



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks about marriage. He tells the Pharisees that it was not God's plan for divorce, but it was allowed in the law because of the hardness of our hearts. Jesus then appeals to the beginning (Genesis) saying that a husband and wife become one flesh and so must not be separated. We know that Jesus raised marriage from a natural union to a supernatural union called a sacrament. Sacramental Marriage is now a conduit of God's supernatural grace into the world.

In this culture of no-fault divorce, almost half of marriages end in divorce. This is not what God planned. He made marriage to be a joining of life and love. This, of course, doesn't mean it is easy, but it is meant to be the way a husband and wife get to heaven – they help each other get there by growing in selflessness.

Jesus makes it clear that if someone divorces and remarries, that person commits adultery – a grave sin against the heart of God. Because Jesus made marriage a sacrament, the Church places a high importance and weight on the vocation of marriage. The Church has constantly taught that marriage is a life-time commitment of total, faithful, free and fruitful love. Why? Because Jesus has revealed to us that marriage is not just another form of community, but is an image of the very life and love in the Heart of the Trinity – marriage is a revelation of who God is (see Ephesians 5:25-32)! Because God's love (especially seen on the Cross) is total, faithful, free and fruitful, so must marriage then – by its very nature – strive to live out these four aspects of love.

So how does the Church deal pastorally with those who are now divorced and want to enter into a new marriage?

The Church has a process which examines the marriage to see if it is a sacrament. The formal process for this is called an annulment. Contrary to popular belief, an annulment is NOT Catholic divorce. A divorce is the breaking of the bond. The annulment process looks to see whether or not the sacramental bond was created. The Church examines the marriage from the facts presented to see if all of the necessary aspects of marriage were there at its inception. Because the church has such a high regard for marriage, if the sacramental bond is there, she recognizes that only the death of one of the spouses can break that bond. However, there are different circumstances and situations that could keep the bond from forming correctly at the wedding. For instance, because the Church recognizes that the marriage bond is a total gift of self to the other, if one or both parties enter into marriage with a *condition* on the marriage, the sacramental bond is not formed. This condition might sound like, "I'll stay married to you, *unless...*" That "unless" puts a condition on the marriage. There are several other aspects the Church looks at to determine if there are grounds to declare a marriage was invalid.

I invite you, if you are in a marriage that is not blessed by the Church, to seek to have this marriage become the gift of God that is the sacrament. If you have been divorced and are remarried or desire to be remarried, I invite you to explore the possibility of the annulment process. While it may seem like a daunting process, let me help you through this process. While it can be difficult, it can also bring healing.