

Sacraments III:

The Sacraments of Vocation

The final two Sacraments are ones that have a different focus from the other five. The other five Sacraments focused on initiation into the Christian life or aid in following the Christian life. The final two Sacraments – Matrimony and Holy Orders – are the most controversial and misunderstood of the seven Sacraments since they are the least shared Sacraments among Christian traditions.

The Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders are sacraments of vocation, A vocation is a call from God to live a way of life or to conform one's life to God. The four types of vocation in the Catholic Church are matrimony, holy orders, religious life, and single life. Religious life and single life are both vocations as a way to living the call to follow Jesus in their daily lives but are not sacraments. Holy Orders and Matrimony are both expressions of Jesus' ministry and the nature of God and therefore are sacraments. Regardless, we need to see both of these sacraments of vocation as life-long calls to express the will and love of God to the world.

The Sacrament of Matrimony

Marriage was a common experience in the Old Testament and ancient world. Marriage had two principal functions: the union of families and the procreation of children. Until the modern era marriage was seen as a social institution meant for the good of the society through the union of people and the advancement of the culture and society through the bringing forth of the next generation. Marriages between families was a massive affair whose celebration could last for days or weeks. In the 1st century the party from the marriage lasted up to a week with food, wine, and celebrations. Ancient cultures understood marriage as a contract between two families. The husband's family wanted a wife who would give their son children and continue the family lineage. The wife's family wanted a husband who would care for and protect their daughter. Breaking a marriage entailed the defilement of the wife, the breaking of family bonds, and the loss of protection to the wife. Therefore breaking a marriage was a big deal.

From a biblical perspective, marriage was primarily centered on the preservation of the society. People could only marry between people of the same tribe so that no tribe would dominate another or diminish in size to the point of dissolution. Marriage was forbidden outside of one's tribe and especially outside of the Israelite nation since this practice led to alliances with other nations and religions. During their sojourn in the desert, Moses permitted a husband to write a bill of divorce and dismiss his wife as a way of protecting and preserving his household. Situations of sexual immorality or other grievous crimes permitted this action. Jesus, however, reemphasized the values of marriage when questioned on the topic. Marriage was founded through Adam and Even in which God states: "it is not good for man to be alone." Eve became Adam's wife and the two lived together in harmony with God. Jesus returns to this moment in the Bible as the core theology of marriage. The man and woman are joined together to become one. This oneness cannot be broken, with one exception. In the event that a marriage is considered "unlawful," then the marriage can be dissolved. An unlawful marriage is a marriage contracted with close relatives, between other tribes or nations, or one in which the wife or

husband were considered defiled prior to marriage. Other than these notable exceptions, marriages were never dissolved.

Over the course of the last 20 centuries, the Church has further developed a theology of the Sacrament of Marriage or Matrimony. The core values of marriage are: the good of the spouses and the procreation of children. The first element is easy to understand and the way that most people understand marriage. The man and woman join together to mutually support and provide for each other. Some people call this love others a form of mutual support. Ideally love would be the characteristic that defines this aspect of marriage. The second aspect of marriage is the procreation of children. All of the Sacraments of the church are expressions of God. Therefore in each of the Sacraments we should be able to understand the way each Sacrament speaks about God's ministry in saving the world and showing himself in the Sacraments. Sacraments are always public. The same applies to marriage. Marriage is not the social ratification of two people deciding to support one another. For if marriage was about the communal support for two people joined together in mutual support, then what good would marriage be for society? The preservation of individuals? The expression of love? Marriage is more than that. The necessary component of the procreation of children is the social component in which the society supports and encourages the love shared between these two individuals as a way of furthering the society and promoting the longevity of our society. Therefore this last aspect of marriage reminds us that people are married not just for their own good but for the good of all.

Although the procreation of offspring is an important social dimension of marriage, the theological component of showing God's love to the world is just as important. In the Book of Revelation Heaven is the final culmination of all things in which God is wed to his creation and people. God so loves the world that we wants all people to be with him and share in his love for all eternity. Therefore marriage is not simply the love shared between the couple but their love becomes an expression of God's love. As the couple grows deeper in their love for each other, they show to the world the depth of God's love for all people. Marriage is a way of showing commitment and dedication to all people and especially the unfailing and always faithful love of God.

Marriage has several elements or parts to the marriage rite. The first part of the rite is the entrance of the couple into the church. As they entered into the church on the day of their baptism, so they entered the church to be united to each other. The vows are exchanged between the couple who are the celebrants of the Sacrament. Although the priest is there, he acts as a witness of the vows on behalf of the Church. The priest, deacon, or other witnesses simply witnesses on behalf of the Church that the vows were taken. The couple are the celebrants of the Sacrament not the witness. The exchange of rings are symbols of the undying love the two will share. The rings are blessed as part of the Sacrament and the Rite. Some cultures add a lasso to show that the couple is untied together, or candles to show the light of Christ that came at Baptism, and some cultures exchange coins instead of rings. These symbols all express the same reality: the two have become one.

Annulments: Ideally all couples would be properly prepared for the Sacrament of Matrimony and therefore desire to live their vows faithfully until death makes them part. Yet, this is not always

the case. Jesus taught that marriages are considered unbreakable until death unless the marriage is considered unlawful. In the event that a marriage breaks down, for whatever reason, the Church has a process called an annulment. The annulment is a process in which the couple and Church lawyers evaluate the marriage looking for signs that the marriage was not valid from the moment the vows were exchanged. Situations that would invalidate a marriage include, not following the rules of the Church regarding the marriage, i.e. not in a church, no priest or witness was present, the person was already considered married, the person was not mature enough to make the vows, the couple did not want children, the couple did not intend fidelity or the good of his/her spouse. These conditions cause a marriage to be considered invalidly contracted. In the event that a marriage is considered invalid, then the two are free to marry.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders

The Sacrament of Holy Orders is the most controversial of the seven Sacraments. Since the Protestant Revolution in the 16th century, the priesthood and everything connected with it has been the subject of scrutiny. The most common critique is that Jesus, the only high priest, ended the covenantal priesthood of the Old Testament, therefore Christianity no longer needs priests. Parts of this is true. Jesus is the great high priest to which no priesthood beyond his is necessary. Also, the covenant of the Old Testament is fulfilled in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Nevertheless, fulfilled and ended are two very different actions. Jesus said: "I have not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it." (Matt 5:17) If the priesthood of the old covenant ended with Jesus, then Jesus abolished the old law and inaugurated something new causing God to become a liar. Thus, the priesthood and the sacrifices of the old covenant had a purpose that relates more strongly to God than to us.

What is the Sacrament of Holy Orders? Like the Sacrament of Matrimony, which orders and validates Holy Orders, the Sacrament of Holy Orders is ordered to the service of God's people. The lowest rung, deacons, serve the people and the priesthood through their giving of their lives. The word deacon means servant. Deacons assist the priest in his duties and functions such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, visiting the sick and homebound, and assisting at Mass. The priest is the most common expression of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Priests give their lives to the people for the sake of mediating the blessings of God and directing the lives of the people to God. Like the priesthood of the old covenant in which the priests would offer sacrifices and mediate the blessings of God, so do the priests of the new covenant. But there is one exception. The priests of the old covenant did it on the merits of their own priesthood which God inaugurated and directed. The priests of the new covenant mediate and work under the great high priest, Jesus, who orders and provides the graces which the priest mediates. The importance of priests as a separate role in the Christian era is to relate to the priesthood of all people. Through baptismal grace, all people are priests. The role of the priest is to offer sacrifices to God and mediate the blessings of God and the needs of the people. The people can offer their own sacrifices and mediate the blessings of God and the needs of the people. The ministerial priesthood, however, orders their actions and provides a visible expression for it. The ministerial priesthood is to direct and connect the priesthood of the baptized and order it to the priesthood of Jesus. Bishops are the highest rank of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Like the priests, bishops

perform all the same roles with the addition of the ordination of priests and the specific role of governing the people of God.

The ordination of a deacon is simple. The laying down of one's life for the sake of the people, the promises of fidelity to the Church, ministering of the Sacraments, and the living out of the life of service. These promises are made to the bishop through whom they minister. Ordination to the priesthood adds to the ministry of the deacon. The Priest is responsible for the forgiveness of sins and the Sacrifice of the Mass. Unlike the deacon, the hands of the priest are consecrated with Chrism Oil and set apart for the celebration of the Mass. The priest is also required to promise celibacy unlike the deacon. The Bishop is ordained by other bishops, at least three need to be present. The head of the bishop is anointed with Chrism Oil to show the Holy Spirit coming upon him. The signs of the bishop include the miter (his hat), the crosier (his staff), and the ring, sign of fidelity to his people.

The two most common controversies regarding the priesthood are the only-male priesthood and celibacy. Most people consider the restriction of only men being priests as a product of the Church or of human choice. If this were the case, then the Church could change the requirements for priesthood at any time. Alas, that is not the case. Jesus, when he inaugurated the priesthood at the Last Supper, chose only men to ordain or commission as priests. This choice should seem strange to us. Jesus said that a woman had the greatest faith of anyone he met, only women were present at the Cross and his death, women constantly followed him wherever he went, women were some of his best disciples, and ministered to his needs. Nevertheless Jesus chose only the eleven disciples to commission as priests of the new covenant. The reason behind his decision is the object of many debates. Some claim that the historical time prevented women from taking leadership roles and now we are in a new era. Yet, women priests were common in other religions of the 1st century and Jesus clearly thought very highly of women. Some claim that this is a mode of oppressing women. Yet the church changed the role of women and gave them more authority than any other group until the 20th century. One argument, which is rarely used, is the relational argument. The Church is feminine. Her marriage partner is the priest who is masculine. Between their two roles, the people recognize the marriage of the priest to the church, a union that bears children as new members. If the priesthood was feminine, then all the relationships in the church would be feminine. Where is the value of masculinity? We are left to ponder this mystery. The priesthood is more than a role of service or a position of power. Without these two roles in mind, it becomes clearer why Jesus chose only men: the laws of the old covenant restricted the priesthood to men. The other controversial side of the priesthood is the requirement of celibacy. Unlike the restriction on only men in the priesthood, celibacy is a discipline of the Church and can be changed. Out of the 24 rites in the Catholic Church, only one has a celibate priesthood. Celibacy was highly revered in the early Church as the most perfect way to follow Jesus. Those who wanted to give their lives entirely to him would renounce marriage and live in a community of other celibate men and women. The priesthood carries the same focus. A priest is a man who has given his life to God for the sake of the Church, He should be single-minded in his life so as to witness and conform his life most fully to Jesus the High Priest. Therefore it makes sense that the priesthood should be celibate.