

“AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE”



A PASTORAL LETTER

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Catholic Belief and Practice Concerning Marriage

Introduction

With the conclusion of the Extraordinary Synod on the Family in the context of the New Evangelization not too many months ago, and in anticipation of the Ordinary Synod on the Family to be held this year in October, I write to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus about our “Catholic belief and practice concerning Marriage.” Much, if not most, of what I shall say here will not be new to you. I write this pastoral letter as an encouragement to all to thank Almighty God for the precious and singular gift of the holy union of one man and one woman for the salvation of their immortal souls and those of their children.

We are painfully aware that this God-given union for the sanctification of our Church and our world is under attack by those who choose not to believe in God and His loving, merciful, and creative plan for humanity. In the context of the New Evangelization, it is precisely within true marriage and the family that the world must and will be reawakened to the truth and once again accept this truth as the norm for daily life. The Roman Catholic Church, founded by Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world, has received from Him the mission and authority to teach this truth, to sanctify all who believe in it, and to guide all in the truth so as to transform and elevate every person after the pattern of His life.

This pastoral letter will be divided into three brief sections, with some summary points after each section; there will be a conclusion to this letter and then a listing of suggested readings for your further study, discussion, and prayer.

The three sections are: Marriage in Sacred Scripture; Marriage in Catholic Tradition and the Magisterium; and Marriage in Catholic Practice.

My personal hope and prayer is that all of you will find in this pastoral letter a renewed and better understanding of our Catholic faith concerning Holy Matrimony. Whether you are a young Catholic learning our faith, a young adult discerning if God is offering you the gift of a vocation to be a spouse, a parent or grandparent, a widow or widower, or a chaste, single person, I ask you to read this letter and come to know, love, and serve our good God better in your daily life.

Let us begin this reflection on the holy union of a man and woman with the beautiful prayer to God the Holy Spirit: *Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of divine love! Send forth Your spirit and they shall be created, and You shall renew the face of the earth.*

Section One: Sacred Scripture

While the holy and inspired Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are replete with verses that teach what are the nature and purpose of true marriage as intended by God, let us concentrate on the Book of Genesis in the Old Testament, and the Gospel of Saint Mark and Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians in the New Testament.

“God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’ . . . 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. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth.’ God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good” (Gn. 1: 26-28, 31).

“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 formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each of them would be its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.

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 become one body” (Gn. 2: 18-24).

In these two passages from the first book of the Old Testament, we find all the essential elements of the Catholic Church's belief and practice regarding true marriage. Briefly, let us consider these essential elements by reading these two passages together since they form one coherent and complete teaching.

Reading both chapters in their entirety, it is clear that man is not only unique among all of God's creation; man is created for his own sake. It is also clear that he is created for an equally unique relationship with God the Creator, and with one other just like himself, the woman. The man and woman together will carry out God's will in the created world. This is so because it is not good for man to be alone; God's creation is not complete until man identifies the one creature just like himself, the woman. Man is no longer alone. Man is complete only after God creates for him his suitable partner. What is revealed is that God has created two unique persons who see in each other an equal who is different and yet complementary both spiritually and physically, that is, suitable for God's purposes.

God's will in the created world for the male and female is this: they are to become one physically and, in this, cooperate with God by being fertile, multiplying, and populating God's earth. Moreover, as the highest of all God's creatures, because man and woman are made in His image, God gives them the care of the rest of creation. In other words, because God has found His creation to be very good, He entrusts it to the only two creatures who have a likeness to Him – the man and the woman. They are to do with creation what God Himself has done in creating it, that is, they are to preserve its God-given goodness and they are to increase this goodness by how they relate to each other and to all of creation.

Finally, in chapter 2 of the Book of Genesis, there are two references to the man and the woman which are crucial for the correct understanding of the Church's belief and practice regarding true marriage. The first reference is to what the man does not find among all of the creatures presented to him by God – “but none proved to be *the* suitable partner for the man.” I placed emphasis on the word ‘the’ because it is clear that there is only one suitable partner, and it is God Who will provide her.

The second reference is the last verse noted: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and *clings* to his wife, and the two become *one body*.” The man has just shouted with joy and satisfaction that the woman God has created and given him is suitable physically and spiritually. This is his partner, and he is satisfied. However, just having a partner is not the sum total of God's will. God's will is complete only when the man and woman turn to each other and cling to each other physically and spiritually. It is in this that the two become literally a new person, a spouse. This is God's will for them, and they cooperate with His will when they cling physically to each other while deepening and making fertile their unique partnership with offspring.

“The Pharisees approached and asked: ‘Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?’ They were testing Him. He said to them in reply: ‘What did Moses command you?’ They replied: ‘Moses permitted him to write a bill of divorce and dismiss her.’ But Jesus told them: ‘Because of your hardness of hearts he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. 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, let no man separate what God has joined” (Mk.10: 2-9).

Follow the way of love, even as Christ loved you. He gave himself for us. Defer to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives should be submissive to their husbands as if to the Lord because the husband is head of his wife just as Christ is head of his body, the Church, as well as its Savior. As the Church submits to Christ, so wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. He gave himself up for her to make her holy, purifying her in the bath of water by the power of the word, to present to himself a glorious Church, holy and immaculate, without stain or wrinkle or anything of that sort. Husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Observe that no one ever hates his own flesh; no, he nourishes it and takes care of it as Christ cares for the Church – for we are members of his body.

‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be made into one’. This is a great foreshadowing; I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church. In any case, each one should love his wife as he loves himself, the wife for her part showing respect for her husband” (Eph. 5: 2, 21-33).

As we meditate on the powerful teaching of Jesus in response to the question of the Pharisees, we must remember that Jesus Himself said that He had come not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill and perfect them. What does Jesus reveal in His teaching about marriage and divorce?

First, marriage is of God both in its natural and supernatural form; in other words, God created the union of a man and a woman specifically for them and their ultimate good. The natural form of marriage is simply a part of who a man and woman are as persons. Specifically, it is part of being a man and a woman to marry each other. Second, divorce, which is the result of sin, was never a part of marriage as created by God, and it has no lasting effect on the true union of a man and a woman. Third, marriage as created by God for a man and a woman is permanent, meaning, for as long as they both live. Fourth, since marriage is permanent then, by its nature, it attracts a man and a woman to each other in such an intimate and complete way that the two become a new reality, a new person if you will, and from this new reality they produce a new life of their own which may include children.

Saint Paul's application of the teaching of Jesus to marriage is a masterful and radical break from the understanding and practice of those times. The key for us to understand this is to listen to Paul address both husbands and wives together as equals before God and the Church. Why are they equal? They are equals in and because of Christ, Who sacrificed Himself for all of us. Thus, when Paul exhorts them to "defer to one another out of reverence for Christ," he teaches them that their union is God's will for them. How a wife shows respect and love for her husband and how a husband truly loves his wife, is precisely how they both love Christ. In essence, Saint Paul teaches spouses that their union is a real sacrament because their marriage is the outward sign of the marriage between Christ and His Church. It is in and through their marriage that they receive every grace to be true spouses, that is, to "defer to one another out of reverence for Christ." It is clear from what Saint Paul teaches that it is this type of marriage, which is life-giving, both spiritually (the spouses save their own souls) and physically (it produces new life in their children), for the Church and for the world.

Summary Points

1. Marriage is created by God for a man and a woman, and its purpose is two-fold: it is a union which is to give joy and fulfillment to both, and from this joyful union new life is generated as God intends.
2. Civil divorce has no part in true marriage since it is a creation of man and not of God. Thus, civil divorce does not break or render void the bond of marriage.
3. Marriage is permanent, that is, for as long as both spouses live.
4. Husbands and wives are equals in their unique union and they should treat each other in the very way that Christ loves His Church. As Christ gave His life for the Church, spouses are to live a married life of sacrificial love for each other.



Section Two: Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium

When we consider the deposit of our Catholic Faith, meaning, the defined truths of the Faith, we must do so first, relying on Sacred Scripture which is divinely inspired, cannot err in matters of Faith, and where divine revelation is found. Further, we look to Sacred Tradition and the Magisterium (the definitive teaching authority of the Church), in order to find a coherent and complete understanding and practice of the Faith.

Sacred Tradition began when the Lord Jesus gave to Peter and the other Apostles His power to bind and loose here on earth in all matters which pertain to the Gospel (Mt. 16: 17-19; Jn. 20: 22-23; 21: 15-19). From the day of the first Pentecost, the Apostles and first disciples of the Risen Jesus, Son of God, not only announced the Good News but taught all who heard and believed everything the Lord had commanded. Thus, this is belief and practice, and this is what the living Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church always has been, is, and always will be. The Church, in the person of the Apostles and all their successors, faithfully adheres to what Jesus has commissioned the Church to do in every age. This is how Sacred Tradition and the Church's Magisterium continue in our own time and will continue until the end of time.

Let us look to the person who, perhaps better than any other, represents the Church's living Sacred Tradition and its Magisterium – Saint Augustine. After Saint Paul, Saint Augustine is acknowledged as the second great doctrinal theologian in the Catholic Church. To be sure, there have been many others who have followed Augustine and from whom the Church has greatly benefitted, but Augustine's excellent work on the nature and purpose of marriage, titled *The Good of Marriage*, written in 401 A.D., has brought forth the Church's belief, understanding, and practice concerning marriage, and it is still in use to this day!

Augustine makes clear that since God created man and woman, they are, by that fact, good since everything God created is good. He then states that since God created them to be the only suitable partners for each other and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply on the earth, this fruitful partnership or union is also good by the very fact that it is what God willed for a man and a woman.

Augustine then states that this good of marriage for the man and the woman has three essential parts: fides (fidelity), proles (offspring), and sacramentum (sacrament or permanence). In his own words, Saint Augustine says: "Fidelity means that there must be no relations with any other person

outside the marriage bond. Offspring means that children are to be lovingly received, brought up with tender care, and given a religious education. Sacrament means that the marriage bond is not to be broken and that if one partner in a marriage should be abandoned by the other, neither may enter a new marriage even for the sake of having children. This is what may be called the *rule of marriage*; by it, the fertility of nature is made honorable, and the disorder of concupiscence is regulated.”

It is clear that Saint Augustine is very familiar with the teachings of Jesus with regard to the nature and purpose of marriage; it is equally clear that he understands how Saint Paul applies it to every husband and wife. The three essential goods of marriage - fidelity, children, and permanence - apply to every true marriage, and no person can exclude any of these goods or alter them according to a particular circumstance. It is also clear that, for Augustine, “fidelity is perfect” or absolute; sacrament means that the marriage bond is permanent, “indissoluble between Christian spouses which is a figure of the union of Jesus Christ with His Church;” and children are a gift to the spouses which depends on God’s will for them and thus, they may not reject any children they may receive.

Let us take a closer look at how the Church’s Magisterium relies on Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition to teach faithfully in accord with the command of Jesus and in unbroken communion with the Apostles and their successors. This is best demonstrated by Ecumenical Councils, and I will refer to two of the twenty-one Ecumenical Councils held in the Church’s history - the Council of Trent [1545-1563] and the Second Vatican Council [1962-1965].

The Council of Trent confronted the serious heresies of the Protestant revolt and drew upon all of Church teaching and practice from the Church’s beginnings to repeat and confirm Catholic doctrine but also to explain it so that the practice of the Faith would be defended, strengthened, and fostered. The Second Vatican Council, repeating the methodology of the Council of Trent, confronted the serious errors that developed as a result of the Enlightenment, certain economic theories stemming from the Industrial Revolution, the rise of totalitarianism, and the subtle yet virulent spread of Modernism and Secularism. Vatican II repeated and confirmed the constant Catholic doctrine and it, too, further explained it in order that the practice of the Faith would be defended, strengthened, and fostered.

In the Council’s opening declaration, it is apparent that the Catholic Church’s constant belief and practice concerning marriage is being affirmed and confirmed in the most authoritative and definitive manner.

“Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the forefather of the human race pronounced marriage to be a perpetual and indissoluble bond when he said: ‘This at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh . . . Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’

Christ our Lord taught more openly that the two alone are coupled and joined by this bond when referring to the words just quoted as spoken by God, he said: ‘So they are no longer two but one flesh’, and went on at once to confirm the lasting nature of the same bond, previously declared only by Adam, with the words, ‘What therefore God has joined together, let no one put asunder.’

Christ himself, the instituter and perfecter of the most holy sacraments merited for us by his passion the grace that would perfect natural love, strengthen the unbreakable unity, and sanctify the spouses. This the apostle Paul indicated when he said: ‘Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’, and went on to add, ‘This is a great mystery and I take it to mean Christ and the church.’

Since grace received through Christ raises marriage in the dispensation of the gospel above the unions of the old law, our holy fathers and councils and the universal tradition of the church have always taught that it is rightly to be counted among the sacraments of the new law.”

Clearly, the Council of Trent confirmed and attested to the Catholic Church’s constant belief and practice concerning marriage basing itself on Sacred Scripture and Tradition as taught by the authentic and authoritative Magisterium of the Church. The last statement cited here demonstrates this fact. Contained in this Council’s statement is everything we have covered already in this Pastoral Letter but, in the clearest language, the Council of Trent lays to rest a doubt that had been raised over the prior two centuries concerning the sacramentality of the marriages of Christians.

The marriage of baptized persons is one of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ. It has a natural goodness which has been perfected by Christ and as a result, the spouses have the benefit of an unbreakable bond which serves to strengthen both in the holiness of life. It is noteworthy that the Council Fathers make clear that it is God’s will manifested by Christ the Lord that marriage is for the “two alone,” namely a man and a woman. As such, their marriage bond is permanent, and no human is qualified to alter or break it.

The Second Vatican Council has been much discussed for what it accomplished and how its teachings have been accepted and implemented, as well as maligned for what it was presumed to have done and not done. This discussion continues in spite of the fact that the last five Popes, four of whom were participants in the Council, have consistently presented the actual, authoritative teachings of the Council as the constant belief and practice of the Roman Catholic Church.

To hear what Vatican II said, one must read the actual documents from the Council. While several of the Council's documents make references to marriage and family life, the Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, has an entire section devoted to marriage and that is what I will use in this Pastoral Letter.

I encourage you to read the entire section in *Gaudium et Spes*, in the Constitution, Chapter 1, titled "Promoting the Dignity of Marriage and Family Life," paragraphs 47 to 52. It should be noted that one of the principal authors of this entire Constitution was a young Bishop Karol Wojtyla who would become Saint John Paul II, and the expert theologian consulted was the young Father Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI.

While I will not quote in its entirety this section of *Gaudium et Spes*, I will note some of the statements of the Council Fathers which demonstrate a complete attachment to and affirmation of the Church's constant belief and practice regarding marriage, as well as apply this belief and practice to some new circumstances in culture and society.

First, the well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy state of conjugal and family life (GS n. 47).

Second, the intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and endowed by Him with its own proper laws; it is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent, and thus, by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other, a relationship arises which, by Divine will and in the eyes of society, too, is a lasting one (GS n. 48). By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children and find in them their ultimate crown. This intimate union imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them, and the Christian family springs from marriage, which is an image and a sharing in the partnership of love between Christ and the Church (GS n. 48).

Third, the biblical Word of God several times urges the betrothed to nourish their betrothal with chaste love, and likewise their marriage; this love is an eminently human one since it is directed from one person to another by an affection of the will; and it involves the good of the whole person and can enrich the expressions of body and mind with a unique dignity, ennobling these expressions as special ingredients and signs of the friendship proper to marriage (GS n. 49). This love is uniquely expressed and perfected through the marital act. The actions within marriage by which the couple is united intimately and chastely are noble and worthy ones; firmly established by the Lord, the unity of marriage will radiate from the equal personal dignity of wife and husband, a dignity acknowledged by mutual and total love; and the steady fulfillment of the duties of this Christian vocation demand notable virtue (GS n. 49).

Fourth, marriage and conjugal love are, by their nature, ordained toward the begetting and educating of children, as they are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of the parents (GS n. 50). Without intending to underestimate the other ends of marriage, it must be said that true marital love, and the whole meaning of family life that 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 the couple will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day. Marriage, to be sure, is not instituted solely for procreation; its very nature as an unbreakable union between persons and the welfare of the children both demand that the mutual love of the spouses be embodied in a rightly ordered manner, that it grow and ripen (GS n. 50).

Fifth, certain modern conditions often keep couples from arranging their married lives harmoniously and they find themselves in circumstances where at least temporarily the size of the family should not be increased. In cases like these, it is difficult to preserve the practice of faithful love and the intimacy of their lives; when the intimacy of married life is broken, it often happens that faithfulness is imperiled and the good of the children suffers (GS n. 51). From the moment of conception, life must be guarded with the greatest care, while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes; hence, the acts proper to conjugal love are to be exercised in accord with genuine human dignity and must be honored with great reverence. Thus, everyone should be persuaded that human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone (GS n. 51).

Sixth and finally, the family is a kind of school of deeper humanity since the active presence of the father is highly beneficial to the formation of the

children, and the children, especially the younger among them, need the care of the 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 (GS n. 52). The family is the foundation of society and in it, the various generations come together and help one another to grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with other requirements of social life. Public authority should regard it as a sacred duty to recognize, protect, and promote their authentic nature, to shield public morality and the right of parents to beget and educate their children in the bosom of the family must be safeguarded (GS n. 52). Let the spouses, made in the image of God and enjoying the authentic dignity of the person, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind, and the work of mutual sanctification (GS n. 52).

Another equally important component of the Catholic Church's authoritative teaching Magisterium is Papal teaching in matters of faith and morals. This may take the form of an Encyclical, Apostolic Letter or Exhortation, or a *Motu Proprio*. I wish to cite in brief from two such Papal teachings: the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Blessed Pope Paul VI issued in 1968, and Saint John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* issued in 1981.

Let us look to Blessed Paul VI's encyclical since it is an excellent reaffirmation and further application of the constant teaching and practice of the Catholic Church concerning marriage and its nature, purpose, rights, and responsibilities. It is clear that the Pope is using and applying what had just been accomplished by the Second Vatican Council. This encyclical is readily available, and I urge you to get a copy and read it carefully.

Blessed Paul VI establishes again what the Church teaches about the conjugal love of husband and wife. "God, the Creator, wisely and providently established marriage with the intent that He might achieve His own design of love through men. Therefore, through mutual self-giving, which is unique and exclusive to them, spouses seek a communion of persons. Through this communication, the spouses perfect each other so that they might share with God the task of procreating and educating new living beings . . . Moreover, for the baptized, matrimony is endowed with such dignity that it is a sacramental sign of grace representing the union of Christ and His Church" (HV n. 8).

The Holy Father makes it quite clear that the nature and the finality of the conjugal act between husband and wife, which unites them in a chaste and life-giving union with each other and from which new human life can be transmitted, is a truly good human act and worthy of their dignity as spouses (cf. HV, n. 11).

The key paragraph in this magnificent encyclical follows, and I repeat it here in its entirety. “The doctrine that the Magisterium of the Church has often explained is this: **there is an unbreakable connection between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning of the conjugal act, and both are inherent in the conjugal act. This connection was established by God, and Man is not permitted to break it through his own volition.** Therefore, because of its intrinsic nature, the conjugal act, which unites husband and wife with the closest of bonds, also makes them capable of bringing forth new life according to the laws written into their very natures as male and female. Furthermore, if both essential meanings are preserved, that of union and procreation, the conjugal act fully maintains its capacity for fostering true mutual love and its ordination to the highest mission of parenthood, to which man is called” (HV, n. 12; the bolding is my emphasis). On his recent visit to the Philippines Pope Francis quoted extensively from *Humanae Vitae* and proclaimed Blessed Paul VI to be “prophetic” in what he taught!

Saint John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* situates the family, meaning husband, wife, and children, within the context of marriage as its enduring good fruit for the salvation of its members, as essential to the life and mission of the Church, and as the necessary and first unit of every legitimate human society.

Since God created man in His own image and likeness “God inscribed into the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility of love and communion. . . Consequently, sexuality, by which means man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts proper and exclusive to spouses, is not purely biological but concerns the innermost being of the human person. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves totally to one another until death . . . The only ‘place’ in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God Himself” (FC, n. 11).

Saint John Paul II repeats and confirms the Church’s constant belief and practice regarding the fact that the marriage of the baptized is one of the seven sacraments since “by means of baptism, man and woman are definitely placed within the new and eternal spousal covenant of Christ with the Church and because of this indestructible insertion, the intimate community of life and love founded by the Creator is elevated and assumed into the spousal charity of Christ. Thus, by virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner; their belonging to each other is the real representation by means of the sacramental sign of the very relationship of Christ with the Church (cf. FC, n. 13).

Finally, the Holy Father repeats the Church's definitive teaching on children who are the fruit of the exclusive conjugal act of self-giving love of the spouses. "According to the plan of God, marriage is the foundation of the wider community of the family, since the very institution of marriage and conjugal love is ordained to the procreation and education of children" (FC, n. 14). For Saint John Paul II, the family is a communion of persons, ". . . a complex of interpersonal relationships – married life, fatherhood, motherhood, filiation, and fraternity – through which each person is introduced to the 'human family' and the 'family of God', which is the Church" (FC, n. 15).

Again, it is important to note the real continuity of the Church's Magisterium. Pope Francis made so clear during his recent trip to the Philippines what the Church's constant belief is with regard to marriage and family. He exhorted all: "Be sanctuaries of respect for life, proclaiming the sacredness of every human life from conception to natural death. What a gift this would be to society if every Christian family lived fully its noble vocation."

Summary Points

1. Marriage, as created by God only for one man and one woman, is, by that fact, good in itself as a unique partnership.
2. This inherent good of marriage has three essential elements: fidelity, children, and permanence. Fidelity is absolute faithfulness to one's spouse; children are a gift from God to be received by the spouses without reservation or hindrance; permanence means that the union of the spouses is indissoluble by them.
3. These three essential goods are proper to marriage itself and therefore are not subject to change, exclusion, or elimination by either or both spouses or any other human institution.
4. St. Augustine's three essential goods of marriage led the Church's Magisterium to recognize that the good of the spouses is equally necessary in marriage. It serves marriage and is served by a faithful, fruitful, and permanent marriage.
5. The Council of Trent confirmed the constant belief and practice of the Church from Apostolic times with regard to marriage and made clear that marriage is one of the seven sacraments of the Church for those who have been baptized. Marriage is permanent and, therefore, indissoluble. Marriage, as created by God for a man and a woman, is

for their mutual salvation, and the grace of this sacrament perfects them as spouses.

6. The Second Vatican Council's teachings on marriage are a complete confirmation and affirmation of the Church's constant belief and practice. It expands and places in its proper context the good of the communion of the whole of life of the spouses. The communion of the whole of life in marriage strengthens the essential goods of marriage and these three goods sustain and foster the communion of life of the spouses.
7. Blessed Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* confirms and defines that in every marriage there are always two equally important meanings to the one conjugal act – the unitive and the procreative. This has been created by God and is inherent in the conjugal act itself and thus, humans may not separate, eliminate, or alter them. To do so is a grave and intrinsic evil.
8. Saint John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* confirms the Church's constant belief and practice with regard to marriage. He establishes as a fact the intimate link between the marriage of man and woman and the family. Only the true marriage of a man and a woman can create and foster a family. He defines in clear language that marriage and family are goods in themselves as well as basic goods for every society.



Section Three: Catholic Practice

It seems to me that a good way of demonstrating and explaining Catholic practice with regard to marriage is to look to the Church's Rite of Marriage. There are three necessary parts to the Rite of Marriage: The Instruction, the Statement of Intentions, and the Exchange of Consent. These three parts are an excellent and accurate summary of Catholic belief about the nature, purpose, and ends of a true marriage.

The Instruction

My dear friends, you have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church's minister and this community. Christ abundantly blesses this love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now, He enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity. And so, in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions.

This beautiful instruction repeats the Church's belief and practice that the marriage of the baptized is a sacrament of the Church; marriage is a public act by both persons that not only affects them for the good, but it also has a direct and positive effect on the Church itself. The Council of Trent established a definite form for the marriage of Catholics, and then the Second Vatican Council confirmed it so that the marriage is to be witnessed by the Church's own duly authorized minister and by the community, the two necessary witnesses in order to be considered a valid marriage. Finally, it is clear again that the unitive meaning of marriage is essential since the sacrament gives both persons the grace to live marriage with permanence and absolute fidelity for their mutual spiritual and temporal good as spouses.

Statement of Intentions

N. and N. have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?

Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?

Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and His Church?

These three questions are asked of both the bride and groom individually, and each is to respond aloud so that both the Church minister and the community hear their intentions. By responding affirmatively to the questions, each state that he/she is marrying without any force, fear, or conditions. He/she is marrying, fully aware that this marriage is for life and is a mutual communion of love and respect for the other as an equal. He/she is marrying knowing that children as a gift from God can result from their conjugal union, that he/she not only will accept any children God gives but will not do anything to impede or block God's gift, and finally, that he/she knows and is willing and able to rear children in accord with God's will in the Faith.

Exchange of Consent

Once the public statement of intentions has been declared for those present to witness, then the Church minister asks them to exchange their consent to marry each other. As the Catholic Church has taught from the time of Saint Augustine, when this consent has been exchanged the man and the woman are actually married. Usually, facing each other, first the man and then the woman speak the same words of consent to the other using one of the formulas established by the Church. The Church minister says:

Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and His Church.

I, N., take you, N., to be my wife/husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

The Church minister who is the Church's official witness to this marriage responds to the newly married husband and wife by receiving their exchanged consent. He says:

You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord, in His goodness, strengthen your consent and fill you both with His blessings. What God has joined, men must not divide. Amen.

The joining of hands and speaking marriage consent to each other is the public and outward sign of the two becoming one in flesh (body) and in spirit, in other words, a new person. The words spoken by both to each other are the outward expressions of the interior intentions of both. They really do, in word and in deed, marry each other for the love of the other alone, for the rest of their lives in a communion of unbreakable faithfulness. The rite concludes by calling upon the Lord Who chose these two for each other to bless them in the sacrament they have just administered to each other. It is Jesus Who has the final word on this public act of total self-giving when the Church minister speaks His words on the absolute fidelity of their permanent union. The marriage is of God, not of man.

Saint John Paul II gave a beautiful teaching on the exchange of consent made by a man and a woman on their wedding day. In that teaching, he made it clear that their entire married lives should be a renewal of their first exchange of consent. He said it would be if their conjugal act of physical love for each other was faithful and permanent, open to new life, and respectful of each other as persons. “We are also dealing with a truth that is, simply stated, always affirmed anew. In fact, as man and woman live in marriage ‘until death,’ in some sense they continuously re-propose the sign they themselves gave—through the liturgy of the sacrament—on the day of their wedding” (John Paul II, General Audience, July 11, 1984).

Summary Points

1. The Catholic Rite of Marriage is an excellent summary of Catholic belief, teaching, and practice with regard to marriage. It is steeped in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and the Church’s Magisterium.
2. There are three essential and necessary parts to the Rite of Marriage: an Instruction, a Statement of Intentions, and the Exchange of Consent.
3. The actual Exchange of Consent is the moment the man and the woman are married.
4. The couple is the minister of the Sacrament of Marriage in the Latin Rite; the Church minister, who can be a bishop, priest, or deacon, is the official witness for the Church.

Conclusion

In closing, I wish to refer to two more recent elements of the Catholic Church's Magisterium, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Code of Canon Law*. Both rely heavily on Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition in putting forth for the world the constant teaching and practice of the Roman Catholic Faith. These two Catholic Church documents form a sure and certain foundation for the right practice of the Catholic life and in the case of the Sacrament of Marriage, both are very clear and helpful.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Part Two, Chapter Three, Article 7, 1601-1666) addresses the Sacrament of Matrimony. I urge you in the strongest terms to read these few paragraphs. You will be edified and, if you are married or are contemplating marriage, you will be heartened and strengthened. I cite two of these paragraphs here as they are representative of all that has been said in this Pastoral Letter.

“By reason of their state in life and of their order, [Christian spouses] have their own special gifts in the People of God. This grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace, they ‘help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children’” (1641).

“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; it demands *indissolubility* and *faithfulness* in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to *fertility*. In a word, it is a question of the normal characteristics of all – natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but it also raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values” (1643).

Even a cursory reading of this section of the *Catechism* makes it apparent that marriage is a vocation given not to all but to those whom God chooses for this singularly demanding life. Saint Augustine's three essential goods are at the heart of what the Second Vatican Council has declared to be the unique personal communion of the whole of life for both the man and woman who are to commit themselves without reservation to each other. Again, for those who are baptized (Catholics as well as non-Catholics), their union is, by the fact of their being baptized, a sacrament and therefore indissoluble by any human authority.

The Code of Canon Law is, by its nature, that which the Church applies to living the Catholic life of faith so that what Catholics do conforms to what Catholics profess to believe as taught by the Church itself. Church law is always at the service of the truth of our faith and therefore, it is always at the service of charity.

The first two canons which introduce the Church's discipline for all Catholics who wish to marry and for those non-Catholics who wish to marry a Catholic, form the basis of the Catholic Church's entire discipline regarding marriage: what is to be observed in preparation for marriage, what is to be done by both spouses on the day of the wedding and thereafter, and what remains should the unfortunate circumstance of marital shipwreck (civil divorce) occur before one of the spouses dies. The law of the Church concerning marriage applies equally to both persons.

Canon 1055 §1: The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life, and which of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children, has, between the baptized, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

Canon 1055 §2: Consequently, a valid marriage contract cannot exist between baptized persons without its being by that very fact a sacrament.

Canon 1056: The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility; in Christian marriage, they acquire a distinctive firmness by reason of the sacrament.

Based on these two Church laws, as well as on what is contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it is understandable why the Catholic Rite of Marriage is structured and celebrated in the way we have already observed.

The essential properties of unity and indissolubility in the marital covenant of one man and one woman, fortified by the grace of their sacrament, foster within and between them a permanent and absolutely faithful union of the whole of their life which, if it is God's will, generates new life in their children. Thus, it is easy to understand why the Church teaches that this bond cannot be broken by anyone or anything other than death itself.

I will end this Pastoral Letter with a “Wedding Day Prayer” which captures all we have discussed.

We thank You, O God, for the love You have implanted in our hearts. May it always inspire us to be kind in our words, considerate of feelings, and concerned for each other’s needs and wishes. Help us to be understanding and forgiving of human weaknesses and failings. Increase our faith and trust in You and may Your prudence guide our life and love. Bless our marriage, O God, with peace and happiness, and make our love fruitful for Your glory and our joy both here and in eternity. Amen.

Laudetur Jesus Christus!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+1 David D. Kagan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'D' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

The Most Reverend David D. Kagan, D.D., P.A., J.C.L.
Bishop of Bismarck

Given at Bismarck, North Dakota
Ash Wednesday
the 18th day of February, in the Year of Our Lord, 2015.

Appendix I

I want to present in a summary fashion what is of the utmost importance for every man and woman, whether they be married or single, and that is the cultivation of the virtue of chastity in one's entire life. The best source for the Church's teaching is the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in its treatment of the Sixth Commandment (paragraphs 2331 to 2440).

For the Church, a person's sexuality is a part of who the man or woman is as a person created in the image and likeness of God. Every aspect of a person's life is affected by his or her sexuality because each person is created by God as a unique unity of body and soul. Thus, the Church teaches that sexuality "... especially concerns affectivity, the capacity to love and to procreate, and in a more general way the aptitude for forming bonds of communion with others" (2332). In fact, the Church teaches that each of us, whether a man or woman, should accept our sexuality. In each man and woman, the "physical, moral, and spiritual *difference* and *complementarity* are oriented toward the goods of marriage and the flourishing of family life. The harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which the complementarity needs and mutual support between the sexes are lived out" (2333).

The Vocation to Chastity: It is important to note that the Church teaches that every person has a vocation to be chaste in his bodily and spiritual integrity as a man or a woman. No matter what one's vocation, each person is to live a chaste life. "The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality of the gift (sexuality)" (2337; cf. 2348-2350).

Chastity, lived by a man or a woman, is expressed correctly when it is understood to be a matter of using natural passions and inclinations in such a way that the individual does not demean and degrade himself or herself physically or spiritually and does not do the same to another person. The Church teaches: "The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him. This integrity ensures the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behavior that would impair it. It tolerates neither a double life nor duplicity in speech" (2338). In other words, real chastity is the expression of respect for oneself as a person created by God, and the very same respect is given to every other person as an equal. Thus, all forms of sexually inverted behavior would be considered by the Church to be the enemies of the virtue and vocation of chastity and therefore, gravely sinful (cf. 2351-2359). This is a moral truth that applies to every person and at all times in every person's life.

The Love of Husband and Wife: So often the Church acknowledges this total love of a husband and wife as an all-encompassing love expressed in the full conjugal act, culminating in a faithful and permanent love for one's spouse as that one and only person with whom the total communion of life and love is shared. "Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In marriage, the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. . . The acts in marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honorable; the truly human performance of these acts fosters the self-giving they signify and enriches the spouses in joy and gratitude" (2360, 2362).

Marital and spousal chastity is outwardly shown by spouses by their willingness to completely refrain from all sexual activity at certain times in their married life, but also by the way husband and wife engage in marital sexual activity. Marital relations should be based on true love, affection, and respect for each other, expressed both faithfully and with understanding. However, true marital chastity is more than this sincere outward action. True spousal and marital chastity has its origins in the interior intention and attitude of the man and woman toward each other, and this kind of true chastity begins before marriage.

The periods of dating and engagement are especially important for the cultivation of one's personal chastity and one's future spousal chastity. Our Church offers a beautiful teaching specifically on this. "Those who are *engaged to marry* are called to live chastity in continence. They should see in this time of testing a discovery of mutual respect, an apprenticeship in fidelity, and the hope of receiving one another from God. They should reserve for marriage the expressions of affection that belong to married love. They will help each other grow in chastity" (2350). Continence, simply put, is self-control or self-mastery, which every woman and man as individuals are to work to achieve. In both the engagement period and in the marriage, this takes on a special character as both the husband and wife, refraining from all sexual activity and contact, still show each other faithful and enduring love. This love is sacrificial in that it is expressed with the same devotion, passion, and respect but without that physical consummation.

In essence, the virtue of chastity in marriage is as essential to that communion of the whole of married life as is marital fidelity, permanence, and the openness to the possible conception of children, if that be God's will for the spouses. Marital chastity strengthens and fosters the unifying love husband and wife express to each other every day in their thoughts, words, and actions.

Natural Family Planning (NFP): The virtue of marital chastity is most compatible with the Church's teaching about the openness of each conjugal act to the possibility of the conception of a child. At the same time, marital chastity is also compatible with the Church's teaching concerning responsible parenthood. In both cases, it is real marital chastity that frees both wife and husband to fully and completely love each other and their children and, at the same time, cooperate fully with God Who is the Author of all life, human and divine.

The Catholic Church understands clearly that not every conjugal act of the spouses will result in the conception of new life and the Church has never taught that spouses must conceive children in a continuous manner. What the Church teaches is that the spouses and their conjugal act must be open to the possibility of the conception of new life, and that they may not engage in any conjugal act which is artificially altered so that conception is not possible but they still derive physical pleasure. In other words, spouses who are truly chaste never separate the unitive and procreative aspects of their conjugal love. If this is done, it is neither a chaste nor loving act but only an act which uses the one to be loved unconditionally for a selfish and self-pleasuring purpose.

There are various methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) which the Church approves of as morally acceptable, that is, not violating and separating the unitive and procreative aspects of their conjugal love. Again, spousal chastity is the key to the moral acceptability of any of these natural methods used in order to be responsible parents. What would be morally unacceptable is if even these natural methods were used in order never to have any children. Thus, the name, "Natural Family Planning" denotes the desire for children and their conception according to the moral and physical abilities of both husband and wife to fulfill the great responsibility to have and to raise and educate their children in the life of faith.

Some of the approved methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP) are listed here with a brief explanation. For a full explanation, I ask you to contact the Bismarck Diocese's Office of Family Ministry or go to our diocesan website: bismarckdiocese.com.

Billings Ovulation Method: Consists of observing and recording the patterns and changes of cervical mucus throughout a woman's cycle. The levels of estrogen during a woman's fertile period produce a change in cervical mucus that alerts a woman that ovulation is imminent. This method is taught in a group setting.

Creighton Model: Also consists of observing and recording the patterns and changes of cervical mucus throughout a woman's cycle. The Creighton Model requires more detailed observations than the Billings Method and it is especially helpful for women with irregular cycles and special or particular conditions. This method is taught in a private setting.

Sympto-Thermal Method: Includes the observation and recording of the patterns of cervical mucus as well as the changes in body temperature and other minor signs of ovulation. The Sympto-Thermal Method requires the woman's temperature to be taken upon waking so that the temperature sign and mucus sign can be compared to help pinpoint ovulation. This method is taught in a classroom setting.

Marquette Model: Includes the use of a device called a Fertility Monitor which measures hormone levels in a woman's urine. The observations from the monitor are paired with temperature or mucus signs to pinpoint ovulation.

Note: All NFP models work by pinpointing ovulation in a woman's cycle and the couple then abstaining during these fertile days to avoid pregnancy or not abstaining during these fertile days to try to achieve pregnancy.

Appendix II

This section is informational in nature and is meant to be brief. It is a summary of Catholic Church teachings on certain matters related to marriage. If any of the issues covered here apply to you, I ask that you make an appointment to discuss them with your parish priest.

- 1. Artificial Contraception:** The Catholic Church does not approve of the use of any form of artificial birth control and considers its use by one or both spouses to be a grave sin. The reason is clear: the use of these forms of contraception is a direct break of the inseparable unitive and procreative aspects of the full conjugal act between husband and wife. It is simply contrary to the nature and purpose of that most intimate act of loving union and thus, blocks the possible outcome of this marital act. Artificial contraception includes pills, condoms, inserted mechanical devices, and male and female surgical sterilizations for the purpose of preventing possible births.
- 2. IVF (*in vitro* fertilization):** The Catholic Church does not approve of this artificial and surgical procedure in which a husband and wife seek to conceive a child. It does not involve them in their own loving conjugal act from which conception may occur. During this procedure, life is attempted to be conceived in a petri dish in a laboratory, many eggs from the wife or from another are fertilized by the husband's or another's sperm, and what appears to be the most viable are inserted in the wife's or a surrogate's womb for implantation, with the rest discarded or frozen. IVF can create life artificially, but it destroys human life at a far greater rate. This too is gravely sinful as it objectifies human life, demeans the intimate conjugal act of love between husband and wife, and intentionally destroys life judged to be less desirable. In essence, this process is a good example of why the moral principle of the "end not justifying the means" always applies.
- 3. Conversion to Roman Catholicism & Prior Marriage:** The Catholic Church teaches that any two persons, baptized or not, who enter a first marriage are bound to this marriage bond until one of them dies. As can happen, a non-Catholic may wish to convert to Catholicism in order to marry a Catholic in the near future or at some undetermined time, but this person has had a prior marriage which ended in civil divorce. The best way forward is to address this prior marriage in the Church Tribunal process *before* formal conversion to Catholicism by Baptism or a Profession of Catholic Faith. This issue should be revealed to the parish priest at the earliest possible time.
- 4. Premarital Cohabitation:** The Catholic Church never approves of this situation as it is seriously sinful for both parties. It is very much an abuse

of the sexuality of both the woman and the man since it is based not on a permanent, faithful, and fruitful commitment only to each other but on the seeking of pleasure without those responsibilities. This is a decision of mere convenience and self-centered pleasure, and therefore, cohabitation does not foster the true sacrifice required by a wife and a husband for a lifelong, faith-filled, and fruitful union of life. It has been proven many times by various sociological studies that those who cohabit without marriage or prior to marriage suffer a much higher degree of breakup, infidelity, and civil divorce after marriage.

5. **Same-sex Marriage:** Any reasonable person will understand the Catholic Church's opposition to this matter. It is not only unreasonable and illogical, but in the physical sphere is humanly impossible. Why? Marriage by its nature can only be a relationship between one man and one woman, and nothing else. In the physical sphere, that is, human biology, our physical bodies demonstrate a very simple truth – a man and a woman are made for each other as equal and physically complementary persons. In the real world, no less in the moral sphere, it is not possible to have a same-sex marriage. To promote this real error as a natural good is to subvert the good of individual men and women and that of society itself. It is a denial of the truth of one's human reason and senses.
6. **Catholic Canonical Form of Marriage:** An easily understood and observed Catholic Church requirement is that two Catholics or a Catholic and a non-Catholic who marry are to marry in the presence of a duly authorized Catholic priest or deacon, in the presence of two other witnesses, and in a public ceremony. If this is not done, the Catholic Church does not recognize the union as valid and binding for life. For a sufficient reason, the Catholic may request of his/her bishop a dispensation from this requirement and if granted, the Catholic Church would recognize the marriage as valid and binding.
7. **Catholics and the Effects of Civil Divorce:** i) A Civil Divorce does not break the bond of marriage for Catholics; ii) while they may be apart, the Church considers them married only to each other; iii) neither is free to re-marry, as this violates the Sixth Commandment (to do so will deprive the persons of the ability to receive the sacraments); iv) neither is free to date nor to engage in any sexual acts which are reserved for married spouses (to do so one commits the mortal sin of adultery); v) both persons are bound to fulfill all of their natural responsibilities to any children born to their marriage. **While there is much more to be said about this matter, I have listed the effects of Civil Divorce for Catholics. Kindly consult the Diocesan Tribunal or a Catholic priest for more information.**

Suggested Reading

Primary Sources

Sacred Scriptures

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The Seven Big Myths about Marriage. Christopher Kaczor and Jennifer Kaczor. Ignatius Press, San Francisco.

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What is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense. Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, Robert P. George. Encounter Books, New York & London.

