Take-Home 7. Not Just a Ceremony

From the Beginning

What We Found

Marriage belongs to creation, so two unbaptized people who marry validly are really married. Between two baptized persons, a valid marriage is by that very fact a sacrament, which means validly married Protestants are sacramentally married.

Consent makes the marriage. Not the ceremony, not the paperwork, not the reception.

In the Latin Church the spouses are the ministers of the sacrament to each other, and the priest or deacon assists and receives their consent in the name of the Church. In the Eastern Churches the priest is the witness of the consent, and his blessing is necessary for validity.

The Church ordinarily requires canonical form of Catholics, and can dispense from it for a just cause. Clandestine marriages produced serious injustice, usually against women, when consent was later denied, and the form protects the weaker party and gives public certainty.

An impediment makes a person unable to marry validly. A defect of consent means the person could have married but did not actually give marital consent. Impediments usually turn up on paper, and defects of consent concern what was interior at the moment of consent. A tribunal assesses both from evidence.

A mixed marriage, with a baptized non-Catholic, requires permission. Disparity of cult, with an unbaptized person, is an impediment requiring a dispensation for validity.

The sacrament gives grace that perfects the spouses' love and strengthens their unity. It does not promise an easy marriage and it does not work on people who refuse it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH ON MARRYING WITH THE CHURCH'S KNOWLEDGE

Writing to St. Polycarp on his way to martyrdom early in the second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch taught that those who marry should do so with the knowledge and approval of the bishop, so that the marriage is according to the Lord and not according to mere desire.

This is very early, and it is decisive for one particular claim: the idea that the Church's involvement in weddings is a medieval invention does not survive contact with a letter written within living memory of the apostles.

Letter to Polycarp, chapter 5.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE ON THE BOND THAT REMAINS

St. Augustine taught, in substance, that among the goods of marriage there is something that persists even when the spouses fail: a bond, which he called by the Latin word sacramentum, that is not dissolved by separation or by the sins of either party.

He is arguing from the Church's practice rather than from a lexicon. Christians already refused to treat a broken marriage as an ended one, and he is explaining what that practice implies.

Summary of his teaching on the goods of marriage, especially in On the Good of Marriage.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE COUNCIL OF TRENT ON THE SEVEN

The Council of Trent taught that matrimony is truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the Gospel, instituted by Christ, and it condemned the contrary claim.

Trent did not invent the doctrine in the sixteenth century. It defined, under challenge, what the Church had long held and practiced, which is the ordinary way doctrine gets defined.

Council of Trent, Session XXIV, canons on the sacrament of matrimony, canon 1.

Live It This Week

- **Take your outstanding list to the parish this week.** Every document, permission, or dispensation still open. Ask the office directly what is missing and what the deadline is.
- **Ask the priest or deacon the one question you wrote down tonight.** Do not carry a canon law question around for six months.
- **Read the vows once, alone, each of you.** Do not discuss them yet. Session 8 is next week and it is the center of this study.
- **Bring your sealed sheet to the next session.** If you have lost it, write a fresh answer tonight, alone, before you hear anything else.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Take your list of outstanding documents, permissions, and dispensations to the parish office and ask what is missing and when it is due. If either of you was married before, or married civilly, or if one of you is unbaptized, confirm with the priest which category applies to you.

Also. Ask whether your wedding will be within Mass, and if one of you is not Catholic, ask what the parish recommends and why.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.

Ephesians 5:32

Before next session: Read the consent questions and the vows once, alone, and bring your sealed sheet to Session 8.

Catechism: CCC 1601, 1621-1624, 1625-1632, 1633-1637, 1638-1642. Code of Canon Law, canons 1055, 1057, 1108.