

# WEDDINGS & MARRIAGE

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A SUPPLEMENT TO THE CATHOLIC STAR HERALD



## Pope: Spouses make each other better

By Francis X. Rocca  
*Catholic News Service*

VATICAN CITY — Presiding over the wedding of 20 couples in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis celebrated marriage as the union of a man and woman playing complementary roles during their common journey through life.

"This is what marriage is all about: man and woman walking together, wherein the husband helps his wife to become ever more a woman, and wherein the woman has the task of helping her husband to become ever more a man," the pope said Sept. 14. "Here we see the reciprocity of differences."

The pope spoke during a wedding Mass for couples from the diocese of Rome.

In typically frank style, Pope Francis admitted married life can be tiring, "burdensome, and often, even nauseating."

But the pope assured the brides and grooms that Christ's redemptive sacrifice would enable them to resist the "dangerous temptation of discouragement, infidelity, weakness, abandonment."

"The love of Christ, which has blessed and sanctified the union of husband and wife, is able to sustain their love and to renew it when, humanly speaking, it becomes lost, wounded or worn out," he said.

Pope Francis also offered practical advice for dealing with marital discord.

"It is normal for a husband and wife to argue," he said. "It always happens. But my advice is this: never let the day end without having first made peace. Never. A small gesture is sufficient. Thus the journey may continue."

Speaking three weeks before the start of an extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family, the pope emphasized the importance of the institution based on marriage.

"It is impossible to quantify the strength and depth of humanity contained in a family: mutual help, educational support, relationships developing as family members mature, the sharing of joys and difficulties," he said. "Families are the first place in which we are formed as persons and, at the same time, the bricks for the building up of society."

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New spouses exchange rings as Pope Francis, pictured in the background, celebrates the marriage rite for 20 couples during a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Sept. 14.

CNS photo/Paul Haring



## Question Corner

### Wedding rings, annulments and forgiveness

By Father Kenneth Doyle  
Catholic News Service

*Q. Is the exchange of rings necessary in a Catholic wedding ceremony? My daughter doesn't wear any jewelry and doesn't intend to wear a wedding ring either. What happens in that case? (Ireland)*

A. The heart of the Catholic marriage ceremony is the exchange of consent by the couple, and that is all that is really required. The priest or deacon asks the couple the following three questions:

"Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?", "Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?" and (if appropriate) "Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his church?"

Then the man and woman pronounce their wedding vows (usually by repeating them, in short phrases, after the priest or deacon.) Technically, that is all that is required for the sacrament. Most often, the vows are followed immediately by an exchange of rings, after the rings have been blessed.

In many cultures, rings are widely recognized signs of a lifelong commitment to love and fidelity, but they are not an essential element of the marriage ceremony. So your daughter needn't worry — and, financially speaking, the groom will doubtless be grateful.

*Q. I would like to know why the church has an annulment process that actually may involve a tribunal sitting in judgment on a person's previous marriage.*

*It would seem to me that Jesus taught forgiveness and mercy (along with many other things.) Why can't the Catholic Church ask a divorced person to repent of the sin of divorce and receive forgiveness during a confession, then accept that person as a full member of the church, able to marry again without going through the process of annulment?*

*I believe that the key is forgiveness: understanding, mercy and an attempt to show God's love to a person who has probably suffered enough while going through the divorce. (Columbia, Missouri)*

A. Before answering your question, I need to remind readers that it is not always necessary (in your words) for the "divorced person to repent of the sin of divorce and receive forgiveness during a confession."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us in No. 2386 that divorce is not always sinful: "It can happen that one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law; this spouse therefore has not contravened the moral law."

Following the breakup of a marriage, a civil divorce may be necessary to ensure certain legal rights and the proper care of children. As for your question, the answer is in your own observation — that Jesus taught "many other things" along with forgiveness and mercy.

One of those other things Jesus taught, the church believes, is that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman, one that establishes a partnership for life. Christ said in Matthew 19:9, "Whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery."

Therefore, in order for a Catholic to be permitted to remarry, it is necessary to determine that the first marriage was not "lawful" in the church's eyes, which is the reason for the annulment process.

Sometimes it can be shown that the enduring bond of a sacramental marriage was never present from the beginning, perhaps because of lack of freedom, deep emotional instability or a permanent intention to exclude children from the marriage.

When an annulment is granted, it does not affect the legitimacy of the children nor does it imply that the marriage never existed, but only that it did not have the character of a sacramental bond.

You do make an important point in mentioning that spouses may have already suffered a lot during the breakup of their marriage, and for that reason the annulment process needs to be as humane as possible.

For the petitioner, simply filling out the questionnaire about the circumstances of the marriage may dredge up painful memories, so it is helpful for a sympathetic pastor to guide the petitioner throughout the process.

Questions may be sent to Father Kenneth Doyle at [askfatherdoyle@gmail.com](mailto:askfatherdoyle@gmail.com) and 40 Hopewell St., Albany, N.Y. 12208.



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# The pope's influence on ministries to divorced, remarried

By Dennis Sadowski  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Divorce is never easy.

From the realization that love has failed to feelings of shame and a tendency to assess blame, divorce poses an untidy conundrum for families even when a couple settles on an amicable legal separation.

In the eyes of the church, a divorced couple remains married until a decree of nullity is issued, if a couple chooses to go that route.

There's even more of a challenge for faithful divorced Catholics, who often misunderstand church teaching on marriage. Divorced people may separate themselves from the church, believing they have been automatically excommunicated or banned from church activities even though they have not remarried.

People who are civilly divorced and do not marry someone else are not prohibited from receiving Communion under canon law.

However, church practice prohibits people in irregular marriages — those civilly remarried without receiving an annulment — from receiving Communion, serving as lector or extraordinary minister of holy Communion, teaching in a Catholic

institution and holding certain parish or diocesan offices. There is no prohibition on being involved in most other church ministries.

About 20 percent of U.S. Catholics have experienced divorce, according to the General Social Survey at the University of Chicago. The Center for Applied Research on the Apostolate at Georgetown University places the number of divorced Catholics at about 11 million.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, through its National Pastoral Initiative on Marriage, has worked to explain church teaching on divorce in the hope of correcting misunderstandings and keeping people connected with the church.

Bethany J. Meola, assistant director in the U.S. bishops' Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, described the work of the church with divorced, separated and remarried Catholics as accompaniment, a term often cited by Pope Francis.

"It's that sense of making sure that they don't consider themselves separated from the church, that they realize they are baptized Catholics, they are members of the church, they are called to participate with the church, attend Mass, pray, be present with the church," Meola explained.

"(It's) helping people in all of these situations to carry their cross and know that they don't carry it alone," she said.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, former president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, addressed several concerns surrounding divorced and remarried Catholics in the Sept. 15 issue of "America" magazine.

Acknowledging that the indissolubility of marriage is specified in canon law, Cardinal Kasper cited Pope Francis' repeated calls for a more merciful church in making a carefully constructed argument that mercy must be at the heart of the church's outreach efforts, including those to divorced and remarried Catholics. He wrote that the Gospel "is against a legalistic understanding of canon law."

He posed the question: If a Catholic who is divorced and civilly remarried without the first marriage being annulled, "but then repents of his failure to fulfill what he promised before God, his partner and the church in the first marriage, and carries out as well as possible his new duties and does what he can for the Christian education of his children and has a serious desire for the sacraments, which he needs for strength in his difficult situation, can we after a time of new orientation and stabilization deny absolution and forgiveness?"

Such questions are being weighed by church leaders in advance of the upcoming extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family Oct 5-19.

Healing and acceptance are at the heart of ministries to divorced and remarried Catholics.

*Editor's Note:* More information about the church's ministries for divorced, separated and remarried Catholics is available online at [www.foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage/church-teachings/divorce](http://www.foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage/church-teachings/divorce).

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CNS photo/Stefano Spaziani, pool

Pope Francis celebrates the marriage rite for 20 couples during a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Sept. 14.

## Pope says spouses make each other better men and women

(continued on page S1)

The newlyweds ranged in age from 25 to 56 and represented a variety of situations, with some already having children or having lived together before marriage.

Cohabitation, though not a canonical impediment to marriage, violates the Catholic Church's teaching on marriage and sexual love. Pastoral ministers helping Catholic couples prepare for

the sacrament are urged to encourage them to regularize such situations prior to marrying.

At the start of the papal wedding Mass, the brides, wearing traditional white gowns, were accompanied up the aisle of the basilica by their fathers or other male relatives. The grooms entered with their mothers. The pope called out each couple's names as he read the rite and then each couple,

groom and bride, separately, responded "si."

As a thank-you present to the pope, the couples jointly contributed to an

educational and recreational center for disadvantaged youth in a suburban neighborhood of Rome, to be established by the local branch of Caritas.

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