



Life, Love and Wedding Bells

One of a series • Archdiocese of Baltimore

What could the Catholic Church possibly have to say that's relevant about life, love and wedding bells in today's world?

Marriage in the Bible

- ◆ From the beginning of creation God intended man and woman to be united in marriage. (Genesis 2:24)
- ◆ Marriage is often used as an image of God's love for his people. (Song of Songs 8:6-7)
- ◆ Jesus affirms the beauty and sacredness of marriage by choosing a wedding feast as the setting for his first miracle. (John 2:1-11)

Kid Talk

- ◆ Draw a picture of your Mom and Dad.
- ◆ What kinds of things do they do for each other?
- ◆ In what other ways do your Mom and Dad show they love each other?

Divorce is rampant and living together outside marriage is routine. Abuse, infidelity and family breakdown are endemic. What, as the cliché goes, could a hierarchy of unmarried men know about sex and family life? Do the Church's moral teachings have any relevance for people struggling to make relationships work in an Internet age? Actually, yes. What we have to offer is the hope of Christ.

Just live together?

What Catholics believe about marriage – that it was established by God and made a sacrament by Christ and proven truthful over time – is at odds with just about everything that popular culture promotes these days. Where the world advocates living together before marriage, the Church has always cautioned against it, a viewpoint social science now

supports. In fact, rather than serving as a marriage “test run,” in some cases living together is even associated with a higher incidence of divorce. Where conventional wisdom suggests divorce if your “needs aren't met,” the Catholic experience suggests that it's meeting the other's needs and making a commitment that is key. Where the world sees parenthood as a deliberate choice, the Church believes that being open to children is essential for spouses. And while society has begun to sanction – for the first time in human history – an increasingly varied number of sexually-based lifestyles, Catholics remain committed to a choice which has proven, through the millennia, to be good – not only for the individuals making the choice – but for society at large.

Marriage is the exclusive union of a man and a woman, for life, for the good of each other and their children. It's loving, faithful, freely-chosen, exclusive and open to children. In fact, it's Heaven-sent, and thus worthy of a sacrament – a sign that God is right there, in the midst of the action, filling it with His love.

The fact that Catholics are open to children doesn't mean that the 50-year-old newlyweds or the infertile couples of the world are any less important. In fact, these couples serve in the world differently than their counterparts with children, and their marriages are powerful examples of fruitful, holy love. In their generosity and their hospitality, they bring Jesus to many.

The birds and the bees. Look around. Watch the flowers, the animals. What kinds of relationships do they have? What governs their behavior? The forces that control nature at large also govern human nature. They are written in the human heart and ordered in a way that even children can easily understand. Together, these forces make up what we call natural law. Its principles have driven secular law through the millennia,





and been recognized in all societies and throughout history. This natural law also underpins Catholic teaching on marriage. Our reason tells us that male and female are clearly made for each other – their very bodies naturally drawn together, complementing one another perfectly. Interdependent, together they can bring forth life, and together they can care for it as no other can.

Folly=chaos. Nature, after all, wants to perpetuate life, and see the young safely to the point where they can continue the life cycle. Thus marriage, which fuses parents together, provides nature's best, and safest, loving environment for the raising of children. Marriage in turn becomes such a vital foundation of society at large that civil law offers it special protections. And nature's best environment has proven in study after study to be society's best environment as well. Children raised in intact married families are – among other things – more likely to attend college, be physically and emotionally healthier, less likely to use drugs or alcohol and less likely to become pregnant as teenagers.

We challenge nature at our peril: in the half-century since modern culture began to dismantle the institutions resulting from natural law, we have experienced social chaos. And so as we move forward, we see it as our responsibility – and to society's benefit – to articulate the vision of marriage that the richness of faith and the witness of history have entrusted to us.

Scripture mirrors natural law, as rich images of marriage flow through the Old and New Testaments. The crowning act of God's creation, of course, were Adam and Eve, their very beings naturally designed to complement one another, their directive to love as God loved them, and as a result of this to bring new life. With Adam and Eve, humans became like God, partners with him in creation of new life in the world.

Throughout the Bible, a compassionate God works His mercies on married couples. He entrusts to them

His greatest gifts – children. He placed Jesus in a family to be raised. And then Jesus Himself smiles on marriage as He miraculously replenishes the wine at a wedding feast. Despite existing law that allowed for divorce, Jesus explains that because God can soften the human heart, lifelong marriage is possible. And when confronted with adultery, a living example of all the divisiveness, rancor, hurt and misunderstanding that can beset marriage, He sends the adulteress away, forgiven, directed to sin no more, the threat to marriage robbed of its power.

But the Scriptures are not just for the people of Biblical times. God continues to speak to each of us through them, as He offers the possibility of similar relationships with us. And He goes so far as to ask us to become like Him for our spouse: a permanent, faithful source of life.

For More Reading...

- ◆ United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 21
- ◆ [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), 1640 and 1644
- ◆ "Cohabitation & Marriage: How are they related," by Anne-Marie Ambert, Ph.D., www.vifamily.ca/library/cft/cohabitation.pdf
- ◆ *The Positive Effects of Marriage: A Book of Charts* by Patrick F. Fagan, Robert E. Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D. and America Peterson, www.heritage.org/Research/Features/Marriage/index.cfm
- ◆ *Why Marriage Matters: 26 Conclusions from the Social Sciences* by Bradford Wilcox, Institute for American Values, www.americanvalues.org/html/r-wmm.html
- ◆ "Ten Principles on Marriage and the Public Good," Witherspoon Institute, www.princetonprinciples.org
- ◆ Ten Findings from a National Study on the Moral and Spiritual Lives of Children of Divorce, Elizabeth Marquardt, www.betweenworlds.org