

THE GRACES OF SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE: A BLESSED UNION IN THE CHURCH

Following last week's topic, today's column covers three additional factors affecting the validity of marriage. In consenting to marry, couples (a) have the intention to marry for life, to be faithful to one another and be open to children; (b) they intend the good of each other; and (c) their consent is given in the presence of two witnesses and before a properly authorized Church minister. When couples do marry, they **must intend** to live what the Church teaches about sacramental marriage. It's a "no-brainer"—absolute fidelity and exclusivity are prerequisites. Even the idea of an open marriage is thoroughly inimical to the idea of Christian marriage. Each individual must promise total fidelity and exclusivity.

Canon law has long recognized three basic categories in which a marriage might be proven invalid. These three categories concern what are termed **capacity** for marriage, **consent** to marriage, and the **form** of marriage. While last week's examples concerned "capacity" to marry, today's treat consent. If a man or woman withheld something significant from their intended spouse, that could possibly affect the validity of the marriage. If a woman entered marriage with the intention to have children, yet her fiancé could be shown to have **misrepresented his openness to children**, that is of such a grave nature as to very possibly invalidate the union. It could also apply to so-called "sham" (simulation) marriages, when marriage is attempted **solely for the purpose of immigration** and not out of any sincere desire to wed.

Fidelity, presumed by the vast majority of people in a relationship, remains an essential aspect of marriage. If one party (or even both) believes in a so-called "open marriage," clearly they do not intend what the Church does by marriage. Tribunals explore whether anything in the family background could explain the belief that marriage was not an exclusive (totally faithful) relationship. The priest or deacon administering the pre-nuptial questionnaire asks if there is an **intention to be faithful** to one's spouse. To intend the "good of another" refers to the **three goods** of marriage: permanence, children and fidelity. If one or both spouses entered marriage with the intention to exclude the lifelong permanence of marriage, this ground can be considered. By its very nature, marriage is a permanent partnership which cannot be broken or dissolved by the spouses themselves. Nor can they put a **future condition** on their willingness to marry. "I will marry you only if you become Catholic later." A **pre-nuptial agreement** that foresees the break-up of the marriage calls into question the couple's understanding of permanence and is to be avoided.

For validity, the Church requires that Catholics **observe "canonical form"** for marriage. This involves exchanging vows before a properly delegated priest or deacon and with two witnesses. By contrast, if two Lutherans marry at a courthouse, it is considered valid by the ELCA. As a result, the Catholic Church recognizes that bond as sacramentally valid, even if Lutherans would not use the word "sacrament" to describe the union. The Catholic Church does not require more for validity than another ecclesial communion determines for its own people. For Catholic(s) who **did not follow** proper form, it is quite possible to regularize their unions by means of a convalidation (literally "with validity") ceremony, typically a relatively private ceremony in which a couple exchanges vows before the priest.

Certainly, there are several steps to follow, but an understanding priest will gladly help to facilitate this process. If both are baptized and engage the process, the **convalidation ceremony** is a celebration of the sacrament of matrimony. It is a great joy for all to celebrate the sacrament with these couples and their families. I was both privileged and honored to do so for a relative of mine. Before a couple heads to the County Courthouse to procure a marriage license, I present them a signed letter on parish stationery, imprinted with the parish seal, attesting that they have **completed at least 12 hours** of marriage preparation. With that letter, they receive a substantial **discount** on their fee. Why? It is in the **best interest of society** that couples are prepared for marriage.

We pastors stand ready and willing to assist couples who wish to regularize their union. I urge any Catholic couples reading this column whose civil marriage may not be recognized by the Church to consider embarking upon this path to **regularize their union** and to partake of the rich sacramental graces available. Marriage law

is complicated— there are many factors that must be considered. In 2015, Pope Francis simplified the process for seeking recourse in a case before the tribunal, most notably by removing the automatic appeal of any decision to a second tribunal in a neighboring diocese. This had often needlessly slowed the process. But increasingly today, Catholics are no longer seeking marriage in the Church- out of sight, out of mind. It is not on their radar. Later, they begin to **rethink their** decision. We are here to help you **strengthen your union** with the sacramental graces of matrimony.

- Ready or not—**Lent** begins this Wednesday. There is no better way to begin your Lenten journey by attending one of our **Ash Wednesday Masses: 7:00 a.m. | 12:00 Noon | 5:15 p.m.** (with the Children's Choir). A deacon-led **Prayer Service** with the Distribution of Ashes concludes the day at **7:00 p.m.**, accompanied by the adult Choir. I hope you can fit one of these liturgies into your schedule.
- The latest budget debacle from the City of St. Paul is as disturbing as it is utterly predictable. I have previously written of the **Ayd Mill Road** bike/pedestrian pathway project. After five months, we are now informed that the budget has **nearly doubled to \$9.8 million** for a 1.5-mile stretch. They **forgot to factor in** several items, including **lighting** for the bike path. How on earth do city planners forget that key detail? Methinks we've been hoodwinked once again!
- The inscription is poignant— "In Memory of the 2,411 precious unborn buried here on Feb. 12, 2020." So reads the tombstone in South Bend, IN where mercifully, the mortal remains found in deceased **abortionist Dr. Ulrich Klopfer's** basement were finally given proper burial. We must never tire in the battle to protect the unborn from the horrific evil of abortion.
- Members of the Metropolitan Tribunal will be on hand in the Narthex (entryway) of the Cathedral from **7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.** Ash Wednesday to **answer your questions** about the process for examining marriage nullity cases. No appointment is necessary.
- Ostensibly to avoid needless delays, **Major League Baseball** will implement a new rule requiring each pitcher to face **at least three batters** or finish a half-inning. I feel sorry for the first reliever who, giving up successive home runs to the first two batters, is stuck on the mound to face number three. Awkward!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector