



**YOU SAY TOMATO,
I SAY MARRIAGE.**

We have covered many topics in this newsletter about the subject of marriage, but we have not really reflected in any depth on what marriage is. We will therefore look this month at the canonical definition of marriage and what kinds of marriages there are.

Canon 1055 §1 defines marriage as a “partnership of the whole of life...which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children.” Canon 1056 fleshes this definition out by identifying the essential properties of marriage: unity and indissolubility. So, by its very nature, marriage is an exclusive and permanent covenant established between a man and a woman for their good and the good of having and raising children. This is a matter of divine law (Matthew 19:3-9), and no human power on earth, including the pope, can change it.

Notice that nothing in the above definition mentions anything about being Catholic, or being Christian, or being married in the Church. Marriage is a natural institution that predates and goes far beyond Christianity, and we recognize Non-Christian and Non-Catholic marriages. This is why even Non-Catholics and Non-Christians who have a prior marriage and wish to enter a new marriage in the Catholic Church or who are in a second or subsequent marriage and wish to come into the Church through the RCIA must have the validity of any prior marriages resolved through the annulment process. All marriages are by definition permanent, for life, and exclusive, between one man and one woman, and, unless and until God changes that, we must uphold it for everyone, Catholics and Non-Catholics alike.

Marriage according to the above, universally applicable definition is commonly referred to as natural marriage. All marriages that are truly marriages are therefore natural marriages, but some natural marriages are also sacramental marriages. Canon 1055 §1 states that the natural institution of marriage “has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized.”

The next paragraph goes even further: “For this reason, a valid matrimonial contract cannot exist between the baptized without it being by that fact a sacrament.” This means that any valid marriage between the baptized is not only natural but sacramental. “Baptized” here means any baptized Christians, including Non-Catholics. So, if two baptized Non-Catholics marry, their marriage is sacramental according to the Catholic Church, even if they do not believe that marriage is a sacrament themselves. While this understanding of marriage may raise certain theological questions, the distinction between a merely natural marriage and a sacramental marriage is important for certain canonical procedures, the explanation of which goes beyond the limits of this newsletter.

That’s it for now. Next time we will look at some other kinds of marriages. Until then, keep the faith, love God’s people, and always honor the code!

