Matrimony

The Sacrament of Matrimony

1. By the institution of the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony, Christ regulated and sanctified family life. The better regulated this life is, the more moral and happy will mankind be. Therefore the holy reception of Matrimony, and the sacred inviolability of the marriage tie, is of the greatest importance to man.

2. Whoever wishes to be happily married must above all pray God to direct his choice, he should take the advice of his parents, and other persons of experience. He should consider first his spiritual and then his temporal welfare. Therefore he must be guided in his choice more by religion and virtue than by worldly considerations. He must be especially careful, that there be no impediments in the way of his marriage. These impediments are of two kinds, simple impediment, and nullification.

3. Simple impediments do not nullify the marriage but only render it unlawful; that is, one cannot receive this Sacrament without committing a mortal sin, unless the impediments are removed. They are as follows:

   a) *Time*. The solemnities of marriage must not take place, between the first Sunday of Advent and Epiphany, or between Ash Wednesday and Low Sunday.
   b) *Previous engagement* to another person, unless the engagement has been annulled by mutual consent.
   c) *Simple vows of chastity*.
   d) *Ecclesiastical prohibition*. This includes the marriage of a Catholic with a baptized non-Catholic, if the conditions prescribed by the Church are not complied with. These conditions are:
      1. The non-Catholic must not restrict the liberty of the Catholic in the practice of his or her religion.
      2. When there is hope that the non-Catholic may be brought to the knowledge of the true faith.
      3. Both parties must promise that their children shall be brought up as Catholics.

4. The Church has always disapproved of mixed marriages, even when these conditions are complied with; she has condemned them in more than thirty councils. The great danger to the Catholic party is: that he is liable to fall away from the faith entirely, or become indifferent. There is also great danger that the children may not be brought up Catholics, especially if the Catholic party should die young. Then the danger of divorce, which the non-Catholic may obtain at any time, and be free to contract another marriage. Such unions cannot produce concord or true happiness, because their moral foundation, unity of faith, is wanting. Such a marriage is not a faithful image of that intimate and indissoluble bond of Christ with His Church, which a Christian marriage should be.

Catholics should remember, that the bond of a previous marriage is an impediment which death alone can remove. What, therefore, God bath joined together let not man put asunder (Matt. xix 6). No court, no judge, no power on earth, can break the bond which unites husband and wife. For certain just causes, especially for the crime of adultery, they may live separately, but they are still married and cannot marry again. Let it be remembered that no so-called divorce, no guilt, no desertion, can ever sever the marriage bond. Nothing but a certain knowledge of the death of one party can make it lawful for the other to marry.

5. The impediments that make marriage impossible, or nullify it, are chiefly the following:

   a) The absence of mutual consent, as when one of the parties does not consent, or is compelled only by force, or rapine, etc.
   b) A mistake in the person one marries,
   c) A solemn vow of Chastity,
   d) The Order of Sub-deaconship,
   e) Another marriage-tie still existing,
   f) Difference of religion when one of the parties has not been baptized.
   g) Difference of religion when one of the parties has not been baptized.
   h) Consanguinity and affinity to the fourth degree; spiritual affinity contracted in Baptism and Confirmation.
   i) Clandestine marriage, which has not been contracted before the lawful pastor, or another priest approved by him for this purpose, before two witnesses.
The Pope or Bishop may grant dispensations in some of these cases, when a sufficient cause warrants a dispensation. No one should make use of dispensations unless the cause is true and just.

6. The Church desires that the choice of a state of life should not be thoughtlessly entered upon, and that the Sacrament of Matrimony should not be received without due preparation. The first step towards a future marriage is the engagement or betrothal.

The betrothed should make good use of the time of their engagement, in order to examine themselves earnestly, and see whether their hearts are so closely attached to each other as to make them congenial and happy consorts throughout their future lives. They should prepare themselves by fervent prayer and decorous behavior, especially by a worthy reception of the Sacraments for this decisive step. During this time they should also not omit to make a general confession, in order to participate in the fullness of graces bestowed by this Sacrament.

7. The engagement is made public by the publication of the banns; the faithful are required to make known any impediments, if they are aware of any, and also to assist the betrothed by their prayers, so that they may enter the marriage state with the blessing of God. Only in exceptional cases is the publication of the banns to be omitted, and the omission must be sanctioned by the Bishop. St. John Chrysostom says: "Happy the young men and maidens who come to the nuptial altar with a pure heart! How true will be their united love! How sincere their mutual esteem and how firm their friendship."

8. The Church also exhorts pastors of souls to examine the bridal parties, to see whether they know everything that behooves them to know, and to give them the instruction they need. This fatherly instruction is often the turning point for the weal of those about to be married.

Ceremonies of Matrimony

1. The ceremonies of Matrimony are significant of the duties of the marriage state, and of the graces imparted to the bridal couple.

In the presence of the congregation the bride and groom pledge themselves by the bond of indissoluble fidelity and love; the Church confirms this bond and invokes the blessings and graces of heaven upon the bridal pair.

2. The priest standing before the altar facing the couple, who stand at the foot of the altar, the witnesses behind them, gives them a few words of admonition and instruction on the Sacrament of Matrimony and its duties.

3. Then follows the real act of Matrimony. The priest asks each separately if with their free will and consent, they enter into wedlock, and on answering in the affirmative, in an audible voice, joining right hands they pledge their troth; each repeating, the formula after the priest, in which they each promise separately, to have and to hold the other for better, for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health until death do part them. The priest then, to indicate the indissolubility of the marriage tie, places the stole around their joined hands, unites them in the name of the Holy Trinity, and sprinkles them with Holy Water. The groom now places the ring upon the book, the priest blesses it and returns it to the groom, who places it upon the third finger of the bride, saying: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." The ring without beginning or end denotes the never ending love and fidelity which the bridal pair pledge each other. The joining of hands is a solemn pledge, as if confirming by an oath the promise to be true to their marriage vows as long as they live, and to mutually support each other.

Placing the stole around the joined hands, with the words spoken, shows that the Church acknowledges and blesses the marriage as completed, and takes it under Her protection. With this blessing and protection of the Church the newly married should enter upon their state of life, for which the priest prays in the versicles and prayers that follow, which finish the marriage ceremony.

4. In the Mass which follows, the marriage is solemnly blessed. Even since the time of the Apostles, it was a sacred custom to sanctify marriage by the Sacrifice of the Mass and the reception of Holy Communion. This solemn blessing is wholly united with the Sacrifice of the
Mass, and must only be given during the Mass. As this blessing concerns the bride chiefly, it is not given to a widow, because she received it at the first marriage, nor is it given in the closed time even if the Bishop's dispensation has been obtained. Nor in the case of a mixed marriage; the Church cannot bless such marriages, because she looks upon them with disfavor.

5. The Church has in her liturgy a special Mass for the bridegroom and bride; this Mass must not be used in such cases where the nuptial blessing cannot be given. As far as the Pater Noster, this Mass differs in nothing from an ordinary Mass, but when the priest has come to that part of the service immediately before the "Libera nos," standing at the Epistle corner of the altar, he turns to the bridal pair and reads two prayers over them, in which the blessing of God is besought on behalf of the bride principally. When the priest has communicated, he gives Communion also to the bridal pair and before the last Gospel he implores a special blessing upon them, and then blesses the people. Excepting the Sacrament of Holy Orders, no sacrament is more closely united with the Sacrifice of the Mass than that of the Sacrament of Matrimony. (Note: The nuptial Mass pro sponso et sponsa is a votive Mass, without Gloria or Credo.)

6. On their return home, a wedding feast is prepared. In this there is nothing blameworthy; we know that our Lord, His Blessed Mother and disciples honored such a festivity with their presence. This should remind the newly married to celebrate their wedding in a manner worthy of such sacred guests.

The wedding day is a day of joy, and furthermore a sacred day for the married couple, who have received two sacraments on this day, and entered upon a new state of life with the blessings and prayers of the Church; therefore excess and sin of every kind is to be excluded from such festivities.

7. A jubilee wedding is a festival of gratitude for a couple who have been married twenty-five or fifty years. It is celebrated in order to thank God for the graces received during this time, to renew the former marriage vows and to beg the blessing of the Church on the remainder of their days, that they may finally enter into the joys of the Lord.

Conclusion Regarding Sacraments

The sacraments are the most precious treasures of the Church.

1. The Church has nothing more holy than the sacraments, for they are the fruits of the Passion and death of Jesus Christ. Therefore the Christian should learn to know and treasure them, and never approach them without careful preparation.

2. The Church has nothing more salutary than the sacraments, because upon them depends the salvation of mankind. If our soul is dear to us and we long for heaven let us not delay to make diligent use of these means of grace.

3. The Church has nothing more divine than the sacraments, for God is their author and through them the work of redemption continues for the salvation of man.
Precepts regarding marriage in the Church

Q. 1360. What restrictions does the Catholic Church place on marriage?
A. Not to marry persons who are not Catholics, or who are related to us within the third degree of kindred, nor privately without witnesses, nor to solemnize marriage at forbidden times.

Q. 1360. What is the meaning of the commandment not to marry within the third degree of kindred?
A. The meaning of the commandment not to marry within the third degree of kindred is that no one is allowed to marry another within the third degree of blood relationship.

Q. 1361. Who are in the third degree of blood relationship?
A. Second cousins are in the third degree of blood relationship, and persons whose relationship is nearer than second cousins are in closer degrees of kin. It is unlawful for persons thus related to marry without a dispensation or special permission of the Church.

Q. 1362. Are there other relationships besides blood relationship that render marriage unlawful without a dispensation?
A. There are other relationships besides blood relationship that render marriage unlawful without a dispensation, namely, the relationships contracted by marriage, which are called degrees of affinity, and the relationship contracted by being sponsors at Baptism, which is called spiritual affinity.

Q. 1363. What should persons about to marry do, if they suspect they are related to each other?
A. Persons about to marry, if they suspect they are related to each other, should make known the facts to the priest, that he may examine the degree of relationship and procure a dispensation if necessary.

Q. 1364. What is the meaning of the command not to marry privately?
A. The command not to marry privately means that none should marry without the blessing of God's priests or without witnesses.

Q. 1365. What sin is it for Catholics to be married before the minister of another religion?
A. It is a mortal sin for Catholics to be married before the minister of another religion, and they who attempt to do so incur excommunication, and absolution from their sin is reserved to the bishop.

Q. 1366. What is the meaning of the precept not to solemnize marriage at forbidden times?
A. The meaning of the precept not to solemnize marriage at forbidden times is that during Lent and Advent the marriage ceremony should not be performed with pomp or a nuptial Mass.

Q. 1367. What is the nuptial Mass?
A. The nuptial Mass is a Mass appointed by the Church to invoke a special blessing upon the married couple.

Q. 1368. Should Catholics be married at a nuptial Mass?
A. Catholics should be married at a nuptial Mass, because they thereby show greater reverence for the holy Sacrament and bring richer blessings upon their wedded life.

Q. 1369. What restrictions does the Church place on the ceremonies of marriage when one of the persons is not a Catholic?
A. The Church places several restrictions on the ceremonies of marriage when one of the persons is not a Catholic. The marriage cannot take place in the church; the priest cannot wear his sacred vestments nor use holy water nor bless the ring nor the marriage itself. The Church places these restrictions to show her dislike for such marriages, commonly called mixed marriages.

Q. 1370. Why does the Church dislike mixed marriages?
A. The Church dislikes mixed marriages because such marriages are frequently unhappy, give rise to many disputes, endanger the faith of the Catholic member of the family, and prevent the religious education of the children.