



How Catholics Pray

Section 6:
Matrimony



To Luke E. Hart, exemplary evangelizer and Supreme Knight from 1953-64, the Knights of Columbus dedicates this Series with affection and gratitude.

*The Knights of Columbus presents
The Luke E. Hart Series
Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith*

MATRIMONY

PART TWO • SECTION SIX OF
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

*What does a Catholic believe?
How does a Catholic worship?
How does a Catholic live?*

Based on the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

*by
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A WORD ABOUT THIS SERIES

This booklet is one of a series of 30 that offer a colloquial expression of major elements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope John Paul II, under whose authority the *Catechism* was first released in 1992, urged such versions so that each people and each culture can appropriate its content as its own.

The booklets are not a substitute for the *Catechism*, but are offered only to make its contents more accessible. The series is at times poetic, colloquial, playful, and imaginative; at all times it strives to be faithful to the Faith.

The Catholic Information Service recommends reading at least one Hart series booklet each month to gain a deeper, more mature understanding of the Faith.

SECTION 6: THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

1. *Its importance today*

The institution of marriage, and the family that results from it, is the single most indispensable foundation for happiness in all societies and in most individual lives. It is the fundamental building block for all other human relationships. Therefore “[t]he well-being of the individual person and of both human [natural] and Christian [supernatural] society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life”⁸⁹ (CCC 1603).* If there is a single cause for most of today’s malaise, both religious and secular, it is the weakening of marriages and families.

In today’s “culture of death,” only a “counter-cultural” marriage can succeed. For the message we hear from much of modern culture and modern psychology is profoundly destructive of marriage. It is the “gospel” that the happiness of “me the individual” comes first, before the good of my spouse, my

* CCC = *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

marriage, my family, or my children. It is “the gospel of respectable selfishness.” Nothing is farther from the Gospel of Christ, in which the way to save your life is to lose it, to give it up.

Christians are called to be counter-cultural, above all regarding marriage and family today. “From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers ‘together with all (their) household’¹⁶⁶ [Acts 18:8]. When they were converted, they desired that their whole household should also be saved [Acts 16:31; 11:14]. These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world. In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance...” (CCC 1655-56).

2. *Marriage and God*

Marriages will not succeed today without God. There will be a tension about “who’s the boss,” unless God is the “boss.” The instruments in an orchestra play in harmony only if they obey the same conductor’s baton.

“Why do you have to bring God into it?” To ask that about marriage is like asking why you have to bring Homer into the *Odyssey*. In the words of Archbishop Fulton Sheen’s classic title, it takes “*Three To Get Married*.” God is the author and designer of marriage, and the Creator of the man’s and the woman’s life and the life of their children. The spouses are only his “procreators.” Sex is a “mystery” because in it we share in God’s power of creation. That is why sex is naturally connected to religion.

3. *Two radically different views of marriage*

There are two fundamentally opposed views of marriage: the religious view (which is not limited to Christianity only) and

the non-religious view. There are at least four fundamental differences between them.

- 1) The Church bases all its laws and teachings about marriage on the fundamental fact that “the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws.... God himself is the author of marriage.”⁸⁷ The vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman as they come from the hand of the Creator. Marriage is not a purely human institution, despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes. These differences should not cause us to forget its common and permanent characteristics” (CCC 1603).

The religious view claims that marriage is an objective reality, which man discovers rather than invents. It is a real thing, a big thing, like an elephant. If two people choose to ride on it, they must conform to its terms. It has an unchangeable essence, or nature, and a “natural law” written into it. Human attitudes about it are to be judged by it, not vice versa.

The non-religious view, which has become popular in the modern secular West, is that marriage is man-made, not God-made, and therefore it is whatever we want it to be. We can change it. It conforms to us, not we to it. Thus secularists can speak of “open marriage” (a euphemism for adultery), polygamous, polyandrous, or even group “marriages,” homosexual “marriages,” temporary “marriages,” or even “marriage” between a

man and an animal, if they wish. Marriage to them is a “whatever” – whatever they make it. Marriage to us is a “this” – this reality God has made.

- 2) A second fundamental difference between the secular and the religious views is that the religious view interprets sex and marriage in terms of man, while the secular view (in our society, at least) interprets man and marriage in terms of sex. Religion interprets sex in terms of marriage, marriage in terms of man, and man in terms of God. Religion personalizes sex; materialism depersonalizes it. Religion sees sex as an image of the divine; materialism sees it as an image of the animal. For materialism, love is a human excuse for sex; for religion, sex is a human echo of divine love.

In the Christian view, sex is a *good* (contrary to the Victorian), but it is not a *god* (contrary to the Freudian). Not only is it good, but it is remarkably good – almost magically good. Here is why.

Love’s aim is unity, but matter by its own nature prevents unity: one stone cannot become one with another stone without losing its identity. Things made of matter cannot be shared without being diminished: the more money I give you, the less I have myself. But things made of spirit can be given without being lost: I lose no love or knowledge when I share them. Now sex enables even the flesh to share in love’s unity because sex is closely bound up with the soul in man. God invented sex to enrich love in souls, as he invented senses to enrich knowledge in minds. Neither is a mere “accident” of evolution.

“Explaining” human sex by biology is like “explaining” this booklet by the physics of ink and paper.

- 3) A third difference between the secular and religious views concerns *hope*. The secular view leads to despair because according to this view, the greatest joy comes at the *beginning* and gradually degenerates and dies, with the body. In the religious view, the greatest joy comes at the *end*, in Heaven, and as love increasingly matures on earth. The flesh grows older, but the spirit grows younger. Mere sex always seems to get shallower with age, while the mystery of love gets deeper.
- 4) Most fundamentally, married love is perfected only when grounded in God because otherwise there are only the *two* persons, while with God there are *three* – an image of the Trinity. Only when Love is something “bigger than both of us” can the two humans be united in this Third, as two plants in one soil. It is the Holy Spirit who, hovering over the waters of love’s flesh as he did over the matter of the universe at creation, turns “you and me” into “us.”

When “you” and “I” are not united in Love Itself, there is always the danger of one of us being absorbed into the other. When the true God is not present and active, there is always the danger of treating the other human person (or yourself) as God, as the source of all your joy and hope and happiness. And that is the sure recipe for disaster. Whenever divine burdens are placed on human shoulders, they break.

4. *The history of marriage*

Marriage has a history in the plan of God (history is “his story”).

- 1) It begins in the eternal essence of God himself, for God’s institution of marriage manifests its Institutor. And God is a society of mutual self-giving love among the three Persons of the Trinity.
- 2) “Sacred Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God...” (CCC 1602) and therefore in the image of love. God’s very first command to them was to marry, to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:22).
- 3) Like everything else in life, marriage is now fallen from innocence and infected with sin.
- 4) “Moral conscience concerning...marriage developed under the pedagogy of the old law” (CCC 1610).
- 5) Christ revealed the deepest meaning of marriage by “marrying” and saving the human race by his Incarnation and sacrificial death.
- 6) In the New Law, marriage was “‘raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament’”⁸⁴ (CCC 1601).
- 7) Finally, Scripture “concludes with a vision of ‘the wedding-feast of the Lamb’”⁸⁵ (Revelation 19:7, 9; CCC 1602). Marriage is an image of our ultimate destiny and Heavenly joy.

5. *God’s reason for instituting marriage*

God instituted marriage because God is love.

“God, who created man out of love, also calls him to love – the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. For man is created in the image and likeness of God, who is himself love.⁹⁰ Since God created him man and woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves man” (CCC 1604).

That is why marriage must be both “absolute and unfailing,” both a gift of one’s *whole* life and *for the whole* of one’s life. There are many forms of love in human life, and all of them in some way mirror the God who is love, but only conjugal love has this twofold privilege of *totality* and *indissolubility*. “Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter – appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; [that is why] it demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in definitive mutual self-giving...”¹⁵² (CCC 1643). Spouses say to each other what God says to us in Christ: “I give you my *all*.”

6. *Complementarity*

According to Scripture, the “image of God” is “male and female” (Genesis 1:27).

“Holy Scripture affirms that man and woman were created for each other: ‘It is not good that the man should be alone’”⁹² (Genesis 2:18; CCC 1605). Man is *for* woman, and woman is *for* man. They are “complementary:” each exists for the other, not for self, thus imaging the nature of God’s Trinitarian love.

Man and woman are *equal in value, different in nature, and complementary in purpose*. This divinely revealed truth about the

nature of man and woman fundamentally contradicts all three popular secular alternatives found in our society: chauvinism, which denies their natural equality; unisexism, which denies their natural differences; and individualism, which denies their natural complementarity.

7. *Marriage in a sinful world*

This vision of the unchangeable essence of marriage as designed by God could be called “marriage essential.” But, as Frank Sheed observed in *Society and Sanity*, marriage as fallen into sin and selfishness could be called “marriage existential.”

“Every man experiences evil around him and within himself. This experience makes itself felt in the relationships between man and woman. Their union has always been threatened by discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts that can escalate into hatred and separation. This disorder can manifest itself more or less acutely, and can be more or less overcome according to the circumstances of cultures, eras, and individuals, but it does seem to have a universal character” (CCC 1606).

“[T]he disorder we notice so painfully does not stem from the *nature* of man and woman, nor from the nature of their relations, but from *sin*. As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. Their relations were distorted by mutual recriminations⁹⁶ [Genesis 3:12]...domination and lust...”⁹⁷ (Genesis 3:16b; CCC 1607).

“Nevertheless, the order of creation persists, though seriously disturbed” (CCC 1608). Marriage, like human nature

itself, could not change in its *essence*, which God created and declared “very good” (Genesis 1:31; Hebrews 13:4).

But “[t]o heal the wounds of sin, man and woman need the help of God....”⁹⁹ Without his help man and woman cannot achieve the union of their lives for which God created them...” (CCC 1608).

God’s punishments for sin are at the same time healing mercies. “The punishments consequent upon sin [pain, toil, and death]...also embody remedies that limit the damaging effects of sin” (CCC 1609) – as a tourniquet limits bleeding or a quarantine limits the spread of a disease. Marriage itself becomes such a remedy, for “marriage helps to overcome self-absorption, egoism, and pursuit of one’s own pleasure, and to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving” (CCC 1609). Marriage is a school of saint-making.

If you are married, you probably spontaneously applied that last sentence to yourself (you are learning to be saintly by sacrificing and putting up with your spouse’s faults) rather than to your spouse (he or she is learning to be saintly by having to deal with *your* faults, and by sacrificing for *you*). Your spontaneous reaction tells you why you need to go to a saint-making school.

8. *Marriage in Christ*

Marriage is the primary example of a “covenant” – a binding relationship based not on mere feeling, nor on external human law, but on a freely chosen commitment. Throughout Scripture, God’s relationship with us has always been described as a “nuptial” or marriage-like “covenant.” “The nuptial covenant between God and his people Israel had prepared the way for the

new and everlasting covenant in which the Son of God, by becoming incarnate and giving his life, has united to himself in a certain way all mankind saved by him [for “uniting” is the aim of marriage], thus preparing for ‘the wedding-feast of the Lamb’”¹⁰⁴ (Revelation 19:7, 9; CCC 1612). The ultimate aim of God’s whole plan of creation and redemption, of the whole Christian religion, and of our whole lives, is a spiritual marriage with God. Human marriage is an image, sign, and sacrament of that.

“The entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath¹¹¹ which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist” (CCC 1617).

9. *The effects of the sacrament of Matrimony*

What difference does it make that marriage “has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament”⁸⁴ (CCC 1601)?

The sacrament of Matrimony, like all sacraments, gives to its recipients (the spouses) sacramental and actual graces – that is, the real presence of Christ, in fact the very life of Christ in our souls. “Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength [1] to take up their crosses and so follow him, [2] to rise again after they have fallen, [3] to forgive one another, [4] to bear one another’s burdens, [5] to ‘be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ’¹⁵⁰ [Ephesians 5:21], and [6] to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love” (CCC 1642).

10. *The need for sacrifice*

The truest test of love is giving – that is, sacrifice. Almost all marriages that fail, fail because they fail *this* test, because the

spouses refuse to make sacrifices. The old marriage rite taught couples this wisdom: “sacrifice is usually difficult and irksome. Only love can make it easy; only perfect love can make it a joy.”

“Justice,” “rights,” and “freedom” are three words that lovers never use. Lovers don’t want to be free, they want to be bound to each other. Lovers don’t seek their rights but the rights of the beloved. And justice sets limits, but love knows no limits (1 Corinthians 13:7). When we love a person as *person*, not object, we do not say “I will love you until...” or “I will love you unless...” but simply, “I will love you always,” with no qualifications whatsoever. Not even “if you reciprocate,” for that would be only *justice*.

The wise words of the old rite taught us to vow to love “for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” This is realism; for there *will* be “worse” as well as “better,” sickness as well as health. And there *will* be death. Life cannot avoid the need for sacrifice, and love does not avoid sacrifice. Love also forgives all things, because it knows God’s forgiveness.

Like everything in our religion, it is all there in the crucifix.

11. *The indissolubility of marriage*

“Indissolubility” means permanence, until death. The human marriage covenant can no more be dissolved than *God’s* covenant, for God designed it to be the image of that covenant (see paragraph 5 and CCC 1643).

Christ clearly taught the permanence and indissolubility of marriage (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-9). “In his preaching Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman as the Creator willed it from the

beginning: permission given Moses to divorce one's wife was a concession to the hardness of hearts [Matthew 19:8].¹⁰⁶ The matrimonial union of man and woman is indissoluble: God himself has determined it: 'what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder'¹⁰⁷ (Matthew 19:6; CCC 1614). In quoting Genesis 2:24 ("they became one flesh"), "[t]he Lord himself shows that this signifies an unbreakable union" (CCC 1605), for "one flesh" means "one living body," and a living body is broken only by death.

Divorce is a kind of suicide, an attempt to kill the "one flesh" created by marriage. In fact, since marriage is an image of Trinitarian love, human divorce is impossible because it images an impossible "divine divorce:" if the Father and the Son could ever divorce, the Spirit would die, for the Spirit *is* the love between them.

"Thus *the marriage bond* has been established by God himself [not by the Church] in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality [not just an ideal or an intention], henceforth irrevocable.... The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom"¹⁴⁶ (CCC 1640). No one should say, "I disagree with the Church about divorce," but "I disagree with Christ about divorce."

Churches that permit divorce claim far more authority than the Catholic Church claims for herself: the authority to contradict her Lord. In the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church lost England (or rather, England lost her) because of her fidelity to Christ her King when England's King Henry VIII

demanded the Church's infidelity to Christ to justify his own infidelity to his barren wife.

There are even compelling reasons for the indissolubility of marriage from a purely secular point of view, both from the interest of individuals and the interest of society. Lovers themselves, throughout history, insist on taking vows that speak the language of eternity. Shakespeare wrote, "Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds.... Love's not Time's fool." Euripides said, "He is not a lover who does not love forever." And even John Denver echoes, "If love never lasts forever, what's forever for?" Indissolubility is also necessary for society, for no society can endure without loyalty and promise-keeping; and the marriage vow is the first and foundational promise. When half our married citizens break their promise to the person they love the most, why should society trust them to keep their promises to anyone else?

"Today there are numerous Catholics in many countries who have recourse to civil *divorce* and contract new civil unions. In fidelity to the words of Jesus Christ – 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery'¹⁶⁰ [Mark 10:11-12] – the Church maintains that a new union cannot be recognized as valid, if the first marriage was. If the divorced are remarried civilly, they find themselves in a situation that objectively contravenes God's law. Consequently, they cannot receive Eucharistic communion as long as this situation persists" (CCC 1650).

"Toward Christians who live in this situation, and who often keep the faith and desire to bring up their children in a Christian manner, priests and the whole community must

manifest an attentive solicitude, so that they do not consider themselves separated from the Church...” (CCC 1651). Catholics are not excommunicated for obtaining a civil divorce and remarriage, but they cannot receive the Eucharist because they are living in adultery, according to the clear teaching of Christ (Mark 10:3-10).

“Reconciliation through the sacrament of Penance can be granted only to those who have repented for having violated the sign of the covenant and of fidelity to Christ, and who are committed to living in complete continence” (CCC 1650). On his part, God forgives all sins; but on our part we must confess and repent in order to receive that forgiveness, and we do not repent of a sin if we keep living in it.

12. *Fidelity*

“By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement ‘until further notice’” (CCC 1646).

The need for fidelity follows from the essence of marriage as “mutual self-donation:” that is, spouses give their whole selves to each other, especially their most intimate, sexual, procreative selves (and future children!) – not simply a part of that self to one person and a part to someone else.

The two reasons marriage requires fidelity are the same two reasons it requires indissolubility: “[1] The ‘intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and [2] the good of the children, demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable union between them’”¹⁵⁷ (CCC 1646).

A third reason is that marriage is an image of the union between Christ and his bride, the Church (us!), and Christ is not an adulterer. He is faithful forever.

13. *Why no sex outside marriage?*

The Catholic Church, along with most other religions and even many pagan traditions, teaches that marriage is the only right place for sex. This is not as a concession, as if sex were somehow bad (“If you must smoke, please do it in this room”), but as a formula for its triumphant fulfillment. The Church’s commandment (that is, *Christ’s* commandment) *against* sexual promiscuity is *for* sexual fulfillment. And it is against contraceptive sex for the same reason: because it is *for* “total sex,” with nothing held back. The positive vision is the only reason for the negative strictures; the big Yes is the basis for the little No’s.

The deepest cause of sexual promiscuity is that our spirits, made in God’s image, demand the infinite. Promiscuity is a false infinite, the substitution of a succession of finite loves for Infinite Love. Saint Thomas Aquinas says, “No man can live without joy. That is why one deprived of spiritual joys must turn to carnal pleasures.” The process works as follows. 1) The beginning of the problem is that we do not “know” God (by personal and not just impersonal knowledge); we are not “married” to God. 2) Thus we tend to expect from our spouse what only God can give. 3) And then we are inevitably disappointed. 4) And this is why we seek another. 5) But all others eventually prove disappointing too. 6) Soon we may conclude that love is a delusion, that it promises what it cannot deliver. It promised ecstasy and turned into a routine.

The mistake here is to confuse the appetizer with the meal. What we felt when we first fell in love was no delusion; the delusion was to think that human love alone had the power to fulfill its own promises. It was God's prophet, not God. It takes "three to get married." It takes *agape* (charity and fidelity) to fulfill the hopes of *eros* (romantic love). It takes the love that comes from God (*agape*) to fulfill the love that comes from man (*eros*).

14. *Openness to fertility*

The same reason that demands *fidelity* – the essential nature of marriage itself – demands openness to *fertility*. "By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory."¹⁶²

"[W]ishing to associate them in a special way in his own created work, God blessed man and woman with the words: 'be fruitful and multiply'...."¹⁶³ (CCC 1652).

The Church affirms that the "unitive" and "procreative" aspects of married love may not be artificially separated, either by artificial contraception or by test tube babies. Love and life must not be divorced from each other. "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

"The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the...moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education...."¹⁶⁴ (CCC 1653).

All this – indissolubility, fidelity, fertility, education – is based on the same fundamental fact of marriage's essential nature and purpose: "the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life"¹⁶⁵ (CCC 1653). Marriage is a "task" – a vocation, a calling, fully as much as the priesthood is. It will *not*

“work” if we do not “work at it.” It is like writing a song, not like hearing a song.

15. *Marriage and the vow of consecrated virginity*

“From the very beginning of the Church there have been men and women who have renounced the great good of marriage to...be intent on the things of the Lord...”¹¹⁴ (1 Corinthians 7:32; CCC 1618), like priests, nuns, monks, and religious brothers today.

“Both the sacrament of Matrimony and virginity for the Kingdom of God come from the Lord himself” (CCC 1620) and are honorable and holy states of life.

“Whoever denigrates marriage also diminishes the glory of virginity....”¹¹⁹ (Saint John Chrysostom; CCC 1620) and vice versa. Only if marriage is very good can it be offered up in sacrifice as a worthy offering to God.

16. *The wedding ceremony*

- 1) “[T]he celebration of marriage between two Catholic faithful normally takes place during Holy Mass, because of the connection of all the sacraments with the Paschal mystery of Christ”¹²⁰ (CCC 1621). The Eucharist should be at the heart of a Catholic wedding celebration because it is the consummation of the “New Covenant” or marriage between Christ and his bride, the Church.
- 2) “According to the Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ’s grace mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church” (CCC 1623). In the traditions of the Eastern Churches, the minister of this

sacrament (which is called “crowning”) is the priest or bishop who, after receiving the mutual consent of the spouses, successively crowns the bridegroom and the bride as a sign of the marriage covenant and “for the validity of the sacrament their blessing [that of the priest or bishop] is also necessary” (CCC 1623).

- 3) “The priest (or deacon) who assists at the celebration of a marriage receives the consent of the spouses in the name of the Church and gives the blessing of the Church. The presence of the Church’s minister (and also of the witnesses) visibly expresses the fact that marriage is an ecclesial reality” (CCC 1630). “Sacramental marriage is a liturgical act. It is therefore appropriate that it should be celebrated in the public liturgy of the Church” (CCC 1631).
- 4) “Since marriage is a state of life in the Church, certainty about it is necessary (hence the obligation to have witnesses)... The public character of the consent protects the ‘I do’ once given and helps the spouses remain faithful to it” (CCC 1631).

17. *Who can marry?*

“The parties to a marriage covenant are a baptized man and woman, free to contract marriage, who freely express their consent...” (CCC 1625).

“So that the ‘I do’ of the spouses may be a free and responsible act and so that the marriage covenant may have solid and lasting human and Christian foundations, preparation for marriage is of prime importance.... The role of pastors and of the Christian community as the ‘family of God’ is indispensable for

the transmission of the human and Christian values of marriage and family,¹³⁴ and much more so in our era when many young people experience broken homes which no longer sufficiently assure this initiation” (CCC 1632).

The Church’s regulations for this initiation, or instruction, may vary with time and place. But the Church requires basic instruction before marriage just as before adult Baptism, Confirmation, or admission to the Eucharist, as a kind of “truth in labeling” service. Everyone has a right (and a duty) to know what anything is before they choose it. This is no less true of marriage than of buying a house or adopting a child.

18. *Annulments*

“[T]he Church, after an examination of the situation by the competent ecclesiastical tribunal, can declare the nullity of a marriage, i.e., that the marriage never existed”¹³² (CCC 1629) because one of its essential preconditions was missing – for example, free consent.

An annulment is not a “Catholic divorce.” The Church cannot end any real marriage; she can only find that some apparent marriages were not real ones. The *practice* of granting annulments can be misused or abused, but the *principle* is valid: if one was not really married, one is free to marry.

19. *Separations*

Just as annulments are not divorces, neither are separations. “[T]here are some situations in which living together becomes practically impossible for a variety of reasons [such as violence and abuse]. In such cases the Church permits the physical *separation* of the couple and their living apart. The spouses do not cease to be husband and wife before God and so are not free to

contract a new union. In this difficult situation, the best solution would be, if possible, reconciliation....”¹⁵⁹ (CCC 1649).

20. *Mixed marriages*

In the strict, technical sense of the word a “mixed marriage” is a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic – that is, between two Christians. A marriage “with disparity of cult” is one between a Catholic and a non-baptized person.

- 1) “Mixed” marriage, or “[d]ifference of confession between the spouses does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle for marriage, when they...learn from each other the way in which each lives in fidelity to Christ (CCC 1634). They should “encourage the flowering of what is common to them in faith and respect for what separates them” (CCC 1636) “But the difficulties of mixed marriages must not be underestimated. They arise from the fact that the separation of Christians has not yet been overcome. The spouses risk experiencing the tragedy of Christian disunity even in the heart of their own home” (CCC 1634).
- 2) “Disparity of cult [marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person] can further aggravate these difficulties. Differences about faith and the very notion of marriage... can become sources of tension in marriage, especially as regards the education of children. The temptation to religious indifference can then arise” (CCC 1634). “In case of disparity of cult an *express dispensation* from this impediment is required for the validity of the marriage.¹³⁸ This permission or dispensation presupposes that both parties know and do

not exclude [reject] the essential ends and properties of marriage and the obligations assumed by the Catholic party concerning the baptism and education of the children in the Catholic Church”¹³⁹ (CCC 1635).

Notes from the Catechism in Order of Their Appearance in Quotations Used in this Section

- ⁸⁹ *GS* 47 § 1.
- ¹⁶⁶ Cf. *Acts* 18:8.
- ⁸⁷ *GS* 48 § 1.
- ⁸⁴ CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. *GS* 48 § 1.
- ⁸⁵ *Rev* 19:7, 9; cf. *Gen* 1:26-27.
- ⁹⁰ Cf. *Gen* 1:27; *1 Jn* 4:8, 16.
- ¹⁵² *FC* 13.
- ⁹² *Gen* 2:18.
- ⁹⁶ Cf. *Gen* 3:12.
- ⁹⁷ Cf. *Gen* 2:22; 3:16b.
- ⁹⁹ Cf. *Gen* 3:21.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Rev* 19:7, 9; cf. *GS* 22.
- ¹¹¹ Cf. *Eph* 5:26-27.
- ⁸⁴ CIC, can. 1055 § 1; cf. *GS* 48 § 1.
- ¹⁵⁰ *Eph* 5:21; cf. *Gal* 6:2.
- ¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Mt* 19:8.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Mt* 19:6.
- ¹⁴⁶ Cf. CIC, can. 1141.
- ¹⁶⁰ *Mk* 10:11-12.
- ¹⁵⁷ *GS* 48 § 1.
- ¹⁶² *GS* 48 § 1; 50.
- ¹⁶³ *GS* 50 §1; cf. *Gen* 2:18; *Mt* 19:4; *Gen* 1:28.
- ¹⁶⁴ Cf. *GE* 3.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *FC* 28.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Rev* 14:4; *1 Cor* 7:32; *Mt* 25:6.

¹¹⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *De virg.* 10, 1: PG 48, 540; cf. John Paul II, *FC* 16.

¹²⁰ Cf. *SC* 61.

¹³⁵ Cf. CIC, can. 1063.

¹³² Cf. CIC, cann. 1095-1107.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *FC* 83; CIC, cann. 1151-1155.

¹³⁸ Cf. CIC, can. 1086.

¹³⁹ Cf. CIC, can. 1125.

“Faith is a gift of God which enables us to know and love Him. Faith is a way of knowing, just as reason is. But living in faith is not possible unless there is action on our part. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, we are able to make a decision to respond to divine Revelation, and to follow through in living out our response.”

– United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, 38.

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Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* 34
Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission
of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World

About the Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus, a fraternal benefit society founded in 1882 in New Haven, Connecticut, by Blessed Michael McGivney, is the world’s largest lay Catholic organization, with more than 1.9 million members in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. The Knights support each other and their community, contributing millions of volunteer hours to charitable causes each year. The Knights were the first to financially support the families of law enforcement and fire department personnel killed in the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and to work closely with Catholic bishops to protect innocent human life and traditional marriage. To find out more about the Knights of Columbus, visit www.kofc.org.

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