

LESSON 40: MATRIMONY

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 9	:	Cover points 1 to 6
For Intermediate Level / Age 12	:	Cover points 1 to 9
For Advanced Level / Age 15	:	Cover points 1 to 12

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous few lessons, we learned about the Sacrament of Holy Orders. In this lesson, we learn about the Sacrament of Matrimony (marriage). The Sacrament of Holy Orders and the Sacrament of Matrimony are known as Sacraments of service because they bring us into different states of life that help us to serve others rather than serve ourselves.

Current lesson:

1. Marriage is something which not only the Catholic Church, but the overwhelming majority of human history has found to be sacred. Marriage is a natural institution that has existed throughout the ages. It is a most intimate form of union between a man and a woman that has been present throughout all time and in all places. It has always been understood that in a marriage, a man and a woman unite themselves to each other for the purposes of mutual support and procreation.

However, it is crucial to understand that the institution of marriage was not founded by man, but rather, by God: “God himself is the author of marriage” (CCC 1603). God is the one who instituted such a relationship between man and woman when He created them, even if it has gone through different variations throughout the ages in accordance with different “cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes”. This is why the “greatness of matrimonial union exists in all cultures”.

2. The family is the cradle of civilisation. It is the place where people learn what it means to be human. For this reason, Pope St John Paul II taught that “marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 1).

The Church considers the family as “the first natural society” and “places it at the centre of social life” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 211).

CCC 2207: “The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society.”

Pope St John Paul II taught that the family is presented, in the Creator's plan, as "the primary place of 'humanisation' for the person and society" and the "cradle of life and love" (*Christifideles Laici*, 40).

Pope St John Paul II said, "The future of humanity passes by way of the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 86). This sentence means that there is an intricate relationship between the family and society, and it is a two-way relationship. The good that flows out of the family enters into society. When the family breaks down, society is endangered and compromised. Likewise, a well-nurtured society also helps to fulfil the mission of the family, whereas what goes wrong in society has negative repercussions on the family.

3. To the Catholic Church, Christian marriage is even more than what has been described above. It is something more than a mere natural institution. It is a visible reflection of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church. The Church therefore considers marriage to be a very important kind of relationship. The community of Christ's disciples has a special responsibility for Christian marriage. Since the Church's life revolves around Jesus, Christian marriage entails a married couple's commitment to mutually sharing their faith in Christ and sharing in His life together.
4. The Gospel of John records that Jesus exclaimed on the cross before his death, "τετέλεσται" (*tetelestai*). These words were translated by Saint Jerome into Latin in the 4th century as *consummatum est* ("It is consummated"). This means that on the cross, Jesus took the Church as His Holy Bride. The cross, more than being a place of sacrifice, was the nuptial bed between Christ and His Bride: the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

This is why Pope Francis (2 April 2014) taught that "Marriage is the icon of God's love for us". Christian marriage is a Christian couple's witness to the world of the love of God. It is also through our Christian spouses that God communicates His love for us on a daily basis.

5. When two baptised persons are joined in marriage, they enter into the mystery of the Trinity together, and live out the universal call to holiness in a new, unique way. In their union, they become icons, or images, of the Trinity.

The Trinity is a *communio* (community) that is God. God is a community of Persons sharing in perfect love. In the same way, God desires to bring humanity into His Trinitarian relationship so that we can share in His life and His perfect love. And marriage is a very basic and fundamental vehicle through which God brings us to share in His perfect love. Because of this also, all marriages (especially Christian marriages) should be modelled upon the relationships of the three members of the Holy Trinity with one another.

6. A true marriage between two baptised Christians is a Sacrament. This includes a marriage between a Catholic and a Christian from a non-Catholic community who is validly baptised. In a sacramental marriage, God is doing something for the husband and wife in a special way, and this happens through what the spouses do for each other. Their love and fidelity towards each other and their sacrifices for each other become real signs of God's love and



fidelity towards them as well as His Church. This means that in living out their sacramental marriage, a Christian couple shares in the divine life of God by living out God's plan of salvation for each person's spouse.

7. Christian husbands and wives have a special vocation in their marriage, that is, to reflect the characteristics of Christ's love to the best of their abilities. The love of Christ for His Church is so complete that it even brought Him to death for the sake of the Church, His Bride whom He loves. His death on the cross reflects His love that is forgiving, reconciling, and life-giving. Therefore, when Christians marry before the altar of Christ in the Church, they ought to be aware that they are called to this same life of love and sacrifice for each other, since the altar is indeed the place that most fully reflects the love and sacrifice of Christ for His Church. In living marital lives that reflect the love and sacrifice of Christ in a visible way, these married Christian couples become signs of Christ's love and life to the human society. In this sense, Christian couples must be always aware that their marriage points to something beyond themselves, and that their lives as husbands and wives are not really just about themselves. Furthermore, their marital union should certainly not be defined by the subjective sentimentality that is too prevalent among modern married couples today. This is their special apostolate in the world.

Humanae Vitae, 9: "This love is above all fully human, a compound of sense and spirit. It is not, then, merely a question of natural instinct or emotional drive. It is also, and above all, an act of the free will, whose trust is such that it is meant not only to survive the joys and sorrows of daily life, but also to grow, so that husband and wife become in a way one heart and one soul, and together attain their human fulfillment.

It is a love which is total – that very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything, allowing no unreasonable exceptions and not thinking solely of their own convenience. Whoever really loves his partner loves not only for what he receives, but loves that partner for the partner's own sake, content to be able to enrich the other with the gift of himself.

Married love is also faithful and exclusive of all other, and this until death. This is how husband and wife understood it on the day on which, fully aware of what they were doing, they freely vowed themselves to one another in marriage. Though this fidelity of husband and wife sometimes presents difficulties, no one has the right to assert that it is impossible; it is, on the contrary, always honorable and meritorious. The example of countless married couples proves not only that fidelity is in accord with the nature of marriage, but also that it is the source of profound and enduring happiness."

Humanae Vitae, 25: "...let Christian husbands and wives be mindful of their vocation to the Christian life, a vocation which, deriving from their Baptism, has been confirmed anew and made more explicit by the Sacrament of Matrimony. For by this sacrament they are strengthened and, one might almost say, consecrated to the faithful fulfillment of their duties. Thus will they realize to the full their calling and bear witness as becomes them, to Christ before the world."



8. The Catholic Church's understanding of marriage is that it is intended to be permanent, meaning that it remains valid until the married couple are separated by death. The bond in a valid sacramental marriage, especially, is indissoluble.

CCC 2364: “The married couple forms ‘the intimate partnership of life and love established by the Creator and governed by his laws; it is rooted in the conjugal covenant, that is, in their irrevocable personal consent.’ Both give themselves definitively and totally to one another. They are no longer two; from now on they form one flesh. The covenant they freely contracted imposes on the spouses the obligation to preserve it as unique and indissoluble. ‘What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.’”

CIC 1056: “The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by reason of the sacrament.”

9. The Catholic Church's definition of marriage is specifically ordered to the uniting of one man and one woman with the intention of bearing children and raising the children up in the Catholic Church. This means that two parties wanting to marry each other must intend to engage in a *unitive* relationship and the *procreative* outcome of their union.

CIC 1055: “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptised.”

CCC 1601: “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.”

CCC 2366: “Fecundity is a gift, an *end of marriage*, for conjugal love naturally tends to be fruitful. A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfillment. So the Church, which is ‘on the side of life,’ teaches that ‘it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain ordered *per se* to the procreation of human life.’” This particular doctrine, expounded on numerous occasions by the Magisterium, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act.”

CCC 2367: “Called to give life, spouses share in the creative power and fatherhood of God. ‘Married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby *cooperating with* the love of *God the Creator* and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters. They will fulfill this duty with a sense of human and Christian responsibility.’”



CCC 2369: “By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its orientation toward man’s exalted vocation to parenthood.”

CCC 2373: “Sacred Scripture and the Church’s traditional practice see in *large families* a sign of God’s blessing and the parents’ generosity.”

Humanae Vitae, 9: “...this love is fecund. It is not confined wholly to the loving interchange of husband and wife; it also contrives to go beyond this to bring new life into being. ‘Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents’ welfare.’”

10. The greatest reward that a couple can receive as a fruit of their marital life is the gift of children. God’s decree to mankind to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28) was His way of inviting man to participate in His own creative work.

Gaudium et Spes, 50: “Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, ‘it is not good for man to be alone’ (Genesis 2:18) and ‘Who made man from the beginning male and female’ (Matthew 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: ‘Increase and multiply’ (Genesis 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior. Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day.

Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Thus they will fulfil their task with human and Christian responsibility...”

Gaudium et Spes, 52: The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children. The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to their formation. The children, especially the younger among them, need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account.

11. All this does not mean that married couples will not fail in the course of their relationships. But marital life is an opportunity for couples to grow into “an ever-richer union with each other on all levels physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 19).

12. *Gaudium et Spes*, 52: “...let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification. Thus, following Christ who is the principle of life, by the sacrifices and joys of their vocation and through their faithful love, married people can become witnesses of the mystery of love which the Lord revealed to the world by His dying and His rising up to life again.”



2021 Sherman Kuek. Distribution of this work in its original form is freely permitted for all catechetical work but not for profit purposes. No modifications to the original form of this work are permitted except with the consent of the original author. Where modifications have been consented in any form, legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict the use of this work in ways that the licence permits may not be applied. For further enquiries, contact admin@splendourproject.com.