

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is easy to become complacent and simply coast along in our faith, so it is important from time to time to be reminded of some of the Catholic Church's essential teachings.

I would like to draw your attention to the teachings regarding the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." This is a prohibitive commandment (in other words telling us what NOT to do) rather than an indicative commandment which tells us what we should do.

The prohibitive commandments are not given to make us feel guilty, but to set up proper boundaries that keep us safe, preserve the integrity of our lives together, and help us to avoid the pitfalls that lead us away from the life of God. In this sense, it is obvious that the sixth commandment is given in order to protect and defend the God given Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

All the distortions of sexuality in our personal lives and in our society are an assault on marriage. Marriage, I should remind you, is between one woman and one man for life. For Catholics, for a marriage to be valid both bride and groom need to be Catholic, and the marriage needs to take place in a Catholic Church, according to the prescribed rites of the Church and officiated by a validly ordained priest or deacon. In other words, Uncle Gilbert who has purchased an ordination certificate online cannot marry you at the beach using vows you composed from your favorite song!

If there is a good cause for exceptions to any of these conditions the bride and groom may apply to the bishop for a dispensation or permission. For example - one of the spouses might be a non-Catholic Christian or there is a good reason for them to be married in a non-Catholic church.

If your marriage is valid you are married "until death do you part". When Catholic marriages break down irreconcilably the couple may need to separate, but there is no such thing as a Catholic divorce. After the couple separate they may obtain a civil divorce, but in the eyes of God they are still married. At their wedding the priest quoted the words of Jesus, "that which God has joined together man cannot divide." If a man and woman are validly married and they divorce and re-marry they are committing adultery. If the re-married couple live together as husband and wife, they have put themselves outside the community of Christ's church and should not present themselves to receive Holy Communion. Simply going to confession does not remedy this irregular situation unless the couple also decide to separate.

Sometimes after a marriage breaks down and a civil divorce is granted one or both spouses may ask for the competent church authority (the diocesan marriage tribunal) to examine the validity of their marriage. If grounds are discovered for the marriage to be deemed invalid, then the tribunal may grant them a decree of nullity. This is not an "annulment". If the marriage was valid the church cannot nullify the marriage, but if it can be shown that the marriage was invalid in the first place, a decree of nullity may be

granted. If it is granted, it is as if the marriage (in God's eyes) did not occur and both spouses are free to marry.

When dealing with these vexed circumstances I often explain, "The marriage discipline of the Church is simple in principle but complicated in application." That is because our relationships are complex.

It is best to remember that, while the Catholic rules and regulations often seem inexplicable and cumbersome, they have been established to help all of us make our way the best we can through this often messy pilgrimage of life.

If you have questions about these matters Fr Ballard and I are there to assist you.

Thank you for working with us to support and strengthen our families and our lives together at OLR!

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker