

The Seven Sacraments of the Church can be grouped into three types. There are sacraments of initiation, Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. There are sacraments of healing, Reconciliation, that is Confession, and the Anointing of the Sick. Then there are the sacraments of vocation, a sacrament that God calls some of us to receive, the sacrament of Holy Orders, received by bishops, priests and deacons, and the sacrament of Matrimony. Marriage is one of the ways God has put in place to give us Sanctifying Grace.

Our first reading today reveals God's plan for us. In spite of our current trend in social engineering, God made two genders, male and female, not 37, or 52 or 76 as some sociologists would have us believe. God made man and woman and called them to leave their parents, marry, and become one flesh.

This is clearly stated in the Old Testament and affirmed in the New. When a man and a woman come together in marriage they become “one flesh.” Each becomes a part of the other. They compliment each other.

Some critics do not like the term “woman” because they feel the word implies that a woman is dependent upon the man. But these people miss the point. Man and woman, in Hebrew “ish” and “ishshah,” are complimentary, they rely on each other.

Men and women are different. They are different physically, psychologically, and emotionally. When they come together they supply what is lacking in the other, and become a complete whole person.

When Adam sees Eve he recognizes her as a part of himself, someone without whom, he would be incomplete. She is that part of him that was missing in his life.

For those who are called to the Sacrament of Matrimony, God blesses two people with someone who makes them whole. And for those believers who freely enter into the sacrament, God promises them spiritual graces.

In recent decades, psychological and developmental studies have tried to shed some light on this complementarity.

They have identified complementary characteristics on the level of biology, emotion, cognition, and even chemistry, but the full explanation still defies science – it goes deeper, even into the spiritual realm. A marriage is a spiritual covenant.

A covenant is different from a contract. Two businesses may enter into a contract for their mutual benefit. But they remain two distinct businesses. Two people who enter into a marriage covenant are no longer separate, they become one family.

I would ask the married men gathered here today to remember back when they were preparing for their marriage. Did you think you were marrying one person, only to find out later that you married an entire family? That's what a covenant does. Contracts create businesses on a physical, superficial level, covenants create families on a deep spiritual level.

A covenant, another word for covenant is testament, is how God relates to us, as family. The history of man's relationship to God is a history of covenants. And each time God establishes a covenant with us His family grows larger.

The covenant of marriage is not simply a bureaucratic piece of paper, it is not a legal formality, a marriage covenant, is a mysterious coming together of a man and woman.

This coming together in marital love, is so deep and so significant that when a marriage encounters difficulty, it is excruciatingly painful, because that “one flesh” is trying to pull itself apart.

There was a priest who would talk about counseling a young couple who wanted to get married. He brought them into his office and turned towards the young man and asked him, “why do you want to marry this woman?” the young man answered, “because I love her.” Then he turned to the young woman and asked her the same question, “why do you want to marry this man?” The woman was a little sharper and answered, “because I want to help him get to Heaven.”

All marriages, even those blessed by God, will have difficult times. But it is important to remember in those times that God has brought two people together and He will help them remain together, as long as they keep striving for the good of the other person.

Marriage is a complex issue. If you ever hear a canon lawyer on a talk show or radio show take questions from his listeners, you may be

surprised at the complexity of the issues. Every caller seems to have situation that is unique in one detail or another.

In Jesus' time marriage was just as complicated. The Mosaic law that allowed divorce was contentious even then. And different Rabbinical schools had different interpretations. So they come to Jesus and ask Him, “is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

Usually, when Jesus is presented with a question regarding the Law, He doubles down and encourages a more profound observance of the Law. But this time He corrects a misinterpretation of the Law. Marriage is established between a man and a woman but it is also a bond forged by God. As a bond forged by God the man and woman receive spiritual help in remaining faithful to each other. Moses allowed divorce as a concession to the people's hardness of heart. But it was never part of God's plan from the beginning.

A sacramental marriage is all about fulfilling God's plan.

In the Book of Tobit, we meet Sarah. Sarah had a problem. She had been married seven times. But each time, her husband died on their wedding night before the marriage could be consummated. Sarah was so distraught she contemplated suicide but she could not bear to be the cause of the sorrow that that would bring to her aged father. So she prayed to God to have pity on her situation.

It was a demon who was responsible for the deaths of Sarah's husbands but no one knew this. Instead her maid accused her of killing

the men. You can imagine the whispers that must have followed Sarah wherever she went.

But God answered her prayers in the form of Tobias.

Tobias falls in love with her but is hesitant to marry her. His companion, the archangel Raphael in disguise, tells him how to drive away the demon and encourages him to wed Sarah.

The demon is driven away and bound by Raphael.

On their wedding night, the first thing Tobias does is to take Sarah's hand and together they kneel as Tobias leads them in this prayer.

“Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors; blessed be your name forever and ever! Let the heavens and all your creation bless you forever. You made Adam, and you made his wife Eve to be his helper and support; and from these two the human race has come. You said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; let us make him a helper like himself.’ Now, not with lust, but with fidelity I take this woman as my wife. Send down your mercy on me and on her, and grant that we may grow old together. Bless us with children. Amen.”

The marriage of Tobias and Sarah, this unity of persons, is founded upon the fulfillment of God's plan.

Saint Paul describes the unity of a married couple in terms of the Body of Christ. Man is the head of the family as Christ is the head of the Church. Again, there are critics who take offense to this

characterization of the man as the “head.” But if a man and wife truly become one flesh then it would be foolish for either of them to mistreat the other, for they are only hurting themselves.

In our society today, marriage is under attack and has been for the last several decades, because society to a large extent, has forgotten God.

We need to pray for marriages.

Although God does call some to a spiritual marriage with Himself or with the Church, a majority of His children are called to marriage and family life. In this fallen world, because we are wounded by sin and constantly surrounded by temptations to turn away from God, living out the vocation of marriage is not easy.

We are tempted to intimacy before marriage, and infidelity after marriage. But Jesus reminds us that we do not rely on our own strength to live out this vocation. God is there to help us with His grace, “what God has joined together, no human being must separate.”