

MATRIMONY:

The Mystery of the Union of Christ and His Church

**Part Vi:
Matrimony --
Christian
Marriage**

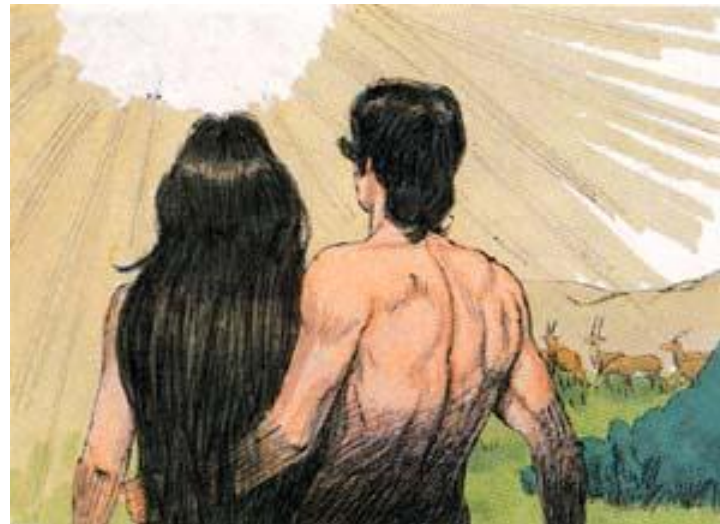


Matrimony

Catholic Christians believe that marriage was instituted by God in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Genesis 1:27-28

God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.”



In the simplicity of his words, Moses described the institution of human society.

Genesis 2:18-24

The Lord God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.” ... So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.

In the New Testament, Jesus reestablished the indissolubility and unity of marriage.

Matthew 19:3-9

Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?” He said in reply, “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘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, no human being must separate.”~

They said to him,
“Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss (her)?” He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery.”

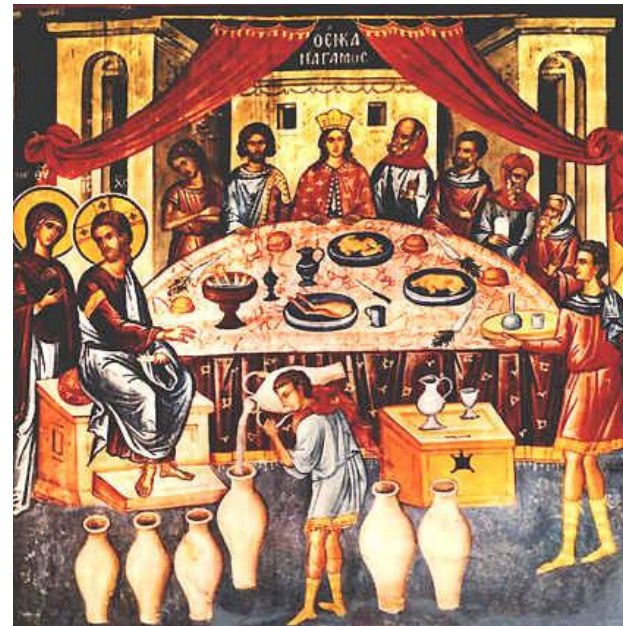


Jesus extolled the sanctity of marriage by his presence at the wedding feast at Cana and the occasion of his first public miracle.

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a **wedding in Cana in Galilee**, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” (And) Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings, each holding twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.”~

So they took it. And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.



Finally, it is Paul who writes of marriage as a true sacrament the sign of the conjugal union of Christ and his Bride, the Church.

Ephesians 5:21-32

Be **subordinate to one another** out of reverence for Christ. **Wives** should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is head of his wife just **as Christ is head of the church**, he himself the savior of the body. As the church is subordinate to Christ, so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything. **Husbands**, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.~

So (also) husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one hates his own flesh but rather nourishes and cherishes it, even **as Christ does the church**, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave (his) father and (his) mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak **in reference to Christ and the church.**



The Fathers of the Church, from the evangelists John and Paul attest to the reinstatement and sanctification of matrimony by Christ and its elevation to a mystical signification.

Ignatius (Antioch, d. 110), *Letter to Polycarp*, MG 5, 724

“Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be satisfied with their husbands in flesh and spirit. In the same way tell my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives as the Lord does the Church. If anyone is able to persevere in chastity to the honor of the flesh of the Lord, let him do so in all humility. If he is boastful about it, he is lost; if he should marry, the union should be made with the consent of the bishop, so that marriages may be according to the Lord and not merely out of lust. Let all be done to the glory of God.”

Tertullian (Rome, 160 - 220), *To His Wife*, Bk. 2:7, ML 1, 1299

“If, then, a marriage of this kind (faithful with unfaithful) is approved by God, why will it not also be a successful marriage, in spite of difficulties and anxieties and obstacles and defilements, since it already enjoys the patronage of Divine grace, at least in part?”



Tertullian, a 16th-century representation

The teaching magisterium of the church in ecumenical council also affirms the sacramental state of matrimony.

Lateran Council II (1139)

First defined as infallibly true that matrimony is as true a sacrament as Eucharist and baptism.

The Council of Lyons II (1274) Also infallibly included matrimony among the list of seven sacraments.

The Council of Florence (1438 - 1445)

The seventh is the sacrament of matrimony which is a sign of the close union of Christ and the Church according to the words of the Apostle: "This is a great mystery - I mean in reference to Christ and to the Church" (Ephesians 5:32).



The Council of Trent (1545 - 1563), Session 24

“Therefore, since matrimony under the law of the gospel is, because of the grace given through Christ, superior to the marriage unions of earlier times, our holy Fathers, the councils, and the tradition of the universal Church have always rightly taught that matrimony should be included among the sacraments of the New Law.”



Annulment: There Never Was A Marriage

The Catholic Church professes the absolute indissolubility of marriage based on the Bible. The Church has also taken on herself to decide if and when marriage occurs. This process is called annulment.

There are, as human experience teaches, many obstacles to a valid marriage. For instance, if a young woman were forced into marriage under fear of death, she would be incapable of entering into a valid marriage. Again, a marriage may not have been consummated for some reason as when men went off to military service, etc. These reasons and others, if proven to have existed, invalidate marriage.

The Church in her wisdom, her history and the presence of the Holy Spirit takes it upon herself to judge the validity of marriages presented to her for judgment. If the presence of some obstacle--called an impediment--is judged to have been there at the time of a wedding ceremony, the Church issues an annulment. She judges that while there may have been a wedding ceremony there was no marriage in the eyes of God.

A wedding does not a marriage make. The parties are then free to contract a valid marriage.



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