

## Marriage and Family Life in Modern Society in the Context of the Catholic Church

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the nature of marriage and family life and explores the significance of marriage and family from a Catholic perspective, emphasizing the essential elements and purposes of the matrimonial covenant. The author, studying in canon law and having experiences in pastoral service, highlights the interconnectedness of marital stability and societal harmony. The article begins by defining marriage as a lifelong partnership, sacred covenant established between a man and a woman, oriented towards the mutual well-being of spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children. It contrasts the notion of marriage as a mere legal contract with its biblical understanding as a sacred covenant, underscoring the permanence and unbreakable nature of marital vow which is made with the life until death as a sacred oath. The author analyzes the essential properties of marriage, such as unity and indissolubility, as defined in Canon Law. These principles are foundational for all

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marriages, especially for Christian marriages, which should be centered on God and the teachings of the Church. The article stresses the importance of preparation for marriage, including pre-marital counseling, courses and inquiry that emphasize the sacramental nature of marriage as a serious divine matter.

Furthermore, it addresses the challenges faced by contemporary couples, such as worrying of divorce which is unacceptable in Catholic teaching and societal pressures against having children and misconceptions that lead couples to divorce simply. The author advocates for the family as a “sanctuary of life,” where children shall be welcomed as blessings from God, highlights the importance of openness to life to fulfilling God’s creation plan. The article concludes by urging individuals and couples to reflect on their commitment to the values of love, fidelity, and openness to life, thereby reinforcing the role of marriage and family in fostering a harmonious stable and flourishing society, and give suggestions to local church leaders with pastoral care and love by discerning the situations and respecting individual circumstances.

**Keywords:** nature of marriage, purposes of marriage, wedding celebration, Christian couples and family life

[摘要] 本文討論了婚姻和家庭生活的本質，並從天主教的角度探討了婚姻和家庭的意義，強調了婚姻盟約的基本要素和目的。作者憑藉著對教會法的研究和經驗，強調了婚姻穩定與社會和諧之間的相互關聯。本文首先將婚姻定義為終身伴侶關係，是男女之間建立的神聖盟約，以夫妻雙方的福祉和生養教育子女為目的。它將婚姻作為純粹的

法律契約的概念與聖經中作為神聖盟約的理解進行了對比，強調了婚姻盟約的永久性和不可拆散性，婚姻盟約是夫妻雙方以自己生命——直到死亡——而發的神聖誓言。作者分析了教會法中給婚姻定義的基本特點，即單一性和不可拆散性。這些性質是所有婚姻的基礎與原則，尤其是基督徒之間的婚姻，夫妻應該以天主和教會的教義為家庭生活的中心。文章強調了婚前準備的重要性，包括婚前輔導，諮詢、培育課程，強調婚姻的神聖性與聖事性，應特別嚴肅謹慎的對待。此外，它還提及了當今夫婦面臨的挑戰，例如擔憂離婚——這在天主教教義中是不可接受的，以及不想生孩子的社會壓力和夫婦對離婚的誤解。

家庭是「生命的至聖所」，孩子們是天主的禮物祝福而應受到歡迎。家庭、社會與國家不應害怕新生命的到來，強調了夫妻生活向生命開放的重要性，這是參與天主的創造計劃。文章最後提醒夫婦反思他們對婚姻之愛、忠誠和向生命開放的承諾的價值，從而強調穩固的婚姻和家庭對促進社會和諧和繁榮的作用，並向各地方教會領導提出建議，藉明智辨別實際情況，並尊重個人狀況來給予牧靈關懷與愛心幫助。

**關鍵詞：**婚姻的性質、婚姻的目的、婚姻慶典、基督徒夫妻與家庭生活

## Introduction

This article responds to an invitation to write about the meaning and value of marriage and family in modern society according to my studies and experiences. I studied canon law for 5 to 6 years at the University of Santo Tomas, in Manila, became particularly interested in marriage law, and currently serve in the local Diocesan Tribunal. I have also given brief talks or detailed explanations in several local parishes and dioceses and through online lectures. The following are some thoughts and insights that somehow summarize, analyze and reflect on this matter of marriage and family.

We, priests, and those who are living in consecrated life, also have the duty to understand the essential elements, properties, purposes of marriage, because married couples and their families are the core center and main objects of our pastoral service.

If there are matrimonial problems, there will be problems in the family, and the family life will be in trouble. If there is a trouble in the family, there will be a trouble in the Church, and the society, in the country, and in the world. These inextricable links and influences range from individual persons, to the whole country and even to all human societies. Therefore, marriage and family must be our first concerns, and we must do our best to defend marriage, and to protect the happiness of the family in order to truly maintain the stability of society and the peace of world; also, the prosperity of the Church and

the journey of humanity towards the fullness of God's plan.

Let us now go directly to the theme of this article, which is to share the fruits and experiences of my personal research and lectures on the marriage and family life of Christians, in the context of Church's teaching, and explore the possibilities of how to apply it in pastoral services and how to deal with the marriage cases in the church tribunal.

## 1. Nature of Marriage

Let me briefly refer first to the nature of marriage, its definition, purpose and essential elements.

### 1. 1 Definition of Marriage

There have been many definitions of marriage throughout history, all of them referring it to the original covenant that brings about the permanent matrimonial partnership. The definition of marriage in the current Code of Canon Law is the following: "*The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole of life, is by its nature ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children; it has, between the baptized, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.*"<sup>1</sup> This statement of canon 1055 clearly expresses the nature, purpose and essential properties of marriage: covenant, lifelong partnership, procreation and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1055 §1; Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), no. 1601.

upbringing of children, unity and indissolubility, sacrament, heterosexual dimension, and so on.

### ***Is Marriage a Contract or a Covenant?***

In the previous Code of Canon Law (1917) and before the Second Vatican Council marriage was generally defined as a “contract”; something questioned by some Jurists and Theologians. In the current Code of Canon Law (1983) marriage is defined as a “covenant”, although still the term “contract” is mentioned twice (in canons 1055 § 2 and 1097 § 2).

Jurists argued that contracts are private affairs, involving normally some patrimonial goods, where the contracting parties can add some conditions or insert new clauses, even against the purposes and the essential properties of a marriage, even have a way to rescind the contract

Theologians argued that considering marriage as a “contract” would be legalism, since marriage, which is a covenant and a sacrament between baptized persons, cannot be enclosed in the concept of contract, which is purely juridical. The Constitution *Gaudium et spes* of the Second Vatican Council uses the term “contract” in regard to marriage, but uses the term covenant, too.

### ***What is the Difference between Contract and Covenant?***

A contract is defined as *a merely agreement between parties, creating mutual obligations that are enforceable by law*. So, the contract is an agreement between humans, generally non-stable, temporal, which can be rescinded at any

time by either party who would just compensate the damage according to the law, which is a civil matter.

On the other hand, a covenant, according to the biblical-inspired teaching of the Church, is an oath established between God and humans, which is permanent, unbreakable. Thus, the parties promised in solemn vow *to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy law*. If the parties understood really the meaning of the marriage vow which is made with for their entire life, no one would like to get divorced because it is to break the vow. Death alone could break the marriage vow – *till death do us part*.

As we see the “covenant” made between God and Israelites, could not be rescinded by the Israel people who even went astray to worship other gods, but God kept this bond with them, no matter what happened, regardless their unfaithfulness. It is a divine matter.

Therefore, the answer on whether marriage is a contract or a covenant depends on how we look at it: if we look at it as a merely human, civil affair, then marriage is a contract. That is why, civil courts issue the divorce decree if one party disagrees with the marriage contract. However, if we consider it as a divine matter, then marriage is a covenant. Therefore, we, Catholics, in line with the teaching of the Church, should try our best to defend the essential properties of marriage, which are unity and indissolubility. Furthermore, marriage is

*a partnership of the whole of life*, tantamount to say “*I will love and honor you all the days of my life*”, which means unbreakable.

## 1.2 Purpose of Marriage

The partnership of the whole of life is *by its nature ordered toward the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children*. From the reading of canon 1055 §1 it appears that marriage has two purposes, namely, the well-being of the spouses, and the procreation and upbringing of children. However, there is a magnificent synthesis of the two approaches without any of them prevailing over the other. There is no preferential or hierarchical order between the two purposes. Previously to marriage, the couple loved each other and decided to get married through the matrimonial covenant. Of course, for this love to be genuine conjugal love, it has to be open to life, an unselfish love that finds its perfect realization in children, the fruits of conjugal love.

This is well expressed by the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*, by saying that both “marriage and conjugal love find their crown in the procreation and education of children” (GS 48). The meaning of this sentence is explained by the same document in its number 50: “Indeed children are the supreme gifts of marriage and greatly contribute to the good of parents.” Children are gifts of God to a married couple; but some couples rejected to give birth to children, the gifts of God, by giving many excuses, like that they were unable to generate children. In the beginning God blessed man and woman with



the words: “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). Accordingly, once a man and a woman got married, having children is a God’s command. Therefore, any Christian couple before getting married should have in mind the purposes of the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children. They cannot exclude them and go after their own wishes by any means.

Some parents feel that their child is not coming at the best time. They should ask the Lord to heal and strengthen them to accept their child fully and wholeheartedly. It is important for that child to feel wanted. The child is not *an accessory or a solution* to some personal need.<sup>2</sup> Each woman shares in “the mystery of creation, which is renewed with each birth” (*AL* 168). The Psalmist says: “You knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Ps 139:13).

### 1.3 The essential properties of marriage

Marriage, besides being defined by its purposes, is also configured by its so-called “essential properties”, which are unity and indissolubility, mentioned in canon 1056: “*The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility; in Christian marriage they acquire a distinctive firmness by reason of the sacrament.*” This is a “dogmatic” canon and states a general principle for marriage. There are also other canons that mention these two properties or one of them. Such as canon 1075 §2 and 1141 (indissolubility); canon 1099, 1101

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2 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (*AL*), no. 170.

§2 and 1134 (indissolubility and unity). Both properties apply to all marriages, even to the “natural” marriage. The official doctrine of the Church says that marriage is monogamic and indissoluble by virtue of natural law, therefore, there is no possibility of dissolving a marriage through a specific divorce law (always, everywhere and apply to all peoples, never fails and cannot be dispensed), not even in the case of a natural marriage bond. The church opposes divorce because it is against both the natural law and divine law. Regarding the unity of marriage, it is clear that monogamy can hardly be considered natural law, for it is not acceptable by a vast majority at the practical, juridical, cultural, and even religious levels.

For Christians, the essential properties of marriage were in the sacred Scripture, such as in the text of Mt 19:3-9.

Some Pharisees approached him, and to test him they said, “Is it against the Law for a man to divorce his wife on any pretext whatever?” He answered, “Have you not read that the creator from the beginning made them male and female, and that he said: This is why a man must leave father and mother, and cling to his wife, and the two become one body? They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide.” They said to him, “Then why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?” “It was because you were so unteachable,” he said “that Moses allowed you to divorce

your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning. Now I say this to you: the man who divorces his wife – I am not speaking of fornication – and marries another, is guilty of adultery.”

The statement of Jesus: “*What God has united, man must not divide*” is valid for any kind of marriage. The Lord did not authorize divorce, even in case of adultery, but would be accepting the separation of spouses while the bond remains (cf. canon 1151-1155). From the beginning, God made them male and female (Mt 19:4; Gen1:27) and the two of them become one body.

## 2. Christian Couples

Christian couples will be the main feature of this article. In order to gain a better insight into its detailed content, I would like to first briefly point out the origin, essence, and principles of Christian marriage and family. The Book of Genesis offers a wonderful description of our original parents as God’s creatures: God Created man and woman in His likeness, who are very different from other creatures, with special dignity and nobility. God blessed them and said to them be fertile and multiply (Gen1:28). They were called to build up a family by God who also established the essential element for their marriage.

The description in Genesis reveals that man was lonely and no other creatures could be compared with him. Man was looking for a helper suited to him (Gen 2:20) to be his

partner. God then built the rib that he had taken from the Man into a woman with the equal dignity and same mission. The man was alone in the beginning, and his loneliness could only be alleviated by a woman fit for him. Hence, woman is the man's assistant, the best gift God has given to the man, as his inheritance. Therefore, the woman shall be loveable. The man shall love the woman and vice versa, husband shall love his wife and vice versa. Men and women are attracted to each other, to help each other, to gaze at each other, and to communicate with love, however they shall know that they are still something different in gender and character (*AL* 12).

Quoting the words of Jesus, all couples are invited to build their family life on a rock centered with Jesus, not on sand. The rock refers to Christ, who is “the stone that the builder rejected, has become the cornerstone” (Mt 21:42).

If the family is Christ-centered and the life of married couple is dominated by the Gospel, such a family is like a rock, which can withstand winds and storms and cannot be shaken by any difficulty. Just as the church is Christ-centered, Christ is at the center of the church as the boat of Peter, where Jesus stayed in (cf. Mt 14:30). Therefore, when the family encounters difficulties and storms, must wake up Christ and cry out to Him, just like Peter did to the Christ: “Lord, please save me!” (cf. Mt 14:30).

If a marriage is built on sand — get married because of money, better material conditions, greed for earthly enjoyment, etc. — such a marriage cannot withstand the strong winds

and storms and will collapse soon! The real situation tells us: the richer the higher the divorce rate. Because their marriage is built on money, not on the love of Christ. Once a crisis is encountered, because they have no real love, but only money or lustful pleasure, such a marriage will naturally not be able to withstand the storms and difficulties.

Couples must center on God and live a life of reverence and love for God, and you will be blessed in everything! It is because “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 9:10). Thus, “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your home, your children like young olive plants around your table. Just so will the Man be blessed who fears the Lord” (Ps 128:3-4). Christian couples should reflect on whether their marriage, as husbands and wives, their children and their family life are really God-centered.

After introducing the origin, center and principles of Christian marriage and family, we will share and discuss in more detail the stages or situations of Christian marriage, hoping to make a humble contribution to the specific pastoral care and its application.

## **2.1 Christians Preparing for Marriage**

Young people are encouraged and invited to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage but they are advised not to get married too young (immature) and rashly (lack of due discretion). We must wait until the boy or the girl is mature enough and can make a corresponding

mature decision to enter the palace of marriage. At the same time, parents must also learn to be mature, because their children have grown up, and respect their freedom, and should not take children as their own property or make choices and decisions for them. “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two of them shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24), which is a word of God worthy of meditation by all Christian couples and their children from the perspective of marriage itself.

However, some youths are unwilling to start a family, why? Because of their fear of getting married; there is a *gamophobia* or being afraid of marriage: they are worried about divorcing soon after marriage. Especially those young people who have experienced the divorce of their parents or have been affected by the divorce of their relatives or friends are more dissuaded to get married and start a family and prefer to choose cohabitation or simply living together or a companionate marriage. In addition, economic reasons for a wedding cannot be ignored. This is why Pope Francis urges these young people “to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage, with generosity of commitment, love, even heroism” (AL 40).

From the beginning, God blessed the marriage of the original parents Adam and Eve, and the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding banquet in Cana made marriage even more sacramental (John 2:1-11), making marriage a Covenant and a Sacrament. Therefore, the church

law stipulates that, a couple about to get married, as long as one party is a Catholic, must observe the canonical form in the Church. Otherwise, their marriage will not be recognized by the Church (cf. Canons 1086 & 1108), and the married man and woman will not be real husband and wife in the eye of God.

Marriage is not an empty ritual (*AL* 72). Some wedding ceremonies are prepared grandly and enthusiastically, with beautiful flashlights and decorations, but they are only a flash in the pan, vanished as soon as it appeared, and couples get divorced soon after they get married. It is because both men and women are not ready and well prepared for “marriage”, but only for a “wedding ceremony.” A wedding is an external ceremony or etiquette held due to customs or traditions or social convention. It does not mean that a man and a woman are prepared for their marriage from the internal minds and hearts, especially shall be ready in all aspects of body, mind, and soul. The wedding ceremony is important; it is only once in a lifetime, and needed to be prepared as nice as you can; but marriage is more important, because it is a lifelong commitment, regretless choice and decision: this is the meaning of the sacrament of marriage as a covenant.

Parish pastors, priests, sister and even the lay people must try their best to help the engaged couples do their “pre-marital preparation”, especially the preparation of their heart, mind and soul.

The following three basic preparation instances are recommended:

First, the **“pre-marital inquiry” of the couple who are about to get married**. The impediment of “disparity of cult”, for example, is a very common case in non-Christian places and deserves due attention: “Special challenges face those couples and families in which one partner is Catholic and the other is a non-believer” (*AL* 248). The Code of Canon Law states that the Catholic who marries a non-baptized shall declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from his or her faith, and he or she is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power in order that all their children be baptized and brought up in the catholic Church (Canon 1125); otherwise, the parish priest shall not bless their marriage in the Church with canonical form.

Regarding the expression that “all their children be baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church”, sometimes we hear the unbaptized spouse gives seemingly reasonable-sounding reasons to delay baptism: “to wait until the child grows up”, “let the child decide by himself/herself whether to be baptized or not”, and “let us respect the child’s freedom”. In fact, it is not that we do not respect the freedom of our children, but that the newborn children (infants) cannot make good use of their freedom. As the guardians of their children, parents have the obligation to make the good decision for their children to be baptized. Moreover, receiving the sacrament of baptism is a good thing and provides great benefit for the children. Just like parents making the decision for their children to study in kindergartens, which provides beneficial and good environment for their children to grow up. No one



would think that parents do not respect their child's freedom if they bring such a young child to school, even to force their small children to go to school, though the child is very reluctant and even cries, the parents still bring the child to school.

Regarding the declaration that “he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith”, the catholic party should attend Mass and join church activities every Sunday. The unbaptized party may make a reasonable request like “within a month, the catholic party can attend Mass and church activities for three Sundays, but please set aside a Sunday to go to the park or a family gathering with him/her and the kids.” In one word: do not go to church every Sunday. Can the Catholic party compromise on the request by the unbaptized party? Of course not, because it is the obligation for the Catholic party to attend Mass every Sunday – this is the first commandment: Love God above all things.

Therefore, young people must take this into consideration when choosing a spouse; this is also the reason why the Church discourages Catholics from marrying unbaptized people, and establishes the impediment of disparity of cult for people with “different beliefs” while the Church encourages Catholics to marry Catholics, which is in principle much better. When choosing a spouse, faith and belief must be a priority to consider. A most pitiful situation would be for someone to obtain earthly material goods and lose their soul in the end. That would be extremely sad. However, in some

places, like in non-Catholic countries, the number of Catholics is relatively small, and the marriage of Catholics with non-baptized is “dispensed from such impediment.”

Second, **the organization of “pre-marital courses” for the engaged couples**, at least for one week. It is best if both parents can participate together. Premarital formation is very important, it helps young people to discover the dignity and beauty of marriage (*AL* 205), especially the sacramental value of marriage. At the same time, it helps them understand that conjugal life is a participation in God’s creation, as it will generate life which is most sacred, at the image of God, and thus will increase the people of God. Therefore, engaged couples should be exhorted to respect the sacramentality of marriage, respect life, and be open to life after marriage. The procreation and upbringing of children is one of the purposes of marriage.

This premarital formation must make the engaged couples to recognize the eventual problems and risks that must be rejected in marriage life, such as absolutely refusing abortion, artificial contraception or deeds that violate the will of God.

In addition, in terms of spiritual growth, engaged couples need to have a realistic trust in the possibility of helping to develop the good points that counterbalance them, and in this way to foster their human growth (*AL* 210). Some couples, as their age gradually increases, their mutual love remain the same as in the beginning. For instance, couples at the age of

50 keep their mutual love young. The imbalance between their age and love is dangerous, and bring risk to their conjugal life. God created man and woman complementary to help each other in their growth. Furthermore, man and woman shall be aware of their respective differences and defects in both physical and spiritual, intellectual and mental.

Third, **prepare the engaged couple to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation — if not yet received — and the Sacrament of Penance.** Particular attention should be paid to those who lived together before marriage: it is better for them to have confession of their sins before receiving the sacrament of marriage which is considered as a “sacrament of righteousness” and must be received with purity of mind and soul, not under deadly sin.

There is need to sport engaged couples to grow in love, encourage them to learn from more experienced Christian couples. Those engaged couples are “a valuable resource because, as they sincerely commit themselves to grow in love and self-giving, they can help renew the fabric of the whole ecclesial body. Their special form of friendship can prove contagious and foster the growth of friendship and fraternity in the Christian community of which they are a part” (*AL* 207). Engaged couples are the future family, the future domestic Church. Obviously, these preparation instances are to lead the engaged couple to the paradise of marriage.

## 2.2 Christians at the Wedding Celebration

The marital vows that Christians make at the very

moment of their wedding celebration constitutes an essential element of a marriage, which is a gift and blessing of God. They vow “in God’s name”<sup>3</sup> publicly in the presence of relatives and friends before God and the Church and make a serious and sincere commitment to each other; they call on God to bear witness to their marriage with the words “May the Lord bless my will.”

Making marriage vows “Before the Church” refers to publicly and validly entering into a marriage contract under the witness of the Church and receiving the blessing of marriage within the Church. The Church specifically stipulates this, and it must be done “in the presence of two witnesses” (cf. Canon 1108), which means that the nature of a marriage is public and not secret, although the ceremony might not be publicly showed. The marriage entered by the couple with “publicly expressing their consent” “before the Church” is recognized by the Church. If both parties were baptized, the marriage becomes a “sacramental marriage”; “ratified and consummated, if the spouses have in a human manner engaged together in a conjugal act in itself apt for the generation of offspring” (Canon 1061).

The marriage between two non-baptized, after their baptism, their “natural marriage” automatically becomes “sacramental marriage” with no need of renewing their marriage vows (*AL* 75). There are many cases of this kind of

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3 In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

marriage in China: A couple getting married, both parties were not baptized, but later they converted to God and both parties received baptism. In this way, their marriage automatically became “sacramental”.

Here I have to mention that the canonical form of the celebration of marriage – the marriage ceremony before God and his Church in the presence of two witnesses – is also one of the essential elements for a Catholic to contract a valid marriage. If one party is a Catholic, the marriage must be contracted in the church by observing the canonical form; otherwise, unless it is dispensed by the competent ecclesiastical authority, the marriage only registered civilly remains still invalid before God and His Church. But in mainland China before May 27, 2007, during the “privileged” period for the Church of Mainland China, if a party is Catholic and only married civilly or according to local customs by setting a wedding banquet with inviting friends and relatives,<sup>4</sup> without observing the canonical form in the Church with the solemnization by the parish priest or local ordinary, the marriage is presumed valid. Obviously, after May 27, 2007, such a marriage would be considered invalid because of lack of canonical form, due to the fact that the privilege<sup>5</sup> given to China by the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of

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4 This is considered a public marriage ceremony in mainland China.

5 N. 6.1. As long as the present circumstances continue in China, the faithful are not subject to any impediments of ecclesiastical law from which the church usually grants a dispensation, nor are they bound by the canonical form.

Peoples on June 27, 1978<sup>6</sup> was revoked by Pope Benedict XVI in his Letter to China.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Christians should make a serious and sincere vow to commit to each other faithfully when they get married by exchanging their matrimonial consent. And this secret vow is not only verbally made, but also shall be lived out by deeds: they must keep their vows intact before God. The grace of marriage, especially that of sacramental marriage, helps them faithfully to keep their mutual commitment till the end of their life; that is, God grants them the grace they need in married life through the solemnization or blessing of the Church, to assume the goods of marriage as commitments that can be better kept through the help of the grace of the sacrament (*AL* 73).

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6 *Facultates et privilegia sacerdotibus fidelibusque in territorio Sinarum degentibus concessa his perdurantibus circumstantiis, Sacra Congregatio pro Gentium Evangelizatione (de Propaganda Fide), Prot. N. 3242/78.*

7 “Letter of Benedict XVI to the Church in China,” 27 May 2007, no. 18: Considering in the first place some positive developments of the situation of the Church in China, and in the second place the increased opportunities and greater ease in communication, and finally the requests sent to Rome by various Bishops and priests, I hereby revoke all the faculties previously granted in order to address particular pastoral necessities that emerged in truly difficult times. Let the same be applied to all directives of a pastoral nature, past and recent. The doctrinal principles that inspired them now find a new application in the directives contained herein.

## 2.3 Married Christians

Being called to married life is a gift and vocation of God. Couples shall receive it with a grateful heart and reverend respect and understand that not everyone is called to get married, but only those chosen by God can enter the paradise of marriage, just as not all people are called to live in a consecrated life! Married men and women cherish this gift of their calling to marriage, and open to the grace God's love, so that married life will be meaningful (*AL* 72, 37, 160).

In love, husband and wife grow up together, become mature and perfect, and sanctify each other through the sacrament of marriage. They fully understand the meaning, purposes and nature of marriage (cf. Canons 1055-1057),<sup>8</sup> live out the conjugal life with reverence and fear of God, and maintain the chastity and integrity of marriage with all their heart, mind, soul and strength. No matter what, it is absolutely not allowed

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8 Can. 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 baptised, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament. §2 Consequently, a valid marriage contract cannot exist between baptised persons without its being by that very fact a sacrament. Can. 1056 The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility; in Christian marriage they acquire a distinctive firmness by reason of the sacrament. Can. 1057 §1 A marriage is brought into being by the lawfully manifested consent of persons who are legally capable. This consent cannot be supplied by any human power. §2 Matrimonial consent is an act of will by which a man and a woman by an irrevocable covenant mutually give and accept one another for the purpose of establishing a marriage.

to break the marriage, nor leave the thought of divorce sprout in their heart. They are to always remember the promises made before God and the Church at the very moment of contracting marriage, and keep in mind the teaching Jesus: “What God has joined, no human can separate.” Be good witnesses to the marriage love that such generosity, which enables us to give freely and fully, really be possible (cf. *AL* 160). In his letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul elaborated a lyrical passage about the features of true love.<sup>9</sup>

The facts from the Bible about the union of man and woman and the establishment of a family (Gen 2): God’s command that a married man or woman shall “leave his father and mother” (Gen 2:24). Married men and women have to live their own married lives; husbands cleave to their wife, and vice versa, and they shall become one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24). Therefore, marriage in the Church must be a covenant established by a mature man and woman who publicly express their consent with due discretionary judgement, are able to assume the essential matrimonial rights and obligations to be mutually given and accepted (cf. canon 1095).

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9 “Love is patient, love is kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4-7).



## **2.4 Christian Couples and Families are Open to Life, Respect, Acceptance and Gratitude**

One of the reasons for the decline in population is that some couples are against having children. In addition, the development of biotechnology has serious impact on the birth rate, especially now that there are too many genetically modified foods, which causes many young people suffer physically and mentally, leading to difficulties in conceiving. Likewise, industrialization, the so-called sexual revolution, the fear of overpopulation, economic problems, and so on, have affected fertility.

The Pope continues saying: “The development of bio-technology has also had a major impact on the birth rate. Added to this are other factors such as “industrialization, the sexual revolution, the fear of overpopulation and economic problems... The upright consciences of spouses who have been generous in transmitting life may lead them, for sufficiently serious reasons, to limit the number of their children, yet precisely “for the sake of this dignity of conscience, the Church strongly rejects the forced State intervention in favor of contraception, sterilization and even abortion” (*AL* 42).

Pope Francis calls the family the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for. Since the family is a sacred place, any behavior that harms life is not allowed in the family. Life should be respected and revered, because life was created by God and is sacred and inviolable. “The family is the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and

cared for, it is a horrendous contradiction when it becomes a place where life is rejected and destroyed. So great is the value of a human life, and so inalienable the right to life of an innocent child growing in the mother's womb, that no alleged right to one's own body can justify a decision to terminate that life, which is an end in itself and which can never be considered the "property" of another human being. The family protects human life in all its stages, including its last" (*AL* 83)."

We say that the womb is the "*Sanctum Sanctorum*" of life, the cradle of life and its safest harbor. However, it is very regrettable to say that, due to various reasons, the lives of many fetuses are killed in the mother's womb. For example, many unmarried women or single women have abortions after being pregnant. When St. Teresa of Calcutta received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979, she gave a speech that shocked the world. One of her points was to respect life and absolutely say no to abortion. A strong country will not be afraid of the birth of new life; a healthy society will not worry about the increase of new life; a harmonious and happy family will make all preparations for the arrival of new life.

The family can give birth to as many lives as possible, to add more children to the country for its good future. Giving birth and generate life to generation is the greatest "patriotic". Furthermore, for Christian family, giving birth is participating the work of God's creation, an increase of the number of people for the Kingdom of God. Children are the heritage from God, fruitful womb is a blessing and reward of God.

A Christian family willing to welcome a new life is like the Holy Family; a family with many children is like a “little kingdom of heaven” to imitate God’s infinite love, and this can also increase the number of young people joining the consecrated life to serving the Lord, witnessing to the Gospel for the great glory of the Lord and for the salvation of people.

Every child growing within the mother’s womb is part of the eternal loving plan of God the Father: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you” (Jer 1:5). Human life comes, through parents, and more importantly, from God; for this reason, we must respect pregnant women, honor parents, and accept and protect life with gratitude to God and thanks to parents: All these are God’s beautiful plans. In this regard, the Church teaches the faithful to live out Christian charity and identity with gratitude.

The family is the setting in which a new life is not only born but also welcomed as a gift of God. All family members shall try their best by all means to care for and grow up the life. Love always gives life: Conjugal love “does not end with the couple... The couple, in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves, but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother” (*AL* 165) Every life is created in the love of God, born in the love of parents. Life, in family, deserves and enjoys the respect, protection and happiness.

The Love of God the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit, the giver of life. The love of a couple shall be giving life.

Families without children are less happy. The current situation is that many young couples are no longer willing either to have children or to have more children due to the pressure of living situation, the huge cost of caring for and raising up their children, and the influence of some incorrect ideas. Even if the country's family planning policy is now open, it can't motivate their desire to have children. Coupled with the increase in the divorce rate, some people worry that after divorce, those who suffer most are their children. Some couples, instead of giving birth to their children, adopted animal pets as their children, taking care of the pets as human. That is not the way to solve problems.

## **2.5 Dealing with Marital Crisis**

Marriage is fragile, like a treasure kept in a pottery (cf. 2 Cor 4:7), and it will be easily in crisis or break up if spouses are not careful. Some crises are typical of almost every marriage. Of course, almost every marriage has crises, especially in newly married young couples. They have no experience, just as every little baby learns how to walk and fall is inevitable. Newlyweds are like novices driving, so they must learn how to adjust and get along, no longer rely on their parents, calm down and be stable when things happen, and gradually mature. As they grow in age, the love between them must also grow up properly. They must learn and understand to mutually forgive, accept, be humble and tolerant, and face

crises and challenges together; otherwise, it will evolve into deformed love.

If a Christian marriage is in crisis, the Church should not only provide appropriate assistance, but more importantly, advise the couple to reconcile in the Lord. With the grace and power of God, an ideal solution will surely be found. To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life” (*AL* 236). Everyone needs forgiveness, especially when one has done something wrong; everyone needs acceptance, especially in unwelcome situations; everyone needs help, especially when being helpless. Each other should understand, feel, and sympathize from each other’s perspective; only in this way can we truly love each other, understand each other, and forgive each other. “The arduous art of reconciliation, which requires the support of grace, needs the generous cooperation of relatives and friends, and sometimes even outside help and professional assistance” (*AL* 236).

Let us all promote this kind of faithful love between husband and wife, appreciate and respect each other, be faithful to each other, to the family and loyal to God, always protect and support the children and spouses, and never abandon the family and give up the marriage.

## 2.6 Divorce

The indissolubility of marriage is not to be viewed as a ‘yoke’ imposed on humanity, but as a “gift” granted to those who are joined in marriage (*AL* 62). Pope John Paul II said in his “Letter to Families” *Gratissimam Sane*, on 2 February 1992, the “Year of the Family”, that the well-being of husband and wife is love, fidelity, honor, the permanence of their union until death.<sup>10</sup> Only this common well-being can affirm both parties and their families.

Divorce is unacceptable by the teaching of the Catholic Church, because divorce is an evil (*AL* 246), a sin, a betrayal of the public oath or vow pledged to each other by “calling on God to bear witness to the marriage” in the presence of the competent minister who is considered the representative of the Church. When preaching about marriage, Jesus emphasized: “What God has joined together, no human being must separate...Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery” (Mark 10:9-12).

Separation at times becomes inevitable. Spouses have the obligation and right to maintain their common conjugal life, unless a lawful reason excuses them (Canon 1151). It may even become morally necessary (as in cases of domestic violence (cf. *AL* 252), precisely when it is a matter of

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10 Pope John Paul II, “Letter to Families” *Gratissimam Sane*, no. 10 (2 February 1992).

removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, and from disregard and indifference” (*AL* 241). When a spouse occasions grave danger of soul or body to the other or to the children, or otherwise makes the common life unduly difficult, provides the other spouse with a lawful reason to leave (Canon 1153). Thus, for the good of the children in their future, the innocent party, after trying his or her best to save the marriage but all in vain, has no other choice but to face the separation or civil divorce, which is also the way of protection to the innocent party from civil law so that the evil party cannot abuse the innocent one.<sup>11</sup> If this is the case, in order to save the life of the innocent and prevent the more abuse from the other party, the Church tolerates separation and even the civil divorce (cf. Canon 1692) – the Church does not approve divorce, and this is not the divorce that the Church refers to. Both parties are still bound by their marriage bond, although they got divorced civilly.

Among the causes of broken marriages are unduly high expectations about conjugal life. (*AL* 221). Young people have romantic expectations at their marriage life; however, it is not a dramatic novel or an utopic ideal life, or a computer game that can be started repeatedly or a joke which is not a serious deal. Because of this, conflict appears soon between couples who are unable to be patient in their incompatible characters.

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11 In most places, especially in countryside, domestic violence is a common happening and people consider it as normal; the innocent party is not protected and defended.

Once it becomes apparent that the reality is more limited and challenging than one imagined, the solution is not to think quickly and irresponsibly about separation, but to come to the sober realization that married life is a process of growth, in which each spouse is God's means of helping the other to mature. Change, improvement, the flowering of the good qualities present in each person – all these are possible (*AL* 221).

The current social situation in dealing with marriage problems in some places is simply divorce. The divorce rate is very high, which has also impacted very much to Christian's marriages, resulting in a decline in the values of unity and indissolubility in marriage, leading to the thinking that "if unbelievers can get divorced, why cannot I get divorced?" Many Christians wrongly think that the marriage solemnized at the Church is the same with the unbelievers who just married civilly and can be divorced easily by civil authority. They think that the civil authorities can grant divorce since they can certify a marriage legal, therefore, the Church authorities can do the same, since they have faculty to solemnize a marriage – that is wrong. They could not really understand the teaching of Jesus on marriage: "What God has joined together, no human being must separate"... "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery" (Mark 10:9-12).



When there is a problem in their marriage, Christian couples must find out where the problem comes from and then try their best to solve the problem. Divorce won't solve the problem of marriage at all, if the couple do not fix the origin of the problems. Divorce is the most stupid solution and the worst way to solve marriage problems. And we see, some people got divorced three or four times, however the problems are kept unsolved. No matter how many times getting divorced, will not solve any problems at all. Christians should witness and proclaim that marriage is possible, and they must be faithful to the end, because God is faithful to us to the end, and the Christian marriage blessed by God can last to the end.

“Never ever take your child hostage!” (*AL* 245). Pope Francis used the very strong word “Never ever” to emphasize the bad consequences that divorce causes to children, which shows its tremendous seriousness. For this reason, one spouse should not use their children as hostages to threaten, extort, racketeer or blackmail the other party for money or for selfish benefit.

Children should have a joyful childhood and happy family life, but those children whose parents divorced may not have them; this kind of family life is luxury for the children from divorced parents to whom they grudged hate, resentment and unpeaceful. Those children who grew up in an atmosphere of fighting, scolding, and even cursing between their parents who complained to each other are often psychologically hurt and mentally affected; and with the negative thinking that their

parents who ought to love them most abandoned them because of their selfishness, they develop hatred towards their parents. In this case, the children pay for the evil bill of their parents' divorce, causing the children to endure life-long painfulness, and even live in an insecure atmosphere of hatred, restless, anger, jealousy and discord.

## **2.7 “Remarriage”**

Various symptoms of a “culture of the ephemeral” have made their appearance in modern society. Most people treat their marriage the same way they treat their mobile phones or clothes, which can easily be thrown away when they are broken or have problems. Instead of spending time or money repairing cellphones or clothes, they prefer to get new ones, which are easier, simpler, faster, and more refreshing and fashionable. Similarly, many marriages relationship have been impacted or have conflict or problems, and none of the parties is willing to spend more time, energy patience or creativity to repair their marriage love, but they prefer to find a new relationship which is simpler and easier. This has caused high divorce rates.

As mentioned earlier, divorce is an evil. Then, remarriage is tantamount to a worse evil. Although civil law allows remarriage, and the parties would be given a new marriage certificate after the registration of another marriage; this kind of civil remarriage is invalid or unaccepted in the Catholic Church. Objectively speaking, the remarried Catholics are in a sinful state, their conjugal life is adultery if their marriage

was not blessed by the Church. As Jesus taught in the Gospel: whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery” (Mt 19:9).

Therefore, Catholics who are in such irregular relationships cannot receive the sacrament of Penance nor can they be admitted to Eucharistic Communion, unless certain conditions are met. Pope John Paul II explains this important matter in his Encyclical letter *Familiaris consortio*:

“Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance which would open the way to the Eucharist, can only be granted to those who, repenting of having broken the sign of the Covenant and of fidelity to Christ, are sincerely ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, in practice, that when, for serious reasons, such as for example the children’s upbringing, a man and a woman cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples.”

“Regarding their admission to Holy Communion, the Church reaffirms her practice, which is based upon Sacred Scripture, of not admitting to Eucharistic Communion divorced persons who have remarried. They are unable to be admitted thereto from the fact that their state and condition of life objectively contradict that union of love between Christ and the Church which is signified and effected by the Eucharist. Besides this, there is another special pastoral reason: if these people were

admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage" (*FC* 84).<sup>12</sup>

By acting in this way, the Church professes her own fidelity to Christ and to His truth. At the same time, she shows motherly concern for these children of hers, especially those who, though no fault of their own, have been abandoned by their legitimate partner. This is why the Church calls Pastors to exercise careful discernment of situations: "There is in fact a difference between those who have sincerely tried to save their first marriage and have been unjustly abandoned, and those who through their own grave fault have destroyed a canonically valid marriage. Finally, there are those who have entered into a second union for the sake of the children's upbringing, and who are sometimes subjectively certain in conscience that their previous and irreparably destroyed marriage had never been valid" (*FC* 84).

In any case, we are to see people with the eyes of Christ, to follow his example, and to look with love and tenderness on the men and women who were created in His Image, even those who commit mortal sins. No matter what kind of sinners, Jesus accompanies them and shows them the truth with gentle eyes, compassion, patience, and mercy, instead of accusing, criticizing or judging them. It is important that the divorced who have attempted a new civil marriage should

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12 Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (*FC*), no. 84.

be made to feel part of the Church. The Church leaders shall pay more concern to the divorced and remarried Christians and try their best to help them out of their sad situation by regularizing their marriage through the ministry of the Church Matrimonial Tribunal, which is very an important institution in every diocese. “They are not excommunicated” and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community.

In some dioceses, local Ordinaries and parish priests used to impose very strict punishments, such as suspension from receiving all the Sacraments and exclusion from all church activities to the divorced Christians, who were considered gentiles or pagans. Not only to the parties concerned, but also to their parents, relatives, and family members who attended their wedding banquet; their whole families would be “excluded from the reception of the sacraments”; furthermore, some even were regarded as excommunicated, as if “expelled from the Church”.

We, who are called by God to serve His Church as bishops, priests, nuns or missionaries should do our best to assist these Christians who are in “irregular marriage relationships”; to try to solve their marital problems radically, and help them regularize their “marriage”, so as to get out of the predicament situation. With the assistance of the Church and the power entrusted by God, if possible and necessary, we are to help them to have their previous marriage bond either dissolved or declared null and void, and thus validate their

current “marriage”. In fact, the Church helps Christians in need by setting up matrimonial tribunals to investigate the validity of their marriages and resolve their marital impediments, in accordance with the judicial procedures contained in the *Code of Canon Law*. Pope Francis issued recently his Apostolic letter *Motu proprio, Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus*,<sup>13</sup> with new regulations to make the procedure more accessible and less time consuming, and, if possible, free of charge.

Married couples should be helped by the good attitude of Church’s leaders to live a normal life, as a true Christian, to return to the Mother Church who embraces and welcomes all people with compassionate and loving care, so that they can participate in church activities, instead of blaming, criticizing, or even intimidating them with “prohibition or suspension to receive sacraments!”

We must humbly accept the truth that we cannot solve all the matrimonial problems. Those Christians who have made every effort but are still unable to solve the impediments from their previous marriages, should also be encouraged to participate in church activities. They may be unable to receive the Sacraments, especially the Holy Communion when they were attending the Eucharist celebration, but they can and shall still live their faithful life as Christians who are baptized in Christ. Here, I would like to give three suggestions for reference to these kinds of Christians:

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13 Pope Francis, *Motu Proprio Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus*, *L’Osservatore Romano*, 15 August 2015.

(1) We must be particularly cautious and respectful in our words and deeds to those Christians, so as not to make them feel discriminated or unwelcomed, expelled by the Church. Especially put ourselves in their shoes and try to understand the situations from their point of view: no one wants or would like to divorce or being divorced. Some were forced to divorce helplessly, and some were divorced innocently; but for the sake of his or her life and the children, they had to re-enter into a new partnership.

(2) We are to encourage them to participate in the Eucharist celebration, although they are not suggested to receive Holy Communion; but they can “spiritually receive Holy Communion” by praying the Lord Jesus to come into their hearts, minds and souls. Oftentimes, with sincerity and devotedness, this “spiritual reception of Holy Communion” is also very effective, even more helpful than for those Christians who receive Holy Communion with indifference.

(3) We should invite them to participate in church activities, such as *Lectio Divina*, bible sharing, singing in choir, doing charitable services, as church volunteers, visiting the sick people, distributing food to the poor, etc., so that they become active members of the local church. The Church should welcome and call back such Christians with “mercy”, just as Jesus did, as the shepherd look for those gone astray, wounded sheep; they are also the People of God, the Sheep of His Flock. So do not let them feel of being excluded from the Church – “excommunicated”. The Church should not abandon

those couples who are divorced or have entered to another relationship, but rather accept them and assist them in their responsibilities in educating their children (*AL* 246). In caring for them, the ecclesial community does not thereby weaken the Church's faith and witness to the indissoluble nature of marriage, or compromises the principles of Christian marriage, but it simply practices charity. This does not mean that the Church approves of their remarriage, but cares for them out of charity which is above all else and is favored by God.

## **2.8 Staying Single after a “Divorce”**

As mentioned earlier, the Church, following the gospel teaching, does not in principle accept divorce, which implies dissolution of a valid marriage bond. However, the Church (Roman Pontiff) sometimes for the good of the faithful who applied for this indult (privilege), with just and sufficient documentary evidence approved by an ecclesiastical tribunal, dissolves valid marriages. This is different from “annulment” or declaration of nullity, which is a declaration that the marriage bond never existed, that the marriage never took place. A dissolution, on the other hand, consists in the breaking of a valid marriage bond in order that one or both parties may contract another marriage. In the Church, a dissolution can be granted if it is proven that the marriage has not been consummated and if it is adjudged that the dissolution will be of great spiritual advantage to one or both parties.

In practice, the Church dissolves the following specific marriages:



- (1) a *ratum non-consummatum* marriage: a valid sacramental marriage without consummation;
- (2) a non-sacramental marriage solemnized by a parish priest with the dispensation from the disparity of cult given by the competent authority, for the good of the Catholic party;
- (3) a natural marriage (a mere civil marriage between two non-baptized), where a non-baptized party, after civil divorce, wants to get married with a Catholic without the intention to be baptized.<sup>14</sup>

Divorced people who have not remarried, and often bear witness to marital fidelity, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the nourishment they need to sustain in their present state of life (*AL* 242).

Although they were forced to divorce, the Lord still loves them, and God will not abandon them. So, “divorce” in itself is not a reason to deprive someone from the right to the sacraments or suspend the party from receiving them, or to be excluded or even expelled from the Church. Indeed, Christians who after divorce remain single can still receive Holy Communion, and such Christians should be encouraged to participate in the activities of the Church.

Unfortunately, in some dioceses, divorced people are

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<sup>14</sup> In mainland China, these two kinds of cases are often presented by the local Ordinary to the Apostolic See for dissolution.

unwelcomed, punished, discriminated, excluded, and even regarded as great sinners, making it difficult for them to be accepted and integrated into the big family of the Church.

Local Ordinaries should provide pastoral guidance and care for the separated, the divorced and the abandoned. “Special discernment is indispensable for the pastoral care of those who are separated, divorced or abandoned. Respect needs to be shown especially for the sufferings of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together. To forgive such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. Pastoral care must necessarily include efforts at reconciliation and mediation, through the establishment of specialized counselling centers in dioceses (*AL 242*).”

The pastors of the Church should pay special attention to the needs of the divorced people, particularly when children are involved or when they are in serious financial difficulty (*AL 242*) and even hire them to work or provide them with living supports, give them some allowances which are very pleasing to God as charitable almsgiving.

## **2.9 Same-sex Marriages and Same-sex Unions**

Finally, I also want to briefly mention the modern phenomenon of “same-sex marriages” and “same-sex unions”. On this regard, we must first bear in mind that in the begin-

ning “God created male and female (singular, not plural, neither creating two men nor two women) in his own image” (Gen 1:27) and blessed their marriage. That means God did not bless two men’s marriage, nor two women’s union – same-sex marriage or same-sex union. No, absolutely not.

Today, numerous countries, even some Catholic countries,<sup>15</sup> recognize the legal status of “same-sex marriage” and same-sex unions. However, the Catholic Church keeps defending her position that these “de facto or same-sex unions may not simply be equated with marriage” (*AL* 52).

As early as June 3, 2003, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith pointed out: There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family. Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law. Homosexual acts “close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.”<sup>16</sup>

Same-sex unions violate the essence of marriage, that is, go against the will of God. Furthermore, such unions are not only closed to the gift of life, but also are considered intrinsi-

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15 Cf. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex\\_marriage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage), entered on 5 November 2024.

16 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons”, 3 June 2003, no. 4.

cally disordered, sinful: God loves sinners but He never blesses sin. The Sacred Scripture condemns homosexual acts “as serious depravity” (cf. Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:10; 1 Tim 1:10).

The Catholic Church has always upheld God’s teaching on the nature, purposes and essential properties of marriage: Marriage is a covenant, a lifelong commitment established by the lawfully manifested consent of persons who are legally capable to express their willingness to give and accepted one another for the purpose of their well-being and the procreation and upbringing of children (cf. Canons 1055-1057).

The Church cannot bless same-sex unions as marriage (cf. *AL* 251). Nonetheless, according to the teaching of the Church, men and women with homosexual tendencies “must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity (*CCC* 2358). Homosexual persons are also children of God and have the right to live and be part of a family which shall also be protected by civil law. They are called, like other Christians, to live the virtue of chastity (*CCC* 2359).

## Conclusion

We are all called to love and cherish marriage and family life. Every true marriage is a blessing of God, and each family is unique, has a different story! Every marriage is a legend, a song that seeks to encourage everyone to be a sign of mercy and closeness wherever family life remains imperfect or lacks peace and joy (*AL* 5).

Let us not compare our marriage and family with others, and do not complain about how bad our marriage and family are. As an English saying go, “you will cry because you had no shoes until you met someone who had no feet.” The same idea applies to marriage and family life: “You cried because you had difficulties in your marriage and family life, until you found out that there are many people who have not even been given a marriage and a family.”

Let everything that happens in our life be in accordance with the will of God! We just response “Amen” by positively live out our calling; by fulfilling our mission and vocation with a grateful and thankful heart! Especially, in witnessing the Gospel values and in carrying out the work of evangelization, we must play our role well. No matter what environment we are in, we all are children of God, created in his likeness and favor. Quoting the first words of Leo Tolstoy’s novel *Anna Karenina*, “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Some similar we could say applied to marriage: “What counts in making a happy marriage is not so much how compatible you are but how you deal with the incompatibility.”

This is commendable. Married couples must learn to make their mutual love become a kind of energy to strength their conjugal life, therefore, by living life as such, transforming their ordinary family life and marriage into delicious and sweet wine (cf. Jn 2:1-11).