

Catholic teaching on values and norms concerning marriage and sexuality: Conservatism or vision?

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Overview of the issues to be addressed

1. Outline of views on marriage morality and sexual ethics in today's society
2. What *is* marriage?
3. Some concrete moral issues concerning marriage and sexuality
4. How is it possible to live according to Catholic marriage morality and sexual ethics?

1. Outline of current views on marriage and sexuality

Until the 1960s, most people in society assumed that there was a link between:

- **Marriage**
- **Sexual intercourse**
- **Propagation**



Especially since the 1960s, marriage, sexual intercourse and procreation have become disconnected for most people due to a range of diverse factors

Some factors:

- **individualization**
- **secularization**
- **changes in family life in the last two centuries**
- **Introduction of hormonal contraception**

Consequences of decoupling sexual intercourse from marriage and procreation

- The widespread availability of the contraceptive pill made sexual intercourse possible, without the 'risk' of procreation; this led to free sexual relations, separate from marriage (the sexual revolution).
- If sexual intercourse can be separated from procreation, are not other sexual acts that cannot in themselves lead to procreation also allowed: same-sex sexual acts and, finally, so-called homosexual 'marriage'?

The Church stands by its teaching that marriage, sexual intercourse and procreation are intrinsically linked

- This is *not* conservatism
- The Church bases its teaching on marriage morality and sexual ethics on the essence of marriage
- Marriage is not a human institution; what marriage and sexuality essentially are is determined by God, the Creator; the creation order cannot be changed by humans, not even by the Pope



1. What *is* marriage?



Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) described marriage and marital love as a mutual gift of man and woman, which includes the gift of new life.

"The institution of marriage and the love of marriage are by their essence nature ordered to the procreation and education of children, and the man as well as the woman 48 find therein, as it were, their crowning glory" (*Gaudium et spes*, no. 48)

"By their inner nature, marriage and conjugal love are directed towards family foundation" (Ibid., no. 50)

In other words, procreation is not an end of marriage, but an integral part of the mutual gift of the spouses



The description of marriage as a mutual gift of the spouses is further elaborated by John Paul II in his theology of the body

He does so on the basis of three analogies:

- 1. The analogy between marriage and the Divine Trinity**
- 2. The analogy between marriage and the relationship between God and the people of Israel**
- 3. The analogy between marriage and the relationship between Christ and his Church**

1. Marriage is created in the image of God who is in himself a communion of three Persons, who love each other infinitely, who give themselves completely to each other and receive each other completely; the Father brings forth the Son and both bring forth the Holy Spirit

- **Gen 1:27: "So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created him"**
- **Gen 2:22: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and attaches himself to his wife, and they become one flesh."**



Man and woman have the same being, are both human (created in God's image and likeness) and therefore have the same dignity

- But they differ physically from each other by their reproductive organs; in this difference, however, they complement each other; this enables them to pass on life together
- In their mutual total self-gift as two human beings with the same essence, husband and wife form a unity of the two, which reflects something of the Triune God, in whom the three Divine Persons are mutually distinct from each other, not with regard to their being, but in their relationships
- Moreover, the unity of the two, husband and wife, which comes into being by their mutual total self-giving, reflects the process of generation within the Trinity by becoming outwardly fruitful in procreation and child-rearing

2. Marriage is a picture of the relationship between God and his chosen people (Old Testament)

- Hosea 1-3;
- Isaiah 54; 62;
- Jeremiah 2-3; 31;
- Ezekiel 16; 23

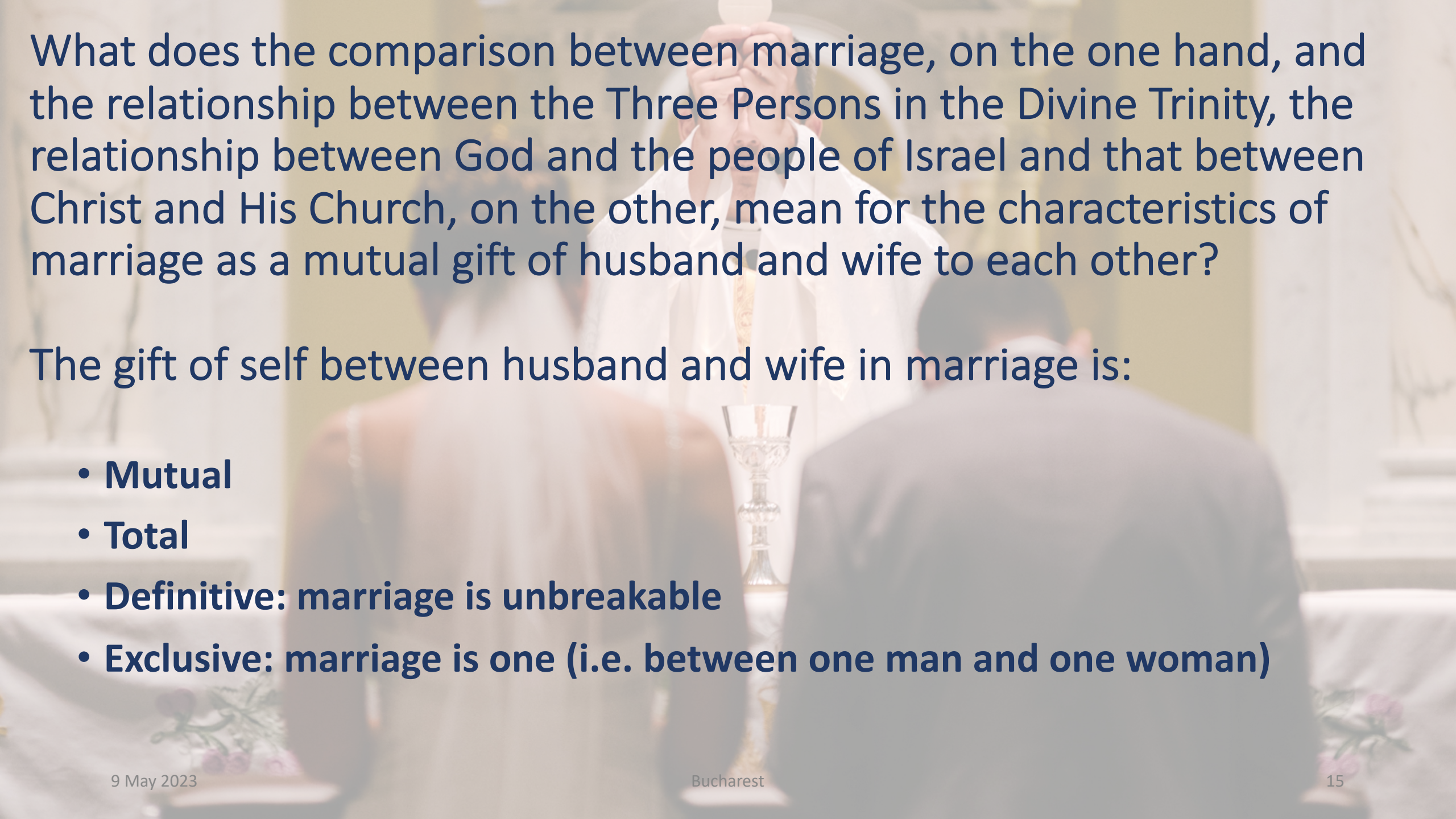
3. Marriage is an image of the relationship between Christ and his Church and has been elevated to a sacrament by Christ

- Letter of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Christians of Ephesus 5.25-32

The difference between a 'natural' marriage and a sacramental one

The natural marriage and the sacramental marriage are not essentially different: both are a mutual total self-gift of husband and wife

- **A 'natural' marriage is an image of the Holy Trinity, the relationship between God and the Jewish people and that between Christ and his Church**
- **In addition, a sacramental marriage actually participates in the life of the divine Trinity and in the relationship between Christ and his Church**



What does the comparison between marriage, on the one hand, and the relationship between the Three Persons in the Divine Trinity, the relationship between God and the people of Israel and that between Christ and His Church, on the other, mean for the characteristics of marriage as a mutual gift of husband and wife to each other?

The gift of self between husband and wife in marriage is:

- **Mutual**
- **Total**
- **Definitive: marriage is unbreakable**
- **Exclusive: marriage is one (i.e. between one man and one woman)**

A *total* gift of the human person is a gift at

- The spiritual level
- The emotional life
- The physical level

For man is not only his soul or only his body, but he is *soul and body*
(*Gaudium et spes*, no. 14)

1. Some particular moral questions concerning marriage and sexuality

- **Sexual relations outside marriage**
- **Using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy**
- **Homosexual acts**

Sexual relations outside marriage

- The total mutual self-gift of husband and wife, which is marriage, essentially includes the gift on the bodily level, because the human person is a unity of body and soul;
- sexual intercourse is the specific expression of the total mutual self-gift of man and woman on the bodily level; sexual intercourse is therefore an integral part of marriage;
- sexual intercourse outside marriage is therefore a sign of something that is not there, namely a mutual total gift; it is a gift on a physical level without a self-giving of the person.

John Paul II speaks of a "lie" in this case:

"Consequently, sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally" (*Familiaris consortio* no 11).



Using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy

John Paul II, Familiaris consortio no 32:

"Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality"

Homosexual acts

Homosexual acts cannot be an expression of a total mutual gift, because they do not allow for the gift of parenthood; therefore, they cannot lead to a total mutual gift

God intended marriage to be a unity of man and woman, two people who are sexually different from each other and complement each other in this; therefore, they can bring about new life together

Homosexual acts are therefore not an expression of a relationship that reflects something of the relationships between the three Divine Persons in the Trinity

4. How is it possible to live according to Catholic marriage morality and sexual ethics?



This is difficult for us humans because our instincts and feelings are disrupted by original sin.

Original sin implies a certain alienation between God and us; this affects not only our nature, but also the marriage created in God's image and thus how we experience our sexuality.

Between Adam and Eve after the Fall, their sexuality is no longer focused on their mutual total self-giving, but becomes primarily a means of sexual gratification; so God says to Eve:

**"To thy husband shall thy desire go forth, though he have dominion over thee"
(Gen 3:16)**

It is difficult but possible for people due to original sin to live according to Catholic marriage morality and sexual ethics through the virtue of chastity

Chastity is neither prudishness nor spastic handling of sexuality

CCC no 2337:

"Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality into the person and thus the inner unity of man in his physical and spiritual being. Sexuality, expressing man's belonging to the physical and biological world, becomes personal and truly human when it is integrated into the relationship of one person to another, into the complete and lifelong mutual gift of a man and a woman."

Chastity is not a restriction on man's sexual freedom, but frees him from addictions in the sexual sphere, such as an addiction to masturbation or pornography.

Importance of the virtue of chastity

- **He who possesses the virtue of chastity is in control of his sexual faculties**
- **Without the virtue of chastity, it is difficult to live up to marriage as a self-giving spiritually, affectively and physically**
- **Those who do not dominate themselves and their (sexual) faculties can hardly give themselves away totally**

Chastity is a moral virtue that we must first and foremost and above all develop ourselves

God also gives chastity as a grace:

"Chastity is a moral virtue. It is also a gift of God, a grace, a fruit of spiritual effort. The Holy Spirit enables one who has been regenerated by the water of baptism to imitate the purity of Christ" (CCC No 2345)

It is difficult to develop chastity in the beginning. But if we fail, it is not a tragedy. We can always resort to the sacrament of confession (and the other sacraments)

Literature

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