

(Bishop Michael Sheridan continues his catechesis on marriage.)

Marriage is a lifelong partnership of the whole of life, of mutual and exclusive fidelity, established by mutual consent between a man and a woman, and ordered towards the good of the spouses and the procreation of offspring (see CCC 1601).

Marriage is a . . . partnership of the whole of life. In marriage a couple vow to give themselves **totally** to each other. Theirs is a mutual self-giving. If marriage is to be authentic, a spouse cannot promise a partial gift of self or a gift of self only some of the time. Because marriage is a partnership of the **whole** of life, contraception violates the very meaning of marriage.

When a couple uses contraception, they are equivalently saying to one another, "I give you myself entirely — except for my fertility." Contraception makes a lie of their marriage. Christ gave himself completely for us, to the last drop of his blood. If marriage is to be a sacrament of Christ's love for his church, the spouses must give themselves to each other **totally** — including their fertility.

We will take up the subject of contraception again when we consider the two ends or purposes of marriage.

Marriage is a . . . partnership . . . of mutual and exclusive fidelity. Conjugal love demands that the spouses are faithful to each other. No one can make a total gift of self to another "for the time being." Neither can one make a total gift of self to more than one person. For this reason adultery, polygamy and all promiscuity contradict the meaning of marriage.

"By its very nature conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of the spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves which they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement 'until further notice'" (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 1646).

Again, because marriage is a sacred sign of Christ's love for his church, the love of the spouses must be exclusive. Christ is not fickle. He is not faithful to us one day and unfaithful the next. Neither can it be for a married couple.

Marriage is a . . . partnership . . . established by mutual consent. Marriage is the only one of the seven sacraments of the church that is not conferred by a priest or deacon. Marriage is conferred by the couple themselves

— each spouse on the other. "The Church holds the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that 'makes the marriage'" (CCC, 1626). This is why it is so very important that the spouses understand the reality to which they are committing their lives. They are, in fact, freely giving themselves to each other so that the two of them might become one flesh. If the spouses themselves confer marriage on each other, why is it necessary for a priest or deacon to witness the exchange of vows?

The sacrament of marriage is not a "private" relationship. Although marriage is entered into by two individual persons, it is nevertheless an ecclesial (church) reality. Marriage places a baptized couple in a new relationship with the church. They become that "sacred sign" which is a sacrament. The minister who assists at the celebration of marriage receives the consent of the spouses in the name of the church.

When God blesses a married couple with children, that couple has yet new responsibilities to the church. "From the marriage of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born and, by the grace of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, those are made children of God so that the People of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries. In what might be regarded as the domestic Church, the parents, by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children" (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Vatican II*, 11).

It is necessary that any Catholic who wishes to marry have the marriage witnessed by a priest or deacon — unless dispensed from that obligation by the bishop. If a Catholic does not have his or her marriage witnessed by the church's minister, the church holds that marriage to be **invalid**. This means that a true marriage has not taken place. And because of this very serious violation of church law, the couple may not receive the sacraments of the church until the marriage is regularized in the church.

If any Catholic has entered

into marriage without the witness of a priest or deacon, and is otherwise free to marry, he or she should approach the parish priest as soon as possible in order to have the marriage validated. No



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MOST REV. MICHAEL J. SHERIDAN, S.T.D.
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Bishop Sheridan's catechesis on marriage will continue in the next issue of The Colorado Catholic Herald.

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