christian form of marriage. Through Jesus' teachings, the faithful realized that marriage should be appreciated as a sacred vocation. The Church continues to praise the goodness of family life and to teach that married love is a sharing in God's love.

Christians see marriage as a sacred covenant, a way of joining the shared lives of a couple with God. It's a way of living that adds richness and value to married lives—and serves as a witness of God's love.

- *How might Christian marriage benefit the spouses, family, Church, and society?*



Signs of God's Love

We understand the true nature of married love only when we realize that it comes from God, who is love. Catholics believe that a marriage between two baptized Christians is sacramental—a sign of Christ.

In the rite of marriage, the Church recognizes “the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that ‘makes the marriage’....‘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 1626–27). This consent must be freely given.

The couple may exchange rings as a sign of their love and fidelity to each other and as a reminder of God's never-ending love and faithfulness.

A married couple makes Christ present to each other. That's why the ministers of the sacrament of matrimony are the husband and wife.

“We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.”

1 John 4:16

Characteristics of Love

Married couples find many opportunities for learning acceptance, tolerance, and forgiveness. In a Scripture passage used at many Christian weddings, St. Paul offers several characteristics of love: “Love is patient, love is kind...” (see 1 Corinthians 13:4–8). We find additional definitions of love throughout Scripture as God reveals his love for his people. Based on St. John's assertion that “God is love” (1 John 4:16), we learn from God's love how to love each other.

Love Is Self-giving

Founded on God's giving of himself, married love is based on giving. Total loving means total giving of oneself “freely and wholeheartedly” (*Order of Celebrating Matrimony*). Married love is a choice to love our spouse unconditionally and requires sacrifice for the good of the other. In choosing to love, we make the decision to give without resentment, forgive completely, and put the other's needs before our own. Two people joined in marriage become one as they share their unique gifts for the sake of the other.

- When have you witnessed or shared self-giving love?



Love Is Forgiving

God's mercy and forgiveness is reflected in the way a couple reconciles differences, forgives hurts, and heals each other. Willingness to reconcile again and again is an example of the desire for reconciliation God has for us.

- When has willingness to forgive or to ask for forgiveness strengthened your relationship?



Love Is Faithful

A couple promises on their wedding day to love and honor each other as husband and wife all the days of their lives. This promise isn't just for days that go well or seasons of life that are easy. It's a lifelong commitment that doesn't end.

God's faithfulness is evident in the commitment a couple makes to love each other for a lifetime. It means affirmation instead of criticism, openness instead of dismissiveness, communication instead of silence, collaboration instead of demands. Modeled on God's faithfulness, married love accepts, affirms, looks for the good, and encourages personal growth.

- What married couple models faithful love? How might you affirm or thank them?



Love Is Intimate

God's love is passionate, joyful, and intimate, qualities reflected in a couple's passion for each other. The intimacy enjoyed in marriage is sexual, emotional, and spiritual. The marital embrace expresses the love of husband and wife and also makes their love grow. Sexual relations in marriage are a way to enrich each other through mutual self-giving. Their love makes them not two persons but one body. Married love that leads to growth in intimacy mirrors the love God has for us.

- *How are couples called to be intimate beyond the physical? What might spiritual intimacy look like?*



Love Is Creative

Sharing in God's creative love, a couple is privileged to share in the most exalted part of God's creative work—the creation of another human being. Their generosity and love is a reflection of the Creator's love.

An essential dimension of marriage is openness to fertility and children. This means much more than the act of conception; it's the encouragement and support given to each other during the raising of children. Christian couples must be willing to bring life through each other and mutually share in the work of nurturing that life to adulthood.

The fruitfulness of marriage isn't limited to children. If a couple is unable to have children, "their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice" (CCC 1654).

The sexual difference and complementarity of man and woman are part of God's design. Based on its understanding of God's design and will, the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is to be between one man and one woman.

Love Is Oneness

There is strength and beauty in a couple whose members are truly one. Each person is distinct, yet together they're a more complete whole. God is best revealed in marriage because God is relationship. In the blending of two into one flesh, we can catch a glimpse of the unity and mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Couples give flesh to Christ's love through intimacy and belonging. The Church and the community have a responsibility to help all married couples live out their vocation and covenant. One way the Church does this is through marriage-preparation and enrichment programs.

What Does the Church Teach About Divorce

Jesus revealed God's intention for married love: "A man shall leave his father and mother [and be joined to his wife], and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Mark 10:7–9).

Catholics believe a sacramental marriage between Christians can never be dissolved. Although Christians may get a civil divorce, the Church still considers the couple to be married. They cannot remarry in the Church without a decree of nullity, commonly called an annulment.

Divorced Catholics who haven't remarried remain full members of the Church. Those who have remarried outside of the Church are encouraged to seek an annulment through a process many find both healing and merciful. If an annulment is granted, marriage within the Church is again possible.

An annulment isn't a Catholic divorce. It's an official Church recognition that the marriage wasn't a true marriage—not a sacrament—in the first place. A decree of nullity in no way affects the legitimacy of children.



Natural Family Planning

Christ calls us all to lead lives of **chastity** according to our state in life. Being chaste means we “reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love” (CCC 2348–50). Within Christian marriage, a couple’s sexual expression of love is to be both exclusive and open to the dual love-giving (unitive) and life-giving (procreative) aspects of God’s design for the sexual expression of love.

The Catholic Church understands that couples may wish to space the births of children and may, for good reason, choose to limit the number of children they have. To do so, couples are encouraged to use various methods of **Natural Family Planning** (NFP).

NFP methods instruct and support the couple in reading and interpreting the biological signs of fertility and in applying this knowledge to achieve or postpone conception. No physical or chemical barrier is used to try to prevent pregnancy, allowing the total gift of self, including one’s fertility, to be shared through a couple’s lovemaking. These methods are completely natural and highly effective.

“NFP ‘isn’t just biological; it has to do with the unity of the whole person: body and spirit. It’s about spouses learning the language of fertility and then living their marriages by it. It allows couples to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. That way, when their bodies say, “I love you,” they’re all the more sure their hearts mean it.”

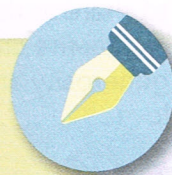
Fletcher Doyle in
Natural Family Planning: Key to Intimacy

- What does being chaste mean in your state in life?



Discuss the following questions with your spouse (if you’re married) or married friends (if you’re single). Record any insights you gain in your journal.

- How does the Catholic teaching about marriage challenge you? Why?
- How will you respond to this challenge?



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