

## Bulletin Article Series on the Family - Week 3: The Covenant and Design of Marriage

This week, we will consider more deeply the Church's teaching on Marriage, as designed by God. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "*the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring*" (1601). Let's look at this in more detail.

Marriage is a matrimonial covenant. In Scripture, a "covenant" is a sacred (God-ordained) exchange of persons that creates a new family relationship/bond. In marriage, a husband and a wife give themselves to each other and so create a new relationship: a marriage, a one-flesh union. The covenant of marriage, in turn, is a sign of the Covenant between Christ and the Church. As such, it reveals to the world how Christ wants to relate to us, His Spouse, the Church: He has given Himself to us *totally* (holding nothing back), *fruitfully* (creating new life in the waters of Baptism and on the Cross), and *faithfully* (He never takes back His covenant love). And He desires that we love Him in return, in the same way. *That is why marriage matters so much: if we get it wrong, we show a false image of God to the world!*

Marriage is by its nature ordered, or we might say, "designed for" two main purposes. First, the good of spouses. Just as God said, "*it is not good that the man should be alone*" (Genesis 2:18), marriage helps spouses overcome the prison of alone-ness and to give themselves to another, which is the essence of love. But for love to be true, it must be free. That is why the Church says that the man and the woman must give their free consent—their choice of self-giving, free of any coercion or grave external fear (CCC1628). "If consent is lacking, there is no marriage" (CCC1626). Witnesses are required to "hear" the consent, to attest that consent was given in case of any future doubt. And this act of self-giving must be total; holding nothing back, or again, it is not a true act of love. That is the love of Christ's Cross.

Secondly, marriage is ordered toward the procreation and education of offspring. In joining man and woman together, God enjoined them to be "fruitful and multiply," so "it is necessary that each and every marriage act remain *ordered to* the procreation of human life" (CCC2366) even if not every marital act results in conception. In keeping with God's design for the marital act that is always open to life, spouses "should realize that they are cooperating with the love of God the Creator" (CCC2367)! Contraception is an offense to the total self-gift that God designed for marriage. By contrast, "periodic continence" for just reasons is a powerful act of sacrificial love not only for the Creator's design, but also respects the dignity of the other spouse. Again, this fruitfulness of marriage reflects the fruitfulness of God; how each and every human life is a reflection of God's own image and likeness in the world!

God bless you,  
Fr John