

THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

I. DEFINITION

The Sacrament of matrimony is the holy service through which the bridegroom and the bride are united together and given the divine grace, which sanctifies their matrimonial union, makes it perfect and spiritual, like the unity of Christ and the Church.

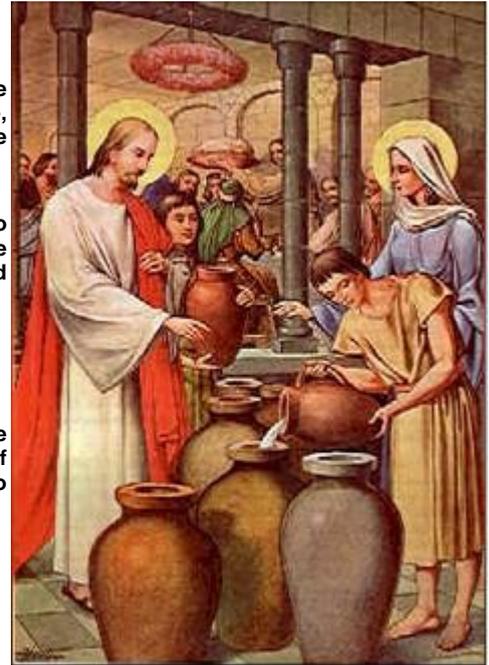
This Sacrament is of a very great importance. In it not only the lives of two persons, but the home, the state, the Church, and the kingdom of God are deeply involved. It is not a Sacrament to be regarded lightly or performed thoughtlessly and indiscriminately.

II. INSTITUTION OF THE SACRAMENT

There is no doubt that matrimony was instituted by God Himself at the creation of the world. "God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He them; male and female created He them, and God said to them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." (Genesis 1:27, 28).

In the New Testament Christ confirmed this Sacrament:

1. By attending the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee. (John 2).
2. By His teaching. When answering the questions of the Pharisees who came unto Him, and saying unto Him; "And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at 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 flesh'? "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matt. 19:4-6).
3. Some Church Fathers were of the opinion that Christ instituted this Sacrament in the 40 days during which He used to appear to His disciples, after His resurrection, and speak of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts: 1:3).



III. THE VISIBLE SIGNS

There are three outward signs in this sacrament:

1. The declaration of the bridegroom and the bride in front of the Church that they wish by their own free will to be married to each other, and that each will be loyal to the other until the end of life.
2. The matrimonial service which the priest performs, and through which he asks for divine grace to the bridegroom and the bride.
3. The oil with which the bridegroom and the bride are anointed at the time of the matrimonial service.

IV. THE INVISIBLE GRACE

The function of this sacrament is:

1. To sanctify the matrimonial union and make it a spiritual one. "Matrimony is honourable in all (Heb. 13:4).
2. To help the husband and wife to keep themselves united together and unseparated, just as the unity of Christ with the church is everlasting, "what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Mat. 19:6).
3. To keep the husband and wife loyal and faithful to each other.

V. WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO ADMINISTER THIS SACRAMENT?

This right is given to priests. Bishops can also celebrate the Sacrament.

VI. OTHER ASPECTS

1. Aims of marriage

- a. Preservation and growth of mankind; "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:27, 28). The growth of mankind tends of course to the growth of the church.
- b. Mutual help between husband and wife. "And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." (Gen. 2:18).
- c. After the fall of man and the entering of sin to the world marriage might help to keep man and woman from the temptation of carnal lusts.

2. Obligations of the husband and wife

a. Before Marriage

1. Both should be Christians, because Christ's grace cannot be given to non-Christians, whether in this Sacrament or other Sacraments.
2. Both should belong to the Orthodox Church. If either of them does not, he or she should first join the Church.
3. Both should not be previously connected together with a carnal or spiritual affinity which prevents their marriage.
4. Each should be willing to get married with the other. The desire of parents is not sufficient. The priest should ask each of them privately and openly whether he or she agrees to be married to the other.

b. At Marriage

Since matrimony is one of the church sacraments, marriage should be through the church. It is the duty of the priests to teach their congregation that every marriage should be in the church, and that the church does not allow any marriage performed outside it.

c. After Marriage

1. The husband should have only one wife, and the wife should have only one husband. Jesus emphasized this when he said "Have you not read that He who made them at 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 flesh?" (Mat. 19:4, 5).
2. If either of them dies, the other can marry. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband lives: but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord." (1 Cor. 7: 39).
3. They can never separate but for one reason, fornication. "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." (Mat. 19:6,9). Therefore none is allowed to leave his or her mate for any other reason.