



Matrimony: Sacrament of Enduring Love

An Adult Faith Formation Activity

By Adrián Herrera, Associate Director

Office of Continuing Christian Education, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Purpose

The purpose of this activity is to invite adults of the parish to deepen their knowledge of Matrimony and reflect on its theological and biblical foundations a sacred sign instituted by God to be the sacrament of the covenant between Christ and his Church. Participants in this activity will also reflect on the importance of protecting family life and marriage as the fundamental units of any society and as the school of love and communion with others, as well as reviewing the liturgical celebration and pastoral applications of Matrimony. Adults who would benefit from participating in this activity include parents, catechists, young adults, small faith-sharing communities, deacons, baptismal team members, marriage preparation teams, and parish pastoral council members.

Schedule

Session 1 (100 minutes)

Welcome, introduction, and explanation of the process (15 minutes)

Opening prayer (10 minutes)

Part I (30 minutes)

Break (10 minutes)

Part II (30 minutes)

Closing prayer (5 minutes)

Session 2 (105 minutes)

Welcome, introduction, and explanation of the process (15 minutes)

Opening prayer (10 minutes)

Part III (35 minutes)

Break (10 minutes)

Part IV (30 minutes)

Closing prayer (5 minutes)

Materials Needed

- Tables (preferably round tables), chairs
- Facilitators to guide the conversation and keep control of time (if required by the number of participants)
- Name tags and markers
- A special table for prayer with the following items: candle, Bible, crucifix, cloth according to the liturgical season, a glass bowl with holy water, and natural plants
- *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA) (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006) and Bibles (or ask participants to bring their own)
- Whiteboard and dry erasable markers
- Laptop, projector, screen (if PowerPoint presentations are used); sufficient copies of any handouts
- CD player to play appropriate religious or instrumental music
- Parish hymnals
- Refreshments and snacks
- Podium
- Microphone

SESSION 1

Preparation

In preparation for this activity, please read the following articles: “Scriptural Reflections on Marriage and Marital Love as Reflective of the Union of God and Israel and Christ and the Church” (by Fr. Lawrence Boadt, SSD) and “Theology of the Body: A Catechesis into the Fullness of Love” (by Fr. José Granados, DCJM). Both articles can be found in the Teaching Aids section of the online resources for Celebrating the Catechetical Year 2010-2011 at www.usccb.org/catecheticalsunday. Also invite participants to pick up copies of these articles from the parish office or to download them from the Catechetical Sunday Web site. For the presentations in this session, if possible, prepare a PowerPoint presentation or a handout summarizing the main points. Make sure you have enough copies for all participants, and invite several people to proclaim the readings from the Bible.

Welcome, Introduction, and Explanation of the Process (15 minutes)

Offer a warm welcome to all participants, and invite them to feel free to get refreshments and snacks. Allow time for participants to introduce themselves, and briefly explain the purpose of the meeting. Clarify that the materials used to prepare the presentations are based on the Catechetical Year 2010-2011 theme “Matrimony: Sacrament of Enduring Love,” from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Each session is divided into eight stages. (Refer to schedule.) Have copies of questions ready to give out to each participant.

Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Open the session with a brief prayer of your choosing.

Song

You can invite the group to sing one of the following songs:

- “Before the Sun Burned Bright” (Dan Schutte, Spirit and Song)
- “Taste and See” (Valimar Jansen, GIA Publications)
- “God of the Living” (Bill Tamblyn, Oregon Catholic Press)
- “No Greater Love” (Francis Patrick O’Brien, GIA Publications)

Scripture Reading

Have someone in the group read a passage from Scripture, such as one of the following:

- Gn 1:26-31: God created man in his image.
- Gn 17:1-8: The Covenant.
- Mk 10:1-9: What God has joined together, no human being must separate.
- Jer 31:31-34: The New Covenant.
- 2 Kgs 17:35-39: To the Lord you shall worship.
- 1 Jn 4:16: God is love.

Additional Reading Option

If time permits, allow a second reading from the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), no. 8.

Part I (30 minutes)

Presentation (10 minutes)

Make a brief presentation that summarizes the main points from Fr. Boadt’s article “Scriptural Reflections on Marriage and Marital Love as Reflective of the Union of God and Israel and Christ and the Church.” Use the PowerPoint presentation or the handout you prepared to help participants follow along. Be sure to leave time for questions after the presentation. Stress the following points:

- Key to understanding the special love that God shows Israel is the fact that he chose her, calling Abraham and promising him and his descendants blessings forever. (See the Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 2nd ed. [Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000], nos. 218-220.)
- God made a covenant with Israel under the image of exclusive and faithful married love (through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, judges, prophets, and finally through his Son Jesus Christ). (See CCC, nos. 1611-1612.)
- Men and women are loved by God, made for each other, and created in the image of God. (See USCCA, Chapter 6.)
- Jesus Christ teaches us a new commandment and calls us to love our enemies. (See CCC, nos. 1823, 1878, 2608.)
- The exercise of all virtues is animated by charity, which is superior to all other virtues. (See CCC, nos. 1826-1827, and USCCA, Chapter 23.)
- The Church is the Bride of Christ, and he has purified her by his blood. (See CCC, nos. 796 and 808, and USCCA, Chapter 10.)

Small Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Have the participants divide into groups of three to five people to discuss the following questions, and allow the facilitator to guide the conversation and keep control of time.

- Scripture tells us that God created man in his own image. When you hear those words, what do you think it means? And why is it so critical to understand this?
- We are told in Scripture that God has made a covenant that was more than a simple contract with the people of Israel, and this covenant has been fulfilled in Christ and through his love for his Church under the image of exclusive and faithful married love. In what ways do you live the commandments of the Lord?
- Fr. Boadt writes in his article that “not all are called to marriage, but married life stands as a unique vocation with the obligation to witness divine love.” In what ways is matrimony called to witness divine love? Explain.
- In his Letter to the Corinthians, Paul meditates on Christian love and stresses that love alone will never fail but rather is permanent because it connects us to our final destination with God. How do you manifest your love for others? Do you consider yourself to be a resentful or bitter person at certain times? If yes, how do you seek reconciliation with others?

Large Group Discussion (5 minutes)

If time permits, ask one or two participants to share their reflections or ideas with the large group.

Break (10 minutes)

Allow time for participants to take refreshments, share with one another, and use the restrooms.

Part II (25 minutes)

Presentation (10 minutes)

Make a brief presentation that summarizes the main points from Fr. Granados's article "Theology of the Body: A Catechesis into the Fullness of Love." Use the PowerPoint presentation or the handout you prepared to help participants follow along. Be sure to leave time for questions after the presentation. Stress the following points:

- The Church teaches that the human person is capable of desiring God and that such desire is written in the human heart. Therefore, we can find truth and happiness in God, for which we were created and for which we long. (See CCC, nos. 27, 30, 384, 1035 and USCCA, Chapter 1.)
- Human sexuality is not something purely biological; rather, it is an integral part of the love by which a man and woman commit themselves. Human sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman in marriage. (See CCC, nos. 2360-2362.)
- The sanctity of marriage is a process of conversion and growth for life. The union of spouses fulfills the twofold end of marriage: the good of the spouses and the transmission of life. (See Second Vatican Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 48; CCC, nos. 2363-2372; and USCCA, Chapter 30.)
- Our Lord Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Matrimony, which gives spouses the grace to love as Christ loves the Church. (See CCC, nos. 1601, 1612, 1616-1617, 1661 and *National Directory for Catechesis* [NDC] [Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005], no. 36.C.2.)

Small Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Have the participants divide into groups of three to five people to discuss the following questions, and allow the facilitator to guide the conversation and keep control of time.

- What is needed to find full happiness?
- Read the scriptural passage 1 John 4:16-21, and explain how one can abide in the love of God.
- Fr. Granados writes about an ancient king who asks his servant to bring him four ropes and instructs him to break them one by one before him. Later, we are told that the king asks for four more ropes; however, this time, the ropes are intertwined with one another, and he offers them again for the servant to break. How are the ropes of your marriage today? What do you do to nurture your marriage? In what ways do you think God is speaking to you today?

Large Group Discussion (5 minutes)

If time permits, ask one or two participants to share their reflections or ideas with the larger community.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

Have instrumental music playing as background music, and explain to participants that, after proclaiming the Word (see suggestions below), they will be asked to come to the front, two by two. From a bowl of holy water, each person will make the Sign of the Cross on himself or herself and then bless the other person. People can be dismissed after this.

- Mt 19:3-8: Marriage and divorce.
- Tb 7:9-15: Marriage of Tobiah and Sarah.
- Tb 8:4b-9: My love, get up.

SESSION 2

Preparation

In preparation for this activity, please read the following articles: “Responsibility and Joy: Catechesis and the Promotion and Protection of Marriage” (by Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz) and “Celebrating the Rite of Marriage” (by Bishop Ronald P. Herzog). Both articles can be found in the Teaching Aids section of the online resources for Celebrating the Catechetical Year 2010-2011: www.usccb.org/catecheticalsunday. Also invite participants to pick up copies of these articles from the parish office or download them from the Catechetical Sunday Web site. For the presentations in this session, if possible, prepare a PowerPoint presentation or a handout summarizing the main points. Make sure you have enough copies for all participants, and invite several people to proclaim the readings from the Bible.

Welcome, Introduction, and Explanation of the Process (15 minutes)

Offer a warm welcome to all participants, and invite them to feel free to get refreshments and snacks. Allow time for participants to introduce themselves, and briefly explain the purpose of the meeting. Clarify that the materials used to prepare the presentations are based on the Catechetical Year 2010-2011 theme “Matrimony: Sacrament of Enduring Love” from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Each session is divided into eight stages. (Refer to schedule.) Have copies of questions ready to give out to each participant.

Opening Prayer (10 minutes)

Open the session with a brief prayer of your choosing.

Song

You can invite the group to sing one of the following songs:

- “God, Who Created Hearts to Love” (M. D. Ridge, Oregon Catholic Press)
- “God’s Holy Family” (John Schiavone, Oregon Catholic Press)
- “Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow” (Ray Repp, Oregon Catholic Press)
- “Song of Songs” (Rory Cooney, GIA Publications)

Scripture Reading

Have someone in the group read a passage from Scripture, such as one of the following:

- Col 3:12-17: New men in Christ.
- Rom 8:38-39: The love of God.
- Song 8:6-7: Total possession.
- Mt 22:23-32: The resurrection of the dead.

- Jn 2:1-11: The wedding at Cana.
- Heb 13:1-6: To live like Christians.

Additional Reading Option

If time permits, allow a second reading from the Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, no. 52.

Part III (30 minutes)

Presentation (15 minutes)

Make a brief presentation that summarizes the main points from Archbishop Kurtz's article "Responsibility and Joy: Catechesis and the Promotion and Protection of Marriage." Use the PowerPoint presentation or the handout you prepared to help participants follow along. Be sure to leave time for questions after the presentation. Stress the following points.

- The family is the fundamental unit of any society and the school of love for any vocation. (See CCC, nos. 1882, 2207; and Pope John Paul II, *On the Family [Familiaris Consortio]* [Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1982], no. 42.)
- The family is the first and essential center of faithful living, the domestic church. (See NDC, no. 36.C.2.)
- List risk factors and challenges that families face in today's society.
- Marriage is prepolitical and prereligious from the time that God created man in his image. (See USCCA, Chapter 6.)
- "By its very nature the institution of marriage" between a man and a woman is the basis and mutual support that spouses need for growth in love and for the procreation and education of children. (See CCC, nos. 1652-1657.)
- Reflect on Archbishop Kurtz's four main points in defense of marriage: (1) God is the author of marriage (see CCC, nos. 1601-1603); (2) sexual difference and complementarity between man and woman are intrinsic to marriage (see CCC, nos. 371-372); (3) marriage is by its nature open to the child (see CCC, nos. 1652-1654, 2366-2378); and (4) marriage is the cornerstone of society (see CCC, nos. 1603, 1882, 2201-2213).
- These points establish the foundation for the four characteristics of the marital union (mutual consent, permanency, exclusivity, openness to life) and the twofold end of marriage (the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children). (See CCC, nos. 2363-2371.)
- The Church calls all people to live a chaste life, and people with homosexual attraction or inclination must be treated with respect and compassion. (See CCC, nos. 2348, 2350, 2357-2359, and USCCA, Chapter 30.)

Small Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Have the participants divide into groups of three to five people to discuss the following questions, and allow the facilitator to guide the conversation and keep control of time:

- In his article, Archbishop Kurtz beautifully describes the relationship that responsibility and joy have in the family as the key unit to any society. Why do you think it is important to protect the sanctity of marriage? And what habits, practices, or activities do you advocate to promote the sanctity of the family?
- The Church teaches that sexual difference and complementarity between man and woman are intrinsic to marriage because “the vocation to marriage is written in the very nature of man and woman” and “they are no longer two; from now on they form one flesh” (CCC, nos. 1603, 2364). How would you explain to a co-worker or relative what the Church teaches with regard to homosexuality? And why is it important to emphasize that marriage can occur only between a man and a woman because “God . . . is the author of marriage” (CCC, no. 1603)?
- If participants include couples who have been married in the Church, allow them to share the following: What have been your blessings in marriage? What have been your challenges? What is the “key” to an enduring marriage?

Large Group Discussion (5 minutes)

If time permits, ask one or two participants to share their reflections or ideas with the larger community.

Break (10 minutes)

Allow time for participants to take refreshments, share with one another, and use the restrooms.

Part IV (25 minutes)

Presentation (10 minutes)

Make a brief presentation that summarizes the main points from Bishop Herzog’s article “Celebrating the Rite of Marriage.” Use the PowerPoint presentation or the handout you prepared to help participants follow along. Be sure to leave time for questions after the presentation. Stress the following points:

- The Church teaches that the Sacrament of Marriage is a covenant and more than a contract, involving “the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children. (See USCCA, Chapter 21, and NDC, no. 36.C.2.)
- The covenant between a man and woman established between themselves in marriage has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized. (See *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition: New English Translation* [CIC] [Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1998], c. 1055, and CCC, no. 1601.)

- During the initial preparation for marriage, it is very important for couples to select Scripture readings that will be proclaimed during the marriage rite.
- The first sentence spoken by the priest in the celebration of the rite connects them to their Baptism as the first experience of their sacramental life. (See *Rite of Marriage*, no. 23)

Small Group Discussion (15 minutes)

Have the participants divide into groups of three to five people to discuss the following questions, and allow the facilitator to guide the conversation and keep control of time:

- Have you ever participated in a wedding as a bridesmaid, best man, groomsman, etc.? How was your experience?
- Why is it important that the symbols speak for themselves?
- Why does the Church call the bride and groom to state their vows to one another publicly?
- Why does the Church invite the bride and groom to place a ring on the finger of the spouse? What is the meaning behind this action?

Large Group Discussion (5 minutes)

If time permits, ask one or two participants to share their reflections or ideas with the larger community.

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

For the closing prayer, invite your priest or deacon to preside, and select one of the prayers found under “Blessings Related to Marriage” in *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007, 247-260).

Copyright © 2010, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.
Permission is hereby granted to duplicate this work without adaptation for non-commercial use.

Excerpts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, second edition, copyright © 2000,
Libreria Editrice Vaticana–United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C.
Used with permission. All rights reserved.