

The Sacrament and Vocation of Marriage

“Each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in a different way. The union of man and woman in marriage is a way of imitating in the flesh the Creator’s generosity and fecundity: ‘Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.’ All human generations proceed from this union.” Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2335

Congratulations on your upcoming marriage! We want you to have a successful marriage and we know you want that too. If you are like most engaged couples, this is a hectic time as you prepare for your wedding day. For a short time, you are invited to put aside the details of your wedding day and spend some time thinking and talking about the two of you and the relationship you bring into marriage.

On your wedding day, surrounded by your family and dearest friends, you’ll make sacred vows to one another on the altar; promises to love and honor each other in good and bad times, forever. Those vows are the most important words you’ll ever say to any one!

After you’ve made your promises, the priest or deacon will pray nuptial blessings over you which will include words like **covenant**, **sacrament**, **mission**, and **one flesh**. These words hold the astonishing truth that God is present today in the love you share and in the joys and struggles you encounter as you try to deepen that love, join your lives together, and stay faithful in the midst of life’s ups and downs.

At the beginning of your marriage liturgy, the celebrant will call this life you are entering a **holy mystery**. Mystery indeed! It seems astonishing that God can be present in the creating of a home and extended family, the cooking and cleaning, the child-raising and sharing of chores, the disappointments as well as times of celebration.

A Catholic understanding of marriage places an infinite value on the promises you are making to each other on your wedding day. Your vows reflect your **vocation**—a calling to love and honor one another and to give life to the world. They constitute a **sacrament**—a special way that God is present in the world through your marriage.

Your vows also create a **covenant**—a personal relationship with each other and with God that unfolds over time. You made these promises first of all to each other, but also to God and to your family and community. They are promises to your yet-unborn children, and to the many people who will place their trust in you as a couple in your life to come.

When we refer to your marriage as a **sacrament** we mean that your love has the power to bring God’s love in very ordinary ways to those around you. The way you love and trust and forgive each other and sacrifice for one another can be a sign to others of how God loves us. That may be hard to understand or believe, but its truth will become apparent as you forge a partnership for life.

Your vows reflect a way of life we call your **vocation**—a calling to serve God and each other in a particular way by forming a partnership of love and life. Your mission is to treasure and grow the love you have for each other and then to share that love with others in your family, among friends and co-workers, and particularly with those in need. Your calling is to let that love grow in a way that gives new life to the world in birthing children and in protecting, serving and respecting human life all around you. That is the power of the covenant love you are committing yourselves to.

A Catholic wedding creates a **covenant** between the two of you and God. You promise to love each other forever and God promises to love you both and be with you no matter what. You will reap a lifetime of advantages and blessings that come with these promises and you will never be alone on the journey.

Your decision to marry in this way is a good thing! Marriage can be a stronghold in a stressful and harsh world. Marriage provides a friend who has promised to love you even after they know all your

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faults. Not only is your marriage a covenant and a call from God, but current research in the social sciences concludes that a healthy marriage has many practical advantages for you and for society. Married people are healthier, wealthier and live longer than others who are single or divorced.

But keeping a marriage relationship alive and well is hard work because what social scientists call a healthy marriage, a satisfying, committed partnership and a lively growing friendship, takes a high degree of maturity. It requires self-sacrifice, humility, patience and outrageous acts of kindness; like sharing the TV remote control.

In the sacrament of marriage, two people place their lives at the service of one another. While retaining their own unique personality and temperament, two "I"s join together to form an "us"—a partnership enterprise like no other! Together you have the privilege of creating a home, having children, and building an ever-growing community of family and friends.

The bond between you, created by your promises and God's grace will be a source of security and comfort to you and a witness of faithful love to all those whose lives you touch.

When you are married, some of your "holy" moments will be in prayer or in church. But most of your "holy" moments may be in the kitchen

fixing a meal when you are tired from work or nauseated by pregnancy. They may be in the driveway jump starting a car in 18 degree weather. Not just "holy" in their dedication to each other and to the duties of your common life, but "holy" in lovemaking that connects you to the Creator God, holy in forgiving each other when hurts have silenced love and in sharing joys and trials together on your way to making a home and family.

A Marriage in the Lord will help you prepare to receive the sacrament of Matrimony. Whether you use this workbook in a marriage prep program offered by your local Catholic diocese or on your own, you will be asked to reflect upon what has made your relationship special, to examine its strengths and its weaknesses, and to see what will be needed to enable it to become stronger and healthier.

May your marriage parallel the love Jesus has for his people. May your love be deepened and supported, growing stronger and enduring for decades to come. May you remember to say thank you and pray to God who has made all things possible, especially your love. May you have the opportunity to build a marriage that echoes the love God has for us. May you truly grow in your own marriage in the Lord.

