

# **The most important aspects of the Church's teaching about marriage**

By Fr Habib Jajou

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## **Introduction**

Church is the assembly of Christian families who form the body of Our Lord. Families have accepted Church's teaching about Christian life, especially marriage as a mystery of God's love and one of the seven sacraments of the Church. Our Lord and the Disciples (especially St Paul who wrote clearly in his letter to the Ephesians 5:21, 22, 25, and 31.) described Marriage as a covenant not a contract between man and woman; their lives rooted in the covenant between God and humanity (Matt 19). What are the most important aspects of the Church's teaching about marriage? Why is marriage a mystery and Sacrament? I will try to expand that by using different Church Resources.

## **Teaching of the Second Vatican Council**

In the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the modern world, the Church emphasises on many points about marriage: The Creator established the intimate partnership of a married life in love the same as His love to His people. Christ blessed this love, and structured it as the same as His love to His Church. As He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other. Spouses should accept the divine will in the eyes of society. The couple's love and life should be dedicated for the procreation and education of children especially religious. Man and woman by love are one flesh in marriage, which they have been consecrated for, growing in perfection day by day suffusing their lives with faith, hope and charity for the glory of God. Christian families will manifest the presence of Our Lord in the world. They will show the real nature of the Church, may human beings test the love of Jesus, His fruitfulness, and solidarity (48)<sup>1</sup>.

## **Marriage in Canon Law**

According to the Canon Law, the Sacrament of marriage has been raised by Our Lord as a 'matrimonial covenant, a communion of persons, by which man and woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring'<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, they have a responsibility for the world.

I believe we can summarize the Church's teaching points as following:

### **1. Unity and Indissolubility**

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<sup>1</sup>Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world, no. 45. 1965 [online]. Rome: Holy See, available World – Wide – Web: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) [26 May 2011]

<sup>2</sup>Code of Canon Law (Can. 1055 §1.), [online]. Rome: Holy See, available World – Wide – Web: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/\\_P3V.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P3V.HTM) [21 May 2011]

Church confirms that unity and indissolubility are the essential properties of marriage. This is for all who are not prohibited by law. Couple must declare loudly that they will do as the Church teaches them regarding unity, fruitfulness, and to indissoluble faithfulness.<sup>3</sup> ‘This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!’ (Gen 2: 18-25).

## **2. Covenant not Contract**

Marriage is not only an agreement between male and female, or a contract between two persons. Rather is a divine institution to establish a new unit within the body of Christ (the Holy Church), covenant between two hearts. We read in the Old Testament about God’s covenant to His people, His covenant with Abraham (Gen 15). There is more than physical and spiritual union. This is the reason for having a permanent characteristic. The spouses saying (*I do*) is the start moment in this covenant. By this, we can understand a little bit about the heart of God, His divine love, and what has done for us.

## **3. Image of the divine love**

Love between bride and bridegroom is an image of the divine love to human being and blessing them to be ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.’ (Gen 1:28). In his letter to Families, Pope John Paul II said: ‘in the newborn child is realized the common good of the family.’<sup>4</sup>

## **4. One Flesh**

Man and woman are created for one another, so they become one flesh as Our Lord said: ‘and the two become one flesh’ (Matt 19: 5). However, sometimes their union may be threatened by evil through infidelity: ‘because you were so hard-hearted’ Our Lord said (Matt 19: 8).

## **5. God’s help**

Man and woman, as a result, need help to achieve the union of their lives according to God’s Good will. In the book of Tobit, the Angel Raphael said to the couple: ‘when you and Sarah were at prayer, it was I who offered your supplications before the glory of the Lord.’ (Tb 12:12).

Praying has a significant role; Pope Pius XI said: ‘Let those about to enter wedlock pray diligently for divine help, so that they may make their choice in accordance with Christian prudence...’<sup>5</sup>

## **6. Being Merciful**

Our Lord said ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ (Matt 9: 13). He desired restoring the original order of creation which was disturbed by sin (CCC1615). As He took the Cross as a price for engaging and loving His Fiancee (the Church) as a spousal love, Christian marriage is a fruit of His grace. So to overcome the difficulties of marriage, man and woman should seek

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<sup>3</sup> Maryvale Institute (2007), *Liturgy and Sacraments 2*, Birmingham. Chap 4. p. 32

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, Pope, 1994. [Letter to Families](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_02021994_families_en.html), no. 11, [online]. Rome: Holy See, available World – Wide – Web: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii LET\\_02021994\\_families\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_02021994_families_en.html) [28 May 2011]

<sup>5</sup> Knowles, L., [Catholic Book of Quotations](#), Our Sunday Visitor, 2004, p. 338.

merciful relationship not like some people of God in the Old Testament who Moses permitted them to divorce their wives. Every couple needs to learn about moral conscience.

## **7. Education**

They should meditate deeply about their mission as Christian Families, through the symbols in the Bible like the books of Ruth and Tobit, which bear a moving witness of marriage and to the fidelity. (CCC1611) Both books are excellent examples of love in marriage; also the Song of Songs confirms that love should be as strong as death (Sg 9:6-7). Love expresses itself through words, feelings, and any action between man and woman. Once, Pope St Gregory said: ‘The words of those who bring up children will be as milk if they be good, but as deadly poison if they be evil.’<sup>6</sup>

## **8. Jesus blessing**

Jesus' presence at the wedding at Cana (John 2) is very important to recognize how much He confirms on the goodness of marriage, and it is a sign for the Kingdom of God where Our Lord is present permanently, only if the couple refuse, because evil this blessing, then will loose it.

## **9. A Great Mystery**

This continuance needs love between husbands and wives, as Christ loves the church. The goal is that they may sanctify themselves. St Paul considered that as a great mystery: ‘This mystery has great significance, I am applying it to Christ and the Church.’ (Eph 5:25-26, 31-32). They set a domestic church; receive a share in the divine life, and foreshadows the eschatological marriage.<sup>7</sup> To achieve this, the spouses should celebrate the sacrament of Penance and confess their sins before declaring their union.

## **10. Sacrament of the Church**

Church is a group of faithful families, she becomes a Sacrament when they come together every Sunday, share life especially through celebrating Sacraments of Church like marriage. Couple who come for marriage needs faithful prayer and support not only from the two witnesses, but from all members of the Parish. This is the Sacrament of the Church.

Despite all the church’s work as an institution to foster and protect marriage, still sometimes she faces a failed one. She accepts separation to stop drifting couple toward sin and destruction.

## **12. Preparing & Celebrating the Sacrament.**

Believing in sharing life, the Church confirms on celebrating the Sacrament within the Mass in the presence of the faithful. The couple should declare loudly before the believers that they freely ‘surrender themselves to each other’ (Gaudium et Spes, 48). Symbols like rings, crown (in the Eastern Churches), the bride’s white custom, and the bridegroom’s black suit, and many other symbols, all have a deep meanings. Ring means love forever; crown on their head of them means being kings (Psalm 45: 10)<sup>8</sup>, white colour means purity, and black

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<sup>6</sup> [QuoteCatholic](http://quotecatholic.com/index.php/category/family-marriage/), [online]. available World – Wide – Web: <http://quotecatholic.com/index.php/category/family-marriage/> [28 May 2011]

<sup>7</sup> Maryvale Institute (2007), *Liturgy and Sacraments 2*, Birmingham. Chap 4. p. 32

<sup>8</sup> In the Eastern Church Liturgy, the bride always stand on the right hand of her bridegroom.

colour of suit means having wisdom. Finally, the couple should pass a course on how to get more information about marriage from different points of life: marriage in the Bible, marriage and psychology, marriage and morals, marriage and Canon Law, marriage and healthy body, and marriage and spiritual life.

## Conclusion

The Mystery of Marriage, which has been given by God to us throughout the history of salvation, is a constituent of life and love, as He is the Life and the Love, and the Author. It is a covenant between man and woman, exactly like the covenant between God and humanity. Marriage is considered as implying participation of the couple in the work of God. They continue the work of redemption in union with the Holy Family. The Church confirms on the unity and indissolubility of marriage. They become one flesh. So praying for God's help and continues self education are very important in their lives. With prayers and life of virtues they may get a merciful heart, and be able to open the door to Jesus for His continuous blessing. Then, they can live this mystery of divine love. This is an urged matter because Christian marriage is facing a critical times due to the negative effects of the civilian society. It is under attack as Secularism, Humanism, and Relativism, are trying to uproot the Christian marriage. So preparing couple for marriage is very important.

## References

1. The New Jerusalem Bible, Pocket Edition published (1990), Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd.
2. The Holy See (2007): Catechism of the Catholic Church, Geoffrey Chapman.
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4. Knowles, L., Catholic Book of Quotations, Our Sunday Visitor, 2004, P. 338.
5. John Paul II, Pope, 1994. Letter to Families, no. 11 [online]. Rome: Holy See. available World – Wide – Web:  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_02021994\\_families\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families_en.html) [28 May 2011]
6. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world, no. 45.1965. [online]. Rome: Holy See. available World – Wide – Web:  
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7. Quote Catholic, [online]. available World – Wide – Web:  
<http://quotecatholic.com/index.php/category/family-marriage/> [28 May 2011]

Not all Churches teach that marriage is a sacrament or sacred ordinance of the Church. See: Sacraments of the Catholic Church - Wikiped...<sup>Â</sup> There are many many references on the sanctity of marriage in scriptures but I personally think this one is the most important as to why it is a sacrament. <sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female. <sup>7</sup> For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother; and shall cleave to his wife. Getting married in a church, in front of God, is very important. A marriage is a public declaration of love and commitment. This declaration is made in front of friends and family in a church ceremony. The history of marriage.<sup>Â</sup> Many couples want to include extra touches, such as flower arrangements or musicians. Some churches offer marriage preparation, where the priest will discuss subjects such as money, conflict, communication and sex.<sup>Â</sup> Catholic teaching on marriage to non-Catholics. The Catechism of the Catholic Church recognises that mixed marriages can pose difficulties but it also points towards the importance of growing together through dialogue and a common faith in Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is an original gift from God to humanity. Although sin entered the world damaging the marital relationship, this gift was not lost but redeemed by Christ and raised to a sacrament (see Eph 5: 28-32; see also Mt 19: 4-6).<sup>Â</sup> Over the centuries and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church has reflected upon marriage, married love and the gift of life. Below you will find foundational documents that articulate these teachings. Ecclesial Teaching. Second Vatican Council. *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) 1965. One of the 16 documents composed at the Second Vatican Council, this pastoral constitution forms the core of the Church's teaching on the role of the Christian in modern society. Christian teaching has never held that marriage is necessary for everyone; for many centuries in Western Europe, priestly or monastic celibacy was valued as highly as, if not higher than, marriage.<sup>Â</sup> Christians believe that marriage is considered in its ideal according to the purpose of God. At the heart of God's design for marriage is companionship and intimacy.<sup>Â</sup> This is the Roman Catholic church's position, although occasionally the church will declare a marriage to be *â€œnullâ€* (in other words, it never really was a marriage).[26] William Barclay (1907-1978) has written: There is no time in history when the marriage bond stood in greater peril of destruction than in the days when Christianity first came into this world.