

Dear Parishioners,

We've been delving into the qualities of marriage in an effort to better understand the Church's teachings on marriage and the marital act. It's now time to look at the Church's marriage laws. The Church has established certain laws regarding the validity of marriage because Holy Matrimony is a sacrament, and thus the marriage covenant involves not only the husband and wife, but also Christ!

For a marriage to be valid in the eyes of the Catholic Church, there are several requirements that must be met: (1) The man and the woman must be free to marry, which means they cannot have been married before, unless any previous spouses are deceased or they have received a *Declaration of Nullity* (commonly called an "annulment") for any previous spouses. It also means that they do not have any other impediments to the natural or ecclesiastical law (such as being too closely related or being bound by Holy Orders). (2) The consent of the man and woman must be deliberate, fully voluntary, and mutual. This presumes that the man and woman possess the maturity to enter into an irrevocable covenant and be of proper age (for men, age 16; for women, age 14), that they possess sufficient use of reason, not suffer from any serious psychological illness, and that they are not being forced to enter into the marriage. (3) In consenting to marry a couple must also understand essential matrimonial rights and duties and have the intention to marry for life, to be faithful to one another, and to be open to children. (4) Lastly, the couple's consent must be given before two witnesses and an authorized priest or deacon, who receives the consent of the husband and wife in the name of the Church and gives them the Church's blessing (although exceptions to this last requirement can be made with the approval of the local bishop).

In the mind of the Church, Catholics are to marry other Catholics, although permission may be obtained for a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic. In addition to fulfilling the above requirements for a valid marriage, the Catholic must seek permission from the local bishop to marry a non-Catholic. If the person is a non-Catholic Christian, this permission is called a "Permission to enter into a Marriage of Mixed Religion." If the person is a non-Christian, the permission is called a "Dispensation from Disparity of Cult." This permission is usually obtained through the assistance of the priest or deacon conducting the marriage preparation. Both permission for a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic Christian or a dispensation to marry a non-Christian may be granted if the Catholic party reaffirms his/her faith in Jesus Christ, intends to continue living his/her Catholic faith, and promises to do his/her best to baptize and rear as Catholics children born of the marriage. The non-Catholic party is to be made aware of these promises and what they entail, but they are not required to promise to raise their children in the Catholic Church.

Lastly, Catholic weddings are to take place in a Catholic church or chapel. This is because for Catholics, weddings are not just family or social events. They are public celebrations of the Church! The local bishop can, however, grant permission for a Catholic wedding to take place in another suitable location. Given the great dignity of marriage, resorts, hotels, beaches and other outdoor venues are not generally considered suitable for weddings.

Yours in Jesus and Mary,  
Fr. Reid