

A Brief Look at the Church's Teaching on Marriage and Divorce

The Church's view of marriage has always been that it is a reflection of Christ's love for the Church. Elevated to a Sacrament by Jesus Christ, marriage is acknowledged as the one blessing that was not lost by the Fall of Adam and Eve, and married life is the vocation in which the majority of the Catholic faithful are called to live out the self-sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrated for us on the cross.

The Church believes that God, the author of marriage, established it as a permanent union. When a man and a woman marry, they form an unbreakable bond. Jesus himself taught that marriage is permanent when he said that when a man leaves his father and mother and joins his wife “they are no longer two, but one flesh” (see Matthew 19:3-6). The Church does not recognize a civil divorce as the dissolution of the marriage because the State cannot dissolve what is indissoluble (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2382-2386).

When divorce is the only possible recourse, the Church offers her support to those involved and encourages them to remain close to the Lord through frequent reception of the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. Divorced people are full members of the Church and are encouraged to participate in its activities. Divorced Catholics are in good standing with the Church when they have not remarried or if they have remarried following an annulment. They should receive the sacraments with joy and the hope of healing. Catholics who have civilly divorced and are dating someone else or have attempted to re-marry outside the Catholic Church are encouraged to speak with their pastor about their particular situation regarding reception of Holy Communion.

The Church teaches that there are three essential aspects of marriage: it is free, faithful, and fruitful. Free, in that the couple has freely chosen to give of themselves in marriage; faithful, in that the couple enters into the marriage understanding its perpetual and exclusive nature; and fruitful, in that the couple orders their marriage toward the procreation and education of children. Because of the large difference between the Church's understanding of marriage and that of the secular world, an increasing number of people find themselves in situations that fall short of the Sacramental view that the Church has, and especially when those relationships fail, it becomes apparent that the relationship was not a valid marriage. In those cases, the Church may grant a declaration of nullity (or an annulment). To find out more about this process, look online at [FAQs about Annulments](#).