

Journey OF Faith

In Short:

- Marriage reflects the paschal mystery.
- Marriage reflects the love of the Trinity.
- Marriage has many spiritual characteristics.



The Sacrament of Matrimony

Melanie would never admit it, but she was a little jealous of her sister Kim. Kim and her boyfriend, Michael, had just gotten married. Even after their first year of marriage, Kim and Mike still acted like they had when they started dating. They loved doing things together and were always there to support each other. When Melanie asked her sister how she knew Mike was the right person to marry, Kim said it was because he was her best friend, her partner for the good and bad times.

Antoine's grandparents had been married for over fifty-two years. The past few years had been the hardest, though. Antoine's grandfather was starting to forget things and couldn't take care of himself anymore. But the way Antoine's grandma treated him never changed. "I loved him then and I love him now," she always said. Antoine wondered if he could ever do that, give himself to someone else completely and selflessly for love.

- What do these stories tell you about marriage?
- What does love mean to you?



Both of these couples are living the sacrament of marriage. The Catholic concept of Christian marriage is more than having a wedding in a church. Christian marriage is a relationship of life-giving love in which two people make the love of Christ present to each other. They then become a sign of the love of Christ to those around them. In marriage, the relationship of the couple is the ongoing sacrament that reveals God's love for us.

The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church.... Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between baptized persons is a true sacrament of the New Covenant.

CCC 1617

What Did Jesus Have to Say About Marriage?

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her.

Ephesians 5:25

Jesus showed us God's design for marriage in many ways. He was born into a human family, a sign of the importance and holiness of ordinary family life (Luke 2). He worked his first miracle at the wedding feast of Cana (John 2:1–11), an indication that the love of husband and wife are to be celebrated. He taught that married love must be faithful (Matthew 5:27–28). He proclaimed that true married love was meant to last forever (Mark 10:6–9).

Pick one or two of the following Scripture stories to read and write or discuss what it teaches about marriage.

Luke 2:41–52 John 2:1–12

Matthew 5:27–30 Mark 10:6–9

Ephesians 5:22–30

What Does the Church Teach About Marriage?

Marriage wasn't invented by the Church, but was authored by God from the beginning of time. Jesus presented the idea of marriage as sacrament through his ministry. In fact, the first miracle Jesus performed was turning water into wine at a wedding (John 2:1–12). This act is more than just the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, it is "confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the proclamation that thenceforth marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence" (CCC 1613).

The way we celebrate weddings has changed through the centuries, but the foundation of the sacrament of marriage remains the same. When Jesus said, "what God has joined together, no human being must separate" (Matthew 19:6), he meant a sacramental marriage forms an indissoluble bond (CCC 1615) that reflects the indissoluble bond between Jesus and the Church.

Jesus himself gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the Reign of God. It is by following Christ...that spouses will be able to "receive" the original meaning of marriage and live it with the help of Christ.

CCC 1615

To live marriage as a sacrament means that husband and wife become a sign of Christ's love for each other and for all the people who touch their lives. All relationships encounter hardships. Over the weeks, months, and years of a marriage, there are many opportunities for learning to accept, to be tolerant, and—especially—to forgive. This is why it's important to know the difference between romance and the love that forms the foundation of marriage. We may not always feel in love with someone, but marriage asks spouses to continuously choose to love each other.

When married couples remain faithful to their love for each other through times of difficulty and pain, they become closer to Christ and show something of Christ's ever-faithful love to others. This is why we say that marriage is an ongoing sacrament. To further emphasize the importance of this relationship, the husband and wife perform as ministers of this sacrament. The priest stands as a witness.

Are Protestant Marriages Sacramental?

When we say something is sacramental, we mean that it is a sign of Christ. The Catholic Church believes that a marriage between two baptized Christians is sacramental, a sign of Christ's love alive in our world, even if they were not married in a Catholic Church. The Church also teaches that a marriage between two Protestants cannot be broken by divorce any more than a marriage between two Catholics, because both unions are considered sacred and sacramental.

- Why do you think the relationship between a married couple is so important to the life of the Church?



What Is Love?

If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:3

Love is self-giving. God is the ultimate giver. God gave us the most precious gift a loving parent could give—God's beloved Son, Jesus. Because married love comes from God and is based on the nature of God, it is self-giving. Total loving means total giving.

When we love, we give of our joy, our interest, our understanding, our knowledge, and our time. We do not give up or sacrifice who we are, but we give who we are to the person we love. This is a more difficult task than it sounds. It takes a lot of courage to allow someone to see us for who we truly are, our faults and failings, as well as our gifts.

But this also means we are free to grow with another person. Just like good friends make you excited about new things or bring out your best self, so

does marriage shape who you are and who you will become. True love is a constant call to grow—to become more than we ever imagined we could be.

[Love] does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:5–6

Love is forgiving. When you have a serious disagreement with your best friend, and then you talk about the problem and forgive one another, is your friendship stronger than ever? This is often the case with married love. Forgiveness and acceptance lead to growth and a stronger relationship.

God's endless, constant forgiveness of us is reflected in the way a couple talks about their differences, forgives hurts, and heals one another. The couple's willingness to heal their relationship and let go of personal gain is an example of the desire for reconciliation that God has for us.

[Love] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 Corinthians 13:7

Love is faithful. A man and woman are asked on their wedding day, "Will you love and honor each other as husband and wife for the rest of your lives?" Wouldn't it be reasonable if they replied, "Yes, provided everything goes according to our plan?" But that's not the answer they give. They each reply, "I will."

Marriage, like all human relationships, rarely goes according to plan. Outside influences, such as job changes, illnesses, accidents, and aging parents often place unexpected stress on a married couple. The challenge of raising children is sometimes more difficult than the couple anticipated.

No spouse and no marriage are perfect. Real love is love that endures long after the honeymoon is over. During periods of hardship, real love is not something we feel. It is something we live. Often real love seems more like a commitment than a feeling. Feelings are fleeting and changeable. Faithful, committed love is constant.

God's faithfulness to people is evident in the commitment a couple makes to love each other for a lifetime. God's love is visible when a weary wife listens in the middle of the night because her husband needs to talk. It is visible when a spouse helps around the house even though he or she had plans to go out. God's faithfulness accepts us for who we are, affirms us, looks for the good in us, and challenges us to grow. A married couple should reflect God's love in how they affirm and challenge one another.

- Has your definition of love changed from the beginning of this lesson? How?



Love is intimate and creative. It is impossible for us to understand the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the oneness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But it is possible to recognize the strength and beauty of a couple who is truly one in the sense that they are more complete, more perfect in their togetherness. In the blending of the two into one flesh, we, the Church, can catch a glimpse of the oneness of God.

Because the couple shares in God's creative love, they are privileged to share in the most exalted part of God's creative work—the creation of another human being. This particular creative act comes with the responsibility of raising the child in the faith and educating her or him by both examples and words.

Why Wait

You might be wondering why, if sex is such a meaningful and God-centered thing, the Church is always telling people they can't do it. While this is an attitude many Christians have shared, it's not quite right. The Church isn't saying, "NO!" It's saying, "Not yet...."

Because the Church sees sex as so meaningful (it's sharing in God's creative act!), it reserves sex for only the most permanent of relationships—a relationship that becomes the foundation of a family.

What Do Catholics Believe About Divorce?

The Church, after an examination of the situation by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal, can declare the nullity of marriage, [that is], that the marriage never existed. In this case the contracting parties are free to marry, provided the natural obligations of a previous union are discharged.

CCC 1629

Because the Church believes that marriage is a sacrament, a divorce can't dissolve it. The Church teaches that a marriage can be annulled, which means a sacramental marriage never happened in the first place. This doesn't mean everyone pretends the wedding didn't take place or that a family wasn't really formed (children whose parents received an annulment aren't considered illegitimate). By saying "the marriage never existed" the Church means the sacramentality of the marriage was never present. That means that even before the wedding took place, the couple was unable to give of themselves freely and completely.

The process of annulling a marriage isn't about blaming anyone for messing up the marriage. Actually, it's about healing two people who weren't whole when they came to the marriage initially.



With a partner or as a group, brainstorm some characteristics or traits of a Christian marriage. Then discuss how each of these traits reflects God's love for us.



In your own words, attempt to define and describe real love (it doesn't have to be romantic love!).

If you enjoy being creative, you may write a poem or compose a song.

Journey of Faith for Teens: Catechumenate, C8 (826290)

The process by which adults are initiated into the Catholic faith throughout the United States is now called the OCIA—the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. "Order" is a clearer translation of the Latin term for the process formerly known as the RCIA—the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. People preparing for baptism and reception into the Church celebrate several rites as part of the order to which those rites belong—an order whose mission is to journey in the faith. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted the name change in 2021, with American dioceses introducing the name thereafter. For more information, please contact your local diocese.

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