

## BEING CATHOLIC AND GETTING MARRIED

Are you planning on getting married, now or in the future? Then here are some important things you should know.

Catholics have an obligation to celebrate their marriage in a Catholic Church. The only exceptions to that rule occur when a Catholic is marrying a non-Catholic and a dispensation is requested and granted (for any one of several reasons) for the marriage to take place in a non-Catholic church, or when Catholics wish to be married in a university or other school chapel where permission had been given by the diocese or archdiocese for weddings to be performed. Aside from those exceptions, a Catholic cannot enter into a valid, sacramental marriage in a park or on a beach, in Las Vegas or a judge's office, or in any place other than a parish church. Marriages that take place outside the Church are called "invalid", which simply means that, in the sight of God and the Church, there **is** no marriage. A couple may have a license that makes the marriage legal, but they are not married at all as far as the Church is concerned.

An invalid marriage makes a couple's relationship to the Church problematic because technically, they can't receive any of the other Sacraments until their marriage is validated in and by the Church. That might sound harsh, but it is simply part and parcel of living a faithful life as a Catholic; as Catholics, we don't get to pick and choose which rules we want to follow. The good news is that validating an invalid civil marriage is usually very simple—unless one person has been married previously **in** the Church and then divorced; then it gets considerably more complicated, though still not impossible. But it is important to consider one scenario at a time:

- Two Catholics, never married before, get married outside the Church by a minister or Justice of the Peace: the only thing they need to do to get their marriage validated in the Church is to see a priest, fill out the proper paperwork, go to a one day marriage preparation class (ideally) or do an online marriage preparation survey, then have a simple ceremony (costing nothing) in the church with two witnesses and their immediate family. It is important to remember that, once a couple has been married civilly, they can no longer have a "big" church wedding, but only the simple validation. That's certainly something to think about before heading to Vegas or the County building.
- Two Catholics are married civilly, but one has been married before **outside** the Catholic Church and divorced. If that previous civil marriage was never validated in the Catholic Church, it doesn't exist as far as the Church is concerned. So in order to have their current marriage validated in the Catholic Church, the previously married person simply needs to apply for a *Declaration of Nullity* which requires only minimal paperwork, a small processing fee and a few weeks waiting time (not months or years) for approval from the archdiocese. Then, preparation for the Church validation proceeds as above.
- Two Catholics are married civilly, and one has been married previously in the Catholic Church and divorced. Most Catholics probably know that this is where the time-consuming and emotionally difficult **annulment** process comes into play. Unfortunately, there is so much misinformation floating around about annulments, many people don't even try to find out the truth by simply talking to a priest. These are some of the facts: annulments don't cost a fortune; the cost is based on a sliding scale according to the petitioner's ability to pay, with \$800 being the usual upper limit; an annulment doesn't

make the children of the marriage illegitimate; the resistance of the former spouse to cooperate in the process does not affect the outcome. Perhaps most importantly, there is no courtroom scenario where the former spouses confront each other or are called to testify publicly. Couples who find themselves in this situation should at least talk to a priest to assess the likelihood of an annulment being granted, given their particular circumstances. Even if an annulment is not granted, there can be other remedies available which can only be pursued in conversation with a priest. Those remedies will likely be expanded in the not-too-distant future due to the initiatives that have been proposed by Pope Francis.

- The final scenario is one that is probably most difficult to comprehend: a Catholic marries a non-Catholic who has been previously married by a minister or a Justice of the Peace and then divorced. Since a non-Catholic is under no obligation to be married in a particular forum in order for their marriage to be valid and binding, **any** marriage contracted by a non-Catholic is considered valid; therefore, the non-Catholic would be required to pursue an annulment in the Catholic Church in order to have their present marriage to a Catholic validated in the Church.

The relatively simple way for Catholics to avoid the need to deal with many of these complications is to do from the start what the Church requires of its members who wish to marry: enter into a sacramental marriage in the Catholic Church. Of course this means resisting the impulse to get married in Vegas, by a Cook County judge, or on a beach in Mexico. It means having the integrity to do what's right rather than what feels good. It means having the humility, courage and determination to seek an annulment when a valid marriage fails for a serious reason. But again, the good news in our day is that Pope Francis and the bishops of the world have begun moving forward with ways to help reconcile difficult marriage issues in a more pastoral and merciful way.

It is extremely important for Church leaders and for Catholic parents to teach young people what's expected of them as Catholic Christians. As a Catholic community, there is a need to foster an understanding of the importance of the Sacrament of Matrimony and to help young people appreciate the grace and strength that can be found in that intimate encounter with the God who wants to bless and affirm their love in the community of the Church.

If you are planning on getting married or remarried, now or somewhere down the road, please take the time to contact a priest and ask for the support you need to make this a moment of grace which will lead to a future of love and faithfulness.

***Please contact the rectory at least 6 months prior to the wedding. For available times and dates, please call 708-798-0622.***