

Why I Am Catholic

The Sacrament of Marriage

"The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1601)

Christ has entrusted the sacrament of marriage to His Church and with that the serious responsibility of preparing couples for marriage and offering programs to sustain, enrich, and strengthen existing marriages. Marriage, by its nature, is intended by God to be fruitful and lasting. *Familiaris Consortio*, an apostolic exhortation issued by Pope John Paul II in 1981, after a bishops' synod on "The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World," calls couples to greater unity.

They "are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving." (FC 19, CCC 1644) A unity "made clear in the equal personal dignity which must be accorded to man and wife in mutual and unreserved affection." (1645)

As we know, the bond of marriage is under attack. In some parts of our country, the divorce rate is as high as 60 percent. Adultery now affects one in three marriages. Many marriages are affected negatively by addictions, increasingly the addiction of Internet pornography.

Many couples do not pray together. They fail to grow spiritually because the focus is on the physical relationship, material possessions, and worldly prestige and success. They do not connect their faith lives and their sex lives and wonder why neither goes well.

"By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory." (1652) "The refusal of fertility turns married life away from its 'supreme gift,' the child." (1664)

For a marriage to thrive, couples must cooperate with God's plan, and continually grow spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and in all relational aspects. Their relationship must deepen in communication, trust, sharing, service, and the ability to forgive. Love "does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." (I Cor 13:5-8)

In the marriage ceremony, the bride and groom are the ministers of the sacrament. The priest or deacon is the official witness (officiant), representing Christ and His Church. Couples marry each other by their sacred and solemn vows. They live them out with God's grace.

This week Pope Benedict XVI "approved the beatification of Louis and Marie Zélie Guérin Martin, the parents of St. Therese of Lisieux. . . They had nine children, five of whom joined religious orders." (*Catholic News Service*). Both came from military backgrounds and attempted to enter religious life, "but God had other plans." The Martins are not the only married couple to be beatified or declared saints.

"Joseph and Mary, Isidore and Maria were married couples. Sts. Peter, Monica, Frances of Rome, Margaret of Scotland, Perpetua and

Felicity, Bridget of Sweden, Elizabeth of Hungary, Elizabeth of Portugal and Elizabeth Ann Seton were married, as were St. Thomas More, St. Stephen of Hungary, St. Henry and St. Edward the Confessor." (Review of *Married Saints* by John F. Fink) We pray for our married couples that they too may one day be saints.