

“The gift of the sacrament is at the same time a vocation and commandment for the Christian spouses, that they may remain faithful to each other forever, beyond every trial and difficulty, in generous obedience to the holy will of the Lord: ‘What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder’” (§20).

These important words, which are in themselves a complete condemnation of divorce, are well worth careful study. They demonstrate that the Catholic Church and Catholic families indeed deserve credit for taking an unalterable stand against an evil which, the neo-paganism of our times is propagating more vehemently day by day, the cursed evil of divorce. As the family goes, so goes the nation.

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The Indissolubility of Christian Marriage

The Church recognizes three states of life: marriage, single blessedness, and single blessedness in the consecrated life.

Marriage is, for evident reasons, by far the best thing for the vast majority of people. It is a state of sanctification; a state in which many have become saints. It is the most natural, the most ordinary state, and strictly speaking, needs no special vocation. It can be said without any exaggeration that most of those now in heaven have been married.

Marriage is a holy, sacramental union between man and woman for the primary purpose of having and bringing up children. Its secondary purpose is mutual care and service and is help in the struggle against sin and its effects. Marriage is of divine institution. We know how after the creation of Adam God said, *“It is not good for man to be alone”*; how He made Eve; how He blessed them, saying, *“Increase and multiply.”* We know how Christ the Lord honored marriage by His presence at Cana and how, as its natural perfection had been corrupted by divorce, He raised Christian matrimony to the dignity of a Sacrament conferring special grace. And we know that God does all things well. If we seek reasons we find three special ones for the institution of marriage. The first is because nature instinctively tends to such a union, and with the problems of life and the infirmities of

old age this union is a source of mutual assistance and support. The second reason is the desire of a family, not so much, however, with a view to leave heirs after us, as to bring up children in the true faith and service of God, to people heaven with immortal souls. The third reason is because human appetite stripped of original innocence, began to rise in rebellion against right reason, and man, conscious of his own frailty and unwilling to fight the battles of the flesh, is supplied by marriage with an antidote against the tendencies of sinful desires.

This “*Great Sacrament*,” as St. Paul calls it, represents the union of Christ with His Church, is a holy contract that is at the same time always a Sacrament when made by Christians. It is a singular Sacrament, in which the man and the woman are the ministers: the priest is but a necessary official witness of it. It is a holy Sacrament that has two peculiar characteristics: unity and indissolubility. Jesus was asked, “*Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?*” He answered, “*Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one’? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.*” They said to him, “*Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?*” He said to them, “*For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from*

the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity [fornication], and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery” (Mt. 19:3-9).

Yes, marriage is one and indissoluble in all cases, even in the case of sterility, perpetual infirmity, violent separation, or adultery. Hence we gather that the sacramental contract of marriage is a serious, sacred thing of crucial importance, not to be entered into lightly, rashly, inconsiderately, headlong, but thoughtfully, religiously, with Jesus and Mary present. The married state also calls for the spirit of sacrifice, and patience.

In Nov 22, 1981, Pope John Paul II wrote an Encyclical on Christian Marriage entitled *Familiaris Consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World). Here he speaks on the indissolubility of the Christian marriage:

“Conjugal communion is characterized not only by its unity but also by its indissolubility: ‘As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union, as well as the good of children, imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them.’

“It is a fundamental duty of the Church to reaffirm strongly, as the Synod Fathers did, the doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage. To all those who, in our times,

consider it too difficult, or indeed impossible, to be bound to one person for the whole of life, and to those caught up in a culture that rejects the indissolubility of marriage and openly mocks the commitment of spouses to fidelity, it is necessary to reconfirm the good news of the definitive nature of that conjugal love that has in Christ its foundation and strength.

“Being rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the couple, and being required by the good of the children, the indissolubility of marriage finds its ultimate truth in the plan that God has manifested in His revelation: He wills and He communicates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church.

“Christ renews the first plan that the Creator inscribed in the hearts of man and woman, and in the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony offers a ‘new heart’: thus the couples are not only able to overcome ‘hardness of heart,’ but also and above all they are able to share the full and definitive love of Christ, the new and eternal Covenant made flesh. Just as the Lord Jesus is the ‘faithful witness,’ the ‘yes’ of the promises of God and thus the supreme realization of the unconditional faithfulness with which God loves His people, so Christian couples are called to participate truly in the irrevocable indissolubility that binds Christ to the Church His bride, loved by Him to the end.