

Dear Parishioners,

In the previous article we discussed what is necessary for a marriage to be *valid* in the eyes of the Catholic Church. It was also mentioned that, generally speaking, Catholics are to marry other Catholics. While a Catholic can receive a dispensation from the local bishop to marry validly someone who is not baptized, such a marriage is not sacramental, but rather is considered a *natural* marriage (i.e., it flows from the *nature* of men and women). For a marriage to be sacramental, both spouses must be baptized. While not sacramental, a valid natural marriage is still a holy union that entails the mutual and permanent self-giving of the husband and wife for the procreative and unitive goods. Thus, the difference between a sacramental and a natural marriage is not in the degree of holiness, but rather the end toward which it is directed. Being transformed in Christ by baptism, a baptized husband and wife have as the ultimate goal of their marriage the attainment of salvation for themselves and their children rather than just purely natural ends. Interestingly, Holy Matrimony differs from the other 6 sacraments in that the Church's minister does not confer it upon the husband and wife, but rather the husband and wife confer the sacrament upon each other through their mutual consent.

While Catholics can (for good reasons) enter into natural rather than sacramental marriages, generally speaking, the law of the Church prohibits Catholics from marrying people who are not baptized. This is why a dispensation from that law from the local bishop is necessary for a Catholic to marry someone who has not been baptized. This law is in place to protect the faith of Catholics. Being married to someone who is not of the Catholic faith can pose a danger to the faith of a Catholic, especially if the non-Catholic spouse is in any way hostile to Catholicism. Therefore, due discretion must be exercised in those situations in which Catholics choose to marry someone who is not Catholic.

Because of the dignity of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, it's important that Catholic couples prepare well so that they might receive the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony worthily. Being properly prepared for the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony means that in addition to being baptized and prepared to follow to the marriage laws of the Church, each spouse should have *rectitude of intention*. This means not being carried away by emotions, but rather entering into the sacrament with the requisite prudence and thoughtfulness. The spouses should each be in a state of grace on the day of their wedding, too. Thus it is a very good idea for engaged couples to go to confession shortly before their wedding. Holy Mother Church also strongly recommends that all those entering into the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony be confirmed beforehand. Thus, every effort should be made for Catholics preparing for marriage to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation before their wedding. Lastly, Catholics entering into the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony must be knowledgeable of the duties of married life in order to worthily partake of the Sacrament. These duties include being faithful to one another until death, to love and honor each other, and to care for the needs of any children born of the marriage.

Sincerely yours in Jesus and Mary,

Fr. Reid