

Episode 3: Marriage and the Church

Today, the Catholic Church is virtually the only Church to uphold the scriptural and historical definition of the indissolubility of marriage. Modern secular society is trying to get the Church to change Her doctrines, but they don't understand that She can't. The Bride of Christ can't override the commands of Her divine Husband.

Jesus Christ used the occasion of a wedding to officially begin His public ministry, putting His seal of approval on marriage and elevating it to a sacrament.

Because of great confusion present in the Church today, people don't know or aren't really sure what the Church's teaching on marriage is.

In February 2014, in a talk called *The Gospel of the Family*, Germany's Cardinal Walter Kasper made a proposal to change the Church's discipline in allowing divorced and civilly remarried Catholics in a state of unrepentant adultery to be able to receive Holy Communion.

Cardinal Kasper attempts to use Church teaching as well as the magisterial teaching of popes and Church councils to back up his premise, but we'll see that he fails because the Church can't change Her doctrine.

The book *Remaining in the Truth of Christ* was written in response to the confusion that's been spread by Cardinals Kasper and Marx and their associates, who pretend they speak for the Church. It was compiled by very solid theologians, five of them cardinals of the Church, who have a very firm understanding of Catholic doctrine and the many holes in Cardinal Kasper's ideas.

Marriage began when God created Adam and Eve, commanding them to be fruitful and multiply. But over time, the true understanding of marriage was lost as humanity descended into sin. The Hebrews obscured it by allowing concubinage and divorce. But when Our Lord took on a human nature. He restored marriage to its original glory and strengthened it with divine grace, making it a sacrament:

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, "For this reason 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, let no one separate. (Matthew 19:4-6)

It's not insignificant the Son of God used the occasion of a wedding and its subsequent feast to officially begin His public ministry. He was present to sanction marriage and bless it with His presence. Our Lord did the same thing earlier when he was baptized by St. John the Baptist. He had no need of baptism, being the second Person of the Holy Trinity, but being baptized He sanctified baptism and made it a sacrament. Same goes when He attended the wedding at Cana. Our Lord didn't marry, since it wasn't part of His mission of redemption, but He attended the wedding of others, giving His divine consent and blessing.

The Gospel of St. John reveals another wonderful thing that happened at the wedding feast:

And when the wine was failing, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”
And Jesus said to her “Woman, what is it to me and to you? My hour is not yet come.”
His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” (John 2:3–5)

From there Our Lord inaugurated His public ministry by miraculously changing the water into wine at the request of His Mother.

The marriage at Cana wasn't just an occasion by which God would do these wonderful things; they were the foundation, the logical beginning of the process of salvation. Marriage began with Adam and Eve, and they sinned, falling from grace. Now the new Adam, Jesus Christ, and the new Eve, the Blessed Virgin Mary, would restore the grace that was lost, beginning at a wedding. It was after the first wedding that man fell from grace; it would be after another wedding that sanctifying grace would be restored.

If all that's not a seal of divine approval for something, nothing is!

Very little evidence of early Christian marriage ceremonies in the West has come down to us .. almost none in fact. This has led certain modern historians .. who attack the Church's teaching on marriage .. to draw conclusions that the Church didn't regard it a sacrament until the sixteenth century. Of course this isn't true.

In the early Church, it was clearly understood that the man and woman were the ministers of the sacrament of Matrimony, unlike the other sacraments where the priest is ordinarily or necessarily the minister.

So because the man and woman marry each other in the sacrament, it wasn't necessary that a priest be present. That doesn't mean that priests weren't present to give their blessings. It's always been customary for the father of the family to give his blessing to the union — why not the religious father, the priest, to give God's blessing to the couple?

So it wasn't strictly necessary at the time that the Church had an official wedding ceremony, but it doesn't mean there wasn't one. Saint Ignatius of Antioch and Tertullian, both Fathers of the Church from the second and third century, indicated the Church was involved in the marriages of Her children.

Weddings were almost always very public affairs. Just like the pagans at the time, Christian weddings were large family celebrations, incorporating prayers and sacrifices. They would have Christianized the celebration by praying to God instead of the pagan Roman gods, and the sacrifice may have even been the celebration of the Mass.

Although historical evidence is lacking, the only people who think the Church wasn't concerned in marriage from the earliest days are those who want to say marriage is a purely human institution and that it should be changed to suit today's “needs.”

After the fall of the Roman empire, the Church had to reinforce the Gospel teaching of indissolubility to Frankish and Germanic people. The popes and local bishops had many struggles with kings and their subjects, who were still learning the Gospel. Several local synods and Church councils were called to address the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage. Even

Charlemagne, the great defender of the Western Church, wasn't particularly fond of the doctrine of indissolubility and fought against it.

The Synod of Verona in 1184 made official what had already been lived and understood: that Christ instituted marriage as one of the sacraments. In 1439 the Council of Florence declared:

But, although it is permitted to separate on account of fornication, nevertheless it is not permitted to contract another marriage since the bond of a marriage legitimately contracted is perpetual.

The text actually describes remarriage not as an injustice but as a sacrilege. Nearly 200 years later, the Council of Trent declared: "If anyone says that it is lawful for Christians to have several wives at the same time and that this is not forbidden by divine law, let him be anathema."

The Council made it necessary that people should contract the sacrament of Matrimony in a Church ceremony in order to protect the public nature of the sacrament.

The Church in the East established ceremonies by the late ninth century, but by the time much of the Eastern Church separated from Rome in the 11th century, their understanding of the sacrament was becoming corrupt. Only 30 years after their schism from the Church, the Orthodox Church formally allowed divorce. Since then, the different Orthodox churches officially allow divorce for all sorts of reasons. They believe that a marriage is sacramental, but in different situations the husband and wife — the ministers of the sacrament — can dissolve it.

They practice something called *oikonomia*, which allows a person who's been sacramentally married to marry somebody else, as long as they go through a period of penance, with a more subdued celebration. However, the rules for this are different according to whichever Orthodox church is presiding.

In the 16th century, when King Henry VIII wanted to divorce his wife and marry Anne Boleyn, Pope Clement's rock-solid, faithful response was "non possumus" — "we cannot" — and the whole nation of England fell away from the Church.

All of the bishops except St. John Fisher and the king's chancellor St. Thomas More signed the Act of Supremacy declaring King Henry VIII the head of the Church in England. Millions of souls were lost to the Church because the Pope stood on the words of Christ: "What God has joined together, let no man split asunder" (Mark 10:9).

The Protestant revolt of Martin Luther in Germany promptly did away with the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage, and Protestants of practically every sect eventually followed suit, allowing divorce and remarriage for all sorts of reasons.

In our modern age, the sanctity of the sacrament of marriage is being taken less and less seriously. Despite that, the Catholic Church will stand strong in the truth of Christ.

SOURCES:

[Catholic Encyclopedia: Sacraments](#)

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