

Take-Home 12. What Marriage Is and Is Not

From the Beginning

What We Found

Questioned about divorce, Jesus answers by appealing to God's design in Genesis, quoting two verses rather than making an argument: Genesis 1:27, male and female, and Genesis 2:24, the one flesh union.

The Church's claim is that she cannot redefine marriage because she did not invent it. That is a limitation on the Church before it is a limitation on anyone else.

Sexual difference is treated as constitutive rather than incidental because marriage includes a bodily union, and a bodily union means two persons coordinating toward an end neither can reach alone.

The Church's criterion is the kind of act, not its outcome, which is why she marries the infertile and the elderly without hesitation, provided they are capable of the marital act, and calls those marriages real, and sacramental where both spouses are baptized.

Civil marriage is a legal status defined by the state. The Church holds that the reality of marriage precedes the state and is not created by it.

Every person is to be received with respect, compassion, and sensitivity, and every sign of unjust discrimination is to be avoided. This is integral to the Church's teaching and it is not optional.

The marriage of two baptized spouses is a sign of the union of Christ and the Church, which means the manner in which this teaching is spoken is part of what is being signified.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: THE CHURCH ON WHAT SHE CAN AND CANNOT DO

Teaching on proposals to give legal recognition to unions between persons of the same sex, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith argued that marriage exists as a reality prior to any state recognition, that it is ordered by its nature to the procreation and education of children, and it argued on that basis against granting other unions legal recognition equivalent to marriage.

Note what the argument does not appeal to. It does not appeal to majority opinion, tradition for its own sake, or the preferences of believers. It appeals to what marriage is.

Summary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons (2003).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON WHAT AN INSTITUTION IS FOR

St. Thomas argued that marriage is natural to human beings not because we feel drawn to it but because of the ends it serves: the begetting and raising of children, which he treats as the principal end and which requires a stability other creatures do not need, together with the mutual help of the spouses. Later magisterial formulations order these differently, so do not flatten the two together.

His method is worth as much as his conclusion. He asks what the thing is for, and reasons from there. It is the same method the Church uses tonight, and it is why she thinks the question is not hers to settle by preference.

Summary of his treatment of marriage as a natural institution in the Summa Theologiae.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA ON THE DEEPEST POVERTY

St. Teresa of Calcutta taught, in substance, that the worst poverty she encountered was not hunger but the experience of being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for, and that this poverty exists in wealthy countries as much as in poor ones.

She is here for a reason.

A thematic summary of a teaching repeatedly associated with her.

Live It This Week

- **Call the person you thought of.** Not to discuss anything from tonight. Just to talk to them.
- **Practice the sentence.** Write down, in two sentences, how you would explain what the Church teaches to a friend who disagrees. Read it to your fiancé and ask whether it sounds like contempt.
- **Settle one guest list question this week,** and settle it on the side of generosity if you can.
- **Read 1 Corinthians 13 before next session.** Not as a wedding reading. As a description of what is about to be asked of you.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Settle one guest list question, and settle it on the side of generosity where you can. If a family situation is genuinely difficult, ask the priest rather than deciding it while tired.

Also. Write down, in two sentences, how each of you would explain the Church's teaching to a friend who finds it painful. Read them to each other and ask whether they sound like contempt.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

Before next session: Read 1 Corinthians 13 before Session 13, as a description of what is about to be asked of you.

Catechism: CCC 1601-1603, 2331-2333, 2357, 2358, 2359.