

Take-Home 9. What God Has Joined

From the Beginning

What We Found

St. Paul himself distinguishes cases in 1 Corinthians 7. For two believers he gives a ruling he says comes from the Lord. For a believer married to an unbeliever who departs, he says the brother or sister is not bound. The Church's law builds on that passage, and canon 1143 supplies the precise conditions: two unbaptized parties at the time of the marriage, one of them later baptized, and the unbaptized party departing.

A declaration of nullity says a marriage never came into existence because, for example, consent, capacity, or canonical form was defective at the beginning, or an impediment stood in the way. It is a finding about the past, not a dissolution.

The Church cannot dissolve a marriage that is both sacramental and consummated. She can dissolve a ratified but non-consummated marriage, and certain marriages in favor of the faith.

Grounds for nullity concern what happened before and during the wedding, not what happened afterward.

Children of a valid or putative marriage remain legitimate in the Church's law (canon 1137), and a declaration does not remove the natural obligations toward a former spouse or toward children.

Being divorced does not bar anyone from the sacraments. The Church commends those who are separated and remain faithful.

Those divorced and civilly remarried without a declaration are not excommunicated and are urged to remain part of the Church's life. Ordinarily they are not admitted to Eucharistic communion while the situation persists, and where they cannot separate for serious reasons the Church has spoken of living in complete continence. Anyone actually in that situation should speak with their pastor.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN FISHER AND THE PRICE OF A MARRIAGE CASE

St. John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, was executed in 1535 for refusing the oath at the center of the same crisis that killed St. Thomas More. He had defended the validity of the king's marriage when nearly the entire English hierarchy found a way not to.

He was the only English bishop who publicly and consistently opposed the king's cause, and the only one executed for it.

Historical summary. Fisher was tried and executed in 1535 for refusing the oath required under the Acts of Succession and Supremacy.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II ON THOSE IN A SECOND UNION

St. John Paul II taught that the divorced and remarried belong to the Church, that pastors and the community must care for them so that they do not consider themselves separated from her, and that they should be encouraged to hear the word of God, attend Mass, pray, and raise their children in the faith.

He also reaffirmed that they are not admitted to Eucharistic communion while the situation persists, and spoke of the case of those who for serious reasons cannot separate and undertake to live in complete continence.

Both halves of that are his. Quoting only one of them misrepresents him.

Summary of his teaching in *Familiaris Consortio*, section 84.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH REFORMING HER OWN COURTS

In 2015 Pope Francis reformed the process for judging nullity: the requirement that an affirmative decision be confirmed by a second court was removed, a briefer process before the diocesan bishop was created for cases of evident nullity, and episcopal conferences were asked to ensure, insofar as possible, a free process, while preserving just remuneration for tribunal workers, so that cost would not bar access.

The stated reason is worth repeating to a room that has heard the cynical version: that the faithful should not be kept waiting for years by the structures meant to serve them.

Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus, 2015.

Live It This Week

- **Correct one false belief this week**, gently, in a real conversation. Most families carry at least one of the four myths from tonight.
- **Call the person you thought of.** The divorced aunt, the remarried cousin, the friend whose marriage ended. Do not bring up theology. Just call them.
- **Disclose anything outstanding to the priest.** If the Couple Conversation surfaced something, book the appointment this week.
- **Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 before Session 10**, and note what St. Paul says the body is for.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. If either of you has anything undisclosed in your history that the priest preparing you does not know, make the appointment this week. If a nullity case is pending for either of you, confirm with the parish that no date is being held on an assumption.

Also. Call one person in your life whose marriage ended. Not about theology. Just call them.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

Matthew 19:8

Before next session: Read 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 before Session 10. Note what St. Paul says the body is for.

Catechism: CCC 1629, 1649, 1650-1651, 2382-2383, 2386. Code of Canon Law, canons 1095, 1098, 1101, 1103, 1141-1143.