

Bulletin Article Series on the Family - Week 5 : The Celebration of Marriage in the Church

This week, we will build upon the reality that, as we said last week, because the Church is the Body of Christ, a Catholic follower of Christ cannot enter a valid marriage *as designed by God* while excluding the Church. These days, we know many people who were baptized as Catholics choose to get married outside of the Church. Sometimes, this is for the simple reason that they want a “destination” wedding: in a barn, on the beach, in a garden, etc. Other times, it is because they no longer practice the Catholic faith and so feel no need to have their wedding in the Church. Others want to create their own ceremony. This ultimately flows from the post-modern belief that “I/we decide what marriage is,” when in reality, *God is the author of marriage* (there are also some Catholics who have been improperly catechized and honestly do not know that Catholic marriages have a proper form that must be followed for validity).

The Catholic Church can only recognize marriages that are between a man and woman who are free to marry, in the presence of Catholic clergy and of two witnesses, and in a Catholic Church (unless special permissions have been granted by the Bishop). Some take offense at the Church (an ordered society of Christians) having “rules” surrounding weddings. And yet I have never heard anyone complain about the State of Michigan (an ordered society of citizens) having its own “rules” around weddings (being at least 18, having 2 witnesses, getting a marriage license, not being closely related, etc.)!

Catholics who choose to get married outside of the Church are depriving themselves of so many gifts, including a comprehensive marriage preparation program (to help couples be *prepared* to make the most important decision in their lives!), the grace of the *Sacrament* of Marriage, and the continued grace of being in communion with the Body of Christ. Meaning, Catholics who attempt marriage outside of Christ’s Church without permission should not receive Holy Communion when they live in conjugal union, because in the eyes of the Church they are not validly married and are thus breaking the 6th commandment. This is not the Church excluding them, and they are not “kicked out of the Church.” This is simply a matter of honesty. That is, if one does not believe with the Church, they cannot honestly say they are in communion with Her, and thus cannot honestly receive Holy Communion. The same principle goes for all Catholics: we should not receive Communion if we don’t believe in the Catholic faith, nor if we are aware of unconfessed mortal sins on our souls (see St. Paul’s important warning regarding the reception of Holy Communion in I Corinthians 11:27-30).

The good news is that this situation can be repaired! If there are no impediments (such as a prior valid marriage that needs to be rectified), Catholics who attempted marriage outside of the Church can make vows in the Church, thus making their marriage a true Sacrament (called a “convalidation,” or more common, “having your marriage blessed in the Church”). This can be a moment of great joy as couples are reconciled back into communion with the Body of Christ and can receive Holy Communion again (once they have gone to Confession). I am always happy to discuss these difficult situations as they arise.