

Catholic Sacraments / Matrimony

All love comes from God, and all love reflects the love that God has for His creation. The Sacrament of Marriage is, first and foremost, a sign and symbol of this love. God has created us sexual as well as social beings, and for most people sexual love is the closest form of union we will ever know. Marriage is a sacrament of the self-giving love which two people offer to each other. The love which a couple have for each other mirrors the love God has for men and women.



The minister of the Sacrament of Marriage is the couple themselves. The priest serves as a witness. In the past, and even today in extraordinary circumstances, a marriage could be valid without the presence of a priest. It was enough for the couple to say, "I marry you" for the marriage to be valid and binding. It was in the 12th century that the first marriage rites were developed. To avoid difficulties that could arise if one member of the couple denied agreeing to the marriage, the Church demanded that the couple at least have their marriage witnessed by a priest.

For various reasons some marriages do not work. They become places of fear and violence or isolation, rather than places of love and caring. Their physical and emotional well-being and that of their family may require that a couple separate. Although the Church does not permit divorce and remarriage, there are cases where a couple may well have grounds for annulment. A valid marriage is one where both partners freely consent without fear or outside pressure to the sharing of the whole of their future life together. In order to be granted an annulment, the couple must demonstrate that they were not validly married in the first place. The Church, through its marriage tribunal's careful investigation of requests for annulment, seeks to provide the mercy and gentleness needed by those who have suffered a broken marriage.

The joy and mutual support of married love can be a source of strength which enables married people to serve others in a very powerful way. It should spill out to their children and to those around them and become a source of life, hope and comfort for others. This is reflected in the blessing which the priest often gives the newly-married couples, saying:

"May you always bear witness to the love of God in this world, so that the afflicted and the needy will find in you generous friends and welcome you into the joys of Heaven."