

My Catholic Worship! Study Group

Session 7 - The Sacrament of Matrimony

Pre-meeting Prep

Participants should be asked to read Chapter Nine of the *My Catholic Worship!* book prior to this meeting.

5 minutes - Gather

Snacks and informal social time as people arrive. Try to be punctual and gather everyone together no longer than 5 minutes after the scheduled starting time.

5-10 minutes - Opening prayer and Scripture

Everyone sits quietly as the leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and then invites a period of silence in the following way:

"Let us quiet ourselves as we begin this study of our glorious Catholic worship together. 'Lord, as we sit here for a minute in silence, help each one of us to bring our own questions, concerns, fears, and joys to You. Help us, in this moment of silence, to be attentive to Your gentle voice speaking to us, directing us, and calling us to a deeper faith.'"

Take about a minute in silence with eyes closed so that each person can speak to our Lord about their own particular cares and concerns.

Leader reads the following invitation:

Let us ponder the Word of God. Let us reflect upon our own faith journey with the following questions: Do I believe? How deep is my faith? Am I open to letting God speak to me? Am I open to the Word of God and willing to let God's truth sink in more deeply? Am I willing to let this new faith change my life?

The leader of the session prayerfully reads the following Scriptures, one at a time, pausing for about 30 seconds between each verse:

Genesis 1:27-28: God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.

Genesis 2:20-25: The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man. So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib that he

had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.

Matthew 19:1-12: When Jesus finished these words, he left Galilee and went to the district of Judea across the Jordan. Great crowds followed him, and he cured them there. Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?" He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator '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 they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate." They said to him, "Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss (her)?" He said to them, "Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery." [His] disciples said to him, "If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." He answered, "Not all can accept [this] word, but only those to whom that is granted. Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Whoever can accept this ought to accept it."

Leader then says: ***Let us take a moment in silence to reflect upon these words.*** (a minute of silence)

The Leader invites everyone to pray silently as the leader prays the following prayer out loud:

Almighty God, we thank You for the sacred gift of the Sacrament of Marriage. We thank You for all marriages and offer each one of them to You. Please help married couples embrace their vocation wholeheartedly so as to imitate Your perfect love and fidelity.

Lord, for those marriages that struggle, we pray for Your intervention. Please bring healing, mercy, and forgiveness when needed.

Lord, for those marriages that are truly blessed, we pray that You continue to shine through them so that their families will be ministered to by their mutual love and so that the world will see in them Your own marriage to all humanity.

Lord, be with those who are discerning marriage. Help them to enter into this sacred bond for good and holy reasons, all in accord with Your divine plan.

Lord, we pray for all children. May they discover, in their parents, Your own merciful love and acceptance and grow strong in grace and virtue through the example of holy parenting. Help every mother and father to discover the beautiful calling You have bestowed upon them so that they may live out their vocation in accord with Your divine plan.

The prayer time concludes with everyone professing the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

45-50 minutes - Discussion questions

Each person should be invited to share something or ask a question if he/she chooses to regarding the questions/discussion starters below. Go through one question at a time, and give each person an opportunity to say something if he/she chooses. Avoid having one or two persons dominate the discussion. Go around the circle and do not be afraid to share! Your insights might assist someone else in their understanding of the topics. Your question might very well be the same question someone else has. Some of the questions below will invite a personal sharing; other questions will invite you to share with others what you read in the chapter for this discussion. The goal is to share personally and to make sure that the faith of our Church is clearly expressed and understood by all.

1. God designed marriage as part of the original intention for human nature. Therefore, marriage is first a natural institution. From there, Jesus elevated it to the level of grace as a Sacrament. Reflect upon these thoughts in the following regards:
 1. Do you understand what it means that marriage was first a natural institution prior to becoming a Sacrament?
 2. When is marriage a natural marriage and when is it a Sacrament?
 3. What were the effects of Original Sin on marriage?
 4. Why did Jesus elevate marriage to the level of a Sacrament?

2. Christian Marriage is now able to share in divine grace and is able to participate in the covenant God made with humanity. Discuss the three ends of the Sacrament of Marriage in light of the high calling of married couples to imitate and share in the new Covenant of grace:
 1. Fidelity: God is faithful to us in all things. His fidelity is absolute. Couples are called to share in this grace of fidelity through their vows and unwavering commitment to each other in an exclusive way. How does the fidelity couples imitate and participate in, the fidelity of God?
 2. Indissolubility: Marriage is “until death do you part.” Once the marriage bond is established, it cannot be broken. Again, this is a sharing in the indissoluble commitment of Christ and the Church. Share your thoughts on this sacred aspect of Marriage.
 3. Openness to Children: God said to “be fruitful and multiply.” Married couples are called to be open to new life. In fact, if this aspect of marriage is intentionally excluded, then marriage itself is excluded. Discuss this essential aspect of marriage with the following questions:
 - i. How many children might God want couples to be open to? Discuss this primarily in theory since every particular situation will differ.
 - ii. Why is artificial contraception immoral? Why is it such a hard teaching to embrace?
 - iii. How does Natural Family Planning fit into God’s plan? How might a “contraceptive mentality” even be problematic with NFP?
 4. Consent is at the heart of marriage. Discuss the necessary qualities of consent and those things that interfere with total consent.
 5. Do you understand annulments? Discuss them. They are not Catholic divorce; rather, they are a process of getting at the truth of a broken marriage for healing and clarity. Discuss this.
 6. One of the purposes for marriage is to be open to children if God blesses a couple with children. Discuss the raising of children in our day and age. This could be a long and complex discussion that could include: best practices, modern dangers to children, Internet and electronics, school, friendships, secular culture, discipline, etc.

20 minutes - Final Reflections and sharing

Go around and give each person an opportunity to share what might have stood out the most to them from the discussion or what left them the most confused, so as to gain further clarity or insight from others.

5 minutes - Closing prayer

Leader begins with the Sign of the Cross and invites a minute of silence with all eyes closed. Each person should reflect upon what was discussed, especially what stood out to him/her the most.

Leader then prays the following prayer:

Lord God, Almighty Father, You are the source of all love and fidelity in each and every relationship. We pray especially for married couples. Help them to continually discover the sacredness of their covenant of marriage and to live it more deeply and faithfully every day.

May every marriage imitate Your own self-giving and selfless sacrificial love. May couples always seek the good of the other first and be a source of comfort, consolation, and care to one another.

Help all parents in their duties toward their children. May they know how to love their children as they care for their many needs in this complex and challenging world. Make each family holy and an icon of Your own family.

Jesus, we trust in You.

Leader then invites everyone present to offer their own prayer in the following way (Note: This can be done out loud, but it might be preferable if it's done in silence at the discretion of the leader):

Let us now each bring our own personal concerns before our Lord, trusting that He hears us and knows all we need. Let us entrust these prayers to Him with full confidence that He desires to take control.

(Take a minute of silence for each person to speak to God about their own personal needs).

Leader then invites everyone to close with the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be.