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## CELEBRATING CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE (4)

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In closing this reflection on Christian marriage I would like to quote from the pastoral notes of the new marriage ritual; these notes are meant as well for the couple getting married as they are for the minister(s) presiding the celebration. The pastoral notes refer to the importance and dignity of the sacrament of matrimony. Preparation and celebration of the marriage are, first of all, the concern of the couple and their families. They also concern the bishop, the pastor and his assistants because of their pastoral and liturgical responsibility, and, in a certain way, the entire Church community. It is the bishop's responsibility in his diocese to establish guidelines regarding marriage preparation and celebration, and to call on the faithful to maintain a Christian outlook on marriage, so that it may achieve holiness. Pastors must ensure that in their own community this support be stimulated especially through their preaching, marriage preparation, couple interviews, a beautiful and dignified celebration of the wedding liturgy, and the support given the couple in their work of maintaining and protecting their marriage bond.

### COMMUNITY OF LIFE

The marriage contract through which man and woman constitute a community of life, has its strength and vitality grounded in creation itself; nevertheless, for Christ's faithful it is raised to an even higher degree of dignity since it is one of the sacraments of the new Covenant. Marriage is established by the marriage covenant, that is, by the definitive consent of both spouses, a consent through which they freely give themselves to one another. This particular union of man and woman requires - as does the good of the children - total fidelity of the spouses and the unbreakable unity of the marriage bond. By its very nature, the institution of marriage and married love itself are ordained to procreation and the education of children who are like the crowning achievement of the marriage relationship. Children constitute marriage's most precious gift, and the greatly contribute to the good of their parents. The intimate community of love and life, in which the couple «are no longer two but one flesh», is founded on our Creator God, has its own laws, and is graced with the Lord's blessing. This is the reason why the sacred bond of marriage does not depend on human choice: it is the decision of its Author that marriage have its own values and objectives or ends.

### NEW COVENANT

In renewing all things and making all things new, Christ the Lord established marriage in its original form and holiness in such a way that humankind may not separate what God has joined. So that this indissolubility be more clearly a sign of his own relationship with the Church, Christ raised it to the dignity of a sacrament. His presence brought grace and joy to the wedding at Cana, as the Lord changed the water into wine, foreshadowing in this way the new and everlasting covenant. Just as God in days of old took the initiative of establishing a loving and faithful covenant with His people, so too does the Saviour of humankind show himself to be the Spouse of the Church, in covenant with her through his paschal mystery. Through baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, man and woman are once and for all introduced into this covenant of Christ with his Church in such a way that their community of love is taken into the love of Christ and enriched with the power of his sacrifice. From this new condition comes the fact that a valid marriage is always a sacrament.

## **MYSTERY OF UNITY AND LOVE**

In marriage, the Christian couple exemplify and share in the mystery of unity and productive love existing between Christ and the Church. It is because of this that in getting married and accepting children they help one another achieve holiness, and they have their own gifts and place within the people of God. As Christ loved the Church and gave his life for it, in marriage the Holy Spirit enables Christian couples, equal in dignity, to strive to maintain their mutual gift of self and a seamless love which is nourished at the divine spring of charity. Binding together human and divine, in joy and in trials, the couple persevere in fidelity, with never a thought for adultery or divorce.

## **HUMAN AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITIES**

True and constant marital love – like the entire family structure which flows from it – tends, without lessening or denigrating the other ends of marriage, to make the couple ready to courageously cooperate in the Creator's and Saviour's love which through them seeks to develop and enrich their own family. And so, trusting in God's providence they thank the Creator and seek perfection in Christ when they take on the role of procreators and generously shoulder their human and Christian responsibilities. Dieu who has called them to the married state continues to call them, once married. Those who are married Christ can, with faith in God's word, fruitfully celebrate the mystery of Christ's union with the Church, live good lives, and witness to all around them.

## **MARVEL**

What a beautiful couple it is, two believers united in a common hope, a common calling, a common service! Two children of the Common Father, two servants of the same Master, with nothing in flesh or in spirit coming between them. They are truly two in one flesh; where flesh is one, there is also one spirit! My best wishes and daily prayers go with every couple. May God grant you happiness and hope and faith! May the peace of Christ be in your hearts, and may the Holy Spirit shower you with his richest gifts!

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (392) (04 July 2001)