



## Holy Matrimony

*Very Reverend Fr. John Winfrey*

**I**N the last several years marriage has been under attack from television, those in government, the universities, a *laissez faire* portion of our culture, and many, many special interest groups. They have done an enormous amount of damage to be sure. Things we have taken for granted for centuries have been overturned and counted as wrong. How could this have happened? And what is the truth about marriage?

Let's begin with the truth about marriage first. Marriage is holy; it is a sacrament. It is so much more than a "union" which is recognized by the state. A civil union — which is all any government can actually grant is, in fact, little more than a contract which grants the parties particular civil rights and privileges. In the nature of things a republic can never say anything is "holy" or in the modern sense even that it is "good," if we take that to mean something has absolute philosophical goodness. What a state can do is grant something to parties which either the legislature or the population believes has some value.

This does not imply unanimity of opinion or of gen-

eral acceptance by all of those in the legislature much less of the citizenry. Good citizens can disagree with *any* exercise of the state's power, unless we have become a totalitarian state rather than a republic. Were this not the case, our state legislatures would still elect our U.S. Senators, the South would still have slavery, and woman would not have been granted suffrage. As Christians and citizens, we can indeed be good and worthy citizens with our firm and unrelenting disagreement and even strong opposition.

But marriage from the Christian point of view is far greater than a civil contract. It is a sacrament, the sacrament of holy matrimony. Marriage is a sacramental relationship between a man and a woman who are joined by Christ through the agency of the priest. A man and a woman thus joined become an image of the heavenly kingdom. A couple of very important distinctives about Christian marriage are: (1) holiness, (2) stability, and (3) procreation.

**Holiness.** This seems obvious to us, but in our culture it isn't very obvious at all. Christian marriage is not a contract, or a mere agreement to live together, but it is a setting apart of the couple by Christ himself for a profound ministry to one another and for others. A Christian marriage is, in a certain sense, an ordination to a special vocation or calling of God. This unique ministry to make present, to reveal in word and deed, the life of the kingdom of God. It is a manifestation of the heavenly kingdom.

I can recall, and I'm sure that many of you have heard this before, some saying they don't need "a piece of paper." But this is such a tragic failure to see what the true beauty of marriage is. This comes from a world view that sees only a functional and practical perspective on marriage. Those who approach marriage as a right or as merely a social institution have eyes that cannot see very far. Or rather, they cannot see the truth of marriage from all of the faults that individual couples may have. Individuals are faulted and fall, but marriage itself is holy.

Because marriage is something holy, we do not perform sentimental services in the Church. It is a solemn event very different from the couple who jump out of a plane to exchange vows, or who do it in front of an Elvis impersonator. We understand marriage *very* differently than the world around us. We keep it solemn because it is holy.

**Stability.** As a holy thing, marriage is for keeps because it cannot say, “I don’t love you.” To say such a thing is only to say, in another manner, “Christ doesn’t love you” or at least, “Even if Christ loves you, I won’t.” A Christian marriage will never give up on forgiving, on striving to love the other — even when this becomes difficult or even seemingly impossible.

**Procreation.** Holy matrimony means holy mothering, or creating a condition of holy mothering. Procreation is sacred and is a sign of the life-giving love of God, it is part of the image of the kingdom. Only a male and female can do this naturally. All other ‘unions’ are sterile and non-procreative, which means they manifest the fallen state of man rather than the life-giving state of grace. Family life is sacred life which the Church, and Christians, must protect.

**How did we get here?** No doubt, each of us can think of examples to the three qualities of marriage that I have given (there are more than those three by the way). And here is where the rubber meets the road. Modern philosophy, since Descartes and Hume especially, views truth very differently. Prior to these two philosophers, it was easy to ‘prove’ something absolutely, but beginning with the age of the Enlightenment a new form of logic developed which was essentially skeptical.

Classical logic could say that there are absolute truths because it reasoned that one could make universal statements from observations. Modern logic says that because you cannot know every single example, you can’t say any-

thing universally. This is the core philosophy that says there are not absolute truths and ultimately gives way to relativism, that a ‘truth’ is true for you but not for me.

This has been disastrous for our culture in countless ways, not to mention marriage. In marriage we can see that this view would say simply that this is right for these parties. But Christians believe in God, in an ultimate personal truth who is eternal and unchanging. And we believe that this is reasonable and can be logically argued, using classical logic of course. This also means that we cannot embrace a relative good when there are absolute truths involved.

Perhaps we will see civil unions include polygamy, humans and animals, or adults and children (I’ve actually heard all of these being discussed). All of these would be an abomination before the Lord, but the state may go to hell if it wishes. The tragic thing is that it may well take thousands along with it. Let us pray we don’t follow them.



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