

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The last of the seven sacraments is Holy Matrimony. When it comes to marriage, the church's teaching is simple in theory, but complicated in application.

For a marriage to be valid in the eyes of the Catholic Church it must be between one man and one woman who are both free to marry. Being "free to marry" means they are not married to someone else, and they are not related by blood. Clearly, so called "gay marriage" is therefore impossible.

The man and woman must understand the seriousness of Catholic marriage and make their commitment freely without any kind of constraint or pressure.

In addition, if they are Catholic, they must marry another Catholic in a Catholic Church, according to the Catholic rite, with the marriage officiated by a Catholic priest or deacon. If these criteria are not met the marriage may be invalid due to lack of proper form. A Catholic may request a dispensation from the bishop to marry another baptized person and to be married in a church other than a Catholic Church, and by a non Catholic minister. Dispensations are rarely granted to marry a non-baptized person or to marry outside of a place of Christian worship.

The proper minister of the sacrament is the bride and groom. The priest or deacon merely officiates at the wedding. The marriage act constitutes the matter of the sacrament. Therefore, if a marriage cannot be consummated the sacrament is invalid.

Catholics believe that marriage is for life and cannot be broken. When a divorce takes place the church recognizes it only as a civil agreement. A divorced Catholic is not free to marry again unless the previous marriage was declared null. An "annulment" is not the proper terminology. Instead, after thorough examination by the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal, a decree of nullity may be granted. This recognizes that a valid marriage never existed. If one receives a decree of nullity after a civil divorce, that person is free to marry.

Because marriage is a sacrament, it is a physical means of receiving God's grace. This is true not only at the wedding, but throughout the couples' married life. Therefore to do anything that soils or breaks marriage is a serious sin because it is not simply a sexual sin, but a sin against marriage--which is a sacrament. Most Catholics would not dream of blaspheming or desecrating the Blessed Sacrament, but how many commit sins against marriage without even considering them to be serious!

The seven sacraments are given so that we might know objectively that we have received God's grace. They are the physical means by which we connect with God and know His love.

The seven sacraments are one of the aspects of the faith distinctive to Catholics. Non Catholic Christians have baptism and holy communion and they honor marriage, confession and confirmation, healing and ordination, but they do not consider the last five to be sacraments.

Each of the sacraments has an element of thanksgiving, so that as we receive and practice the sacraments, we give thanks. We give thanks that God has provided this way to be religious and spiritual, and to know Him as our maker and Father in Heaven.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker