

Celebrate the Contribution of Marriage to the Community

Today we recognize members of our community who have chosen to live out their vocation of love in marriage.

Marriage unites a man and a woman with each other and any children born from their union.

Until a man and woman marry, everyone outside of their family and outside of marriage is replaceable and interchangeable, even closest friends. But marriage is different because when a man and a woman marry, they freely chose to make themselves irreplaceable and non-substitutable to each other.¹ This is important because parents are irreplaceable to any children born from their union – if children are deprived of their parents' love or of knowing and being cared for by them, there is a natural sense of loss – a longing. It is, therefore, fitting that they first chose to make themselves irreplaceable to each other.

By making this choice these couples have prepared themselves to receive the gift of new life – a child of equal value and dignity to themselves. The human person is a manifestation of God's infinite love, a person called by name and destined for eternal life with God, a person of greater value than the entire universe added together.

This is the reality of marriage that is recognized in different ways by every culture, by every religion, and by every government. The institution of marriage is a universal recognition of God's plan for creation. It is a reality that does not depend on faith or revelation. In reality, it forms a circle of irreplaceability or kinship – it is the very foundation of the family.

However, we as Catholics understand that marriage is more than a recognition of God's plan for creation. We know it as a visible sign of an invisible reality – what we call a Sacrament. We see the marriage, we see the husband, and we see the wife, but we know from scripture and the teaching of the Church that man and woman are made in the image of God and when joined together, they become like an image of the Blessed Trinity, and like the Trinity, the marital embrace is life giving. This is a sacred invisible reality.

In the Trinity, Christ pours himself out and gives himself in love to the Father. The Father receives the love of the Son and in return pours himself out in love to the Son. As a result we discover a third person – the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

The marital relationship is similar – the husband receives his wife as a gift of infinite dignity and completely gives himself to his wife. She receives his love as a gift and completely gives herself to her husband. In the marital embrace, the man and woman become almost like another person, a potential creator, from which flows a new person created in the image of

God.² The child is an eternal witness to that union, carrying the flesh of his or her mother and father. In reality, every person without exception is an eternal witness of the one-flesh union between their own mother and father.

Although they have prepared themselves to do so, not all married people have received the gift of children. We honor them because by preparing themselves to receive life as a gift, they are able to live out their vocation of love in marriage and serve the community in other life giving ways.

Another way for married men and women to receive life as a gift is to adopt a child who has been deprived of his or her own mother and father. Everyone without exception has a mother and father, and only a man and a woman can stand in and assume the responsibilities of a mother and father who were not able to care for their child. Because a married couple has chosen to make themselves irreplaceable to each other, they have prepared themselves to receive a child through adoption as a gift and make him or her irreplaceable to both of them. Adoption by a married couple is a beautiful example of receiving a child, making the child irreplaceable and unconditionally loved without doing anything to deserve it. This again is like the Trinity and reflects the unconditional love of God. The father and mother as unique persons and united spouses witness Trinitarian love.

Marriage is also a symbol of the relationship between Christ and his Church. He is the bridegroom and we are the bride. He poured himself out completely on the cross for each of us and our salvation. We did nothing to deserve it. We make a free choice to receive that gift of love and return that love by giving ourselves to him. Through the Eucharist, we enter into communion with him and the Trinity by approaching him in faith, receiving him as gift and giving ourselves to him. In a similar fashion husbands bring love to their wives.

Let us pray for married couples, especially those present here. We give thanks to God for them and their response to their marital vocation. They are a blessing by bearing witness to love. Let us always encourage them in their vocation and pray for them. May God grant them the grace to live in integrity. We pray for the grace to support them in their marriage and to support others who are called to this vocation. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.



¹William E. May. *Marriage: the Rock on Which the Family is Built*, page 5. Ignatius Press. 2009

² Germain Grisez, quoted by Wm. E. May. *Marriage: the Rock on Which the Family is Built*, page 73. Ignatius Press. 2009

The Essential Elements of Marriage Vows

Intentions:

1. Free choice,
2. Irrevocability and irreplaceability
3. Complete mutual gift of self, which is by definition open to life as a gift (complete gift does not include holding back fertility)

Before making their wedding vows the priest or deacon will ask the couple:

"have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?"

"Will you honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?"

"Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?"

Then the Priest or deacon says, "Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and his Church."

Marriage Vows:

Groom: I, (name), take you, (name), to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.

Bride: I, (name), take you, (name), to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.