****

**12**

**THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY**

**Big Idea:** Marriageis the oldest human institution, ordained of the Lord for the procreation of the race and the establishment of homes where happiness and joy can reign. **“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him,” Gen 2:18.**

**Bible Text:** Matt19:1-6, Eph5:22-32 and others

**Bible Verse: Heb13:4, “Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed**

 **undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”**

**Students will**

**Know:** ✠Characteristics and blessings of the Sacrament.

✠Institution of the Sacrament.

✠Characteristics of the Orthodox Marriage.

✠Engagement and courtship.

✠The goal of the Orthodox marriage.

✠Equality and office of Christian partners.

**Feel:** Respect for Holy Matrimony as Christ designed it to be at ease regarding equality and order in the Christian marriage.

**Do:** Approach marriage with the appropriate attitude and preparation.

**THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY**

Marriage is and has been a universal practice for almost every civilized culture throughout history, yet it is considered to be a Sacrament in the Orthodox Church. A Sacrament is a visible form of an invisible grace, it’s a ***mystery***, an open door through which mankind passes from the realm of the physical and earthly, into the reality of the spiritual and heavenly – the realm of communion with God. A Sacrament is seen in the context of created reality (for example, wine and bread in the Eucharist, water in Baptism, and oil in Confirmation, etc…). This created reality is then projected into the Kingdom of God and transformed into a higher reality, which belongs to the spiritual realm.

As a result of our Lord Jesus Christ’s work of redemption, marriage is raised to a new level that transcends human procreation and legal contracts. Marriage is, on one level, a created reality, which is indeed a universal practice. Men and women are attracted to each other, fall in love, and marry. But this created reality of marriage can be assumed into the Kingdom of God and sanctified. When a man and a woman come to Church to be married, they are experiencing the transfiguration of their earthly marriage into the reality of the Kingdom of God.

In the Holy Gospel according toJohn2:1-11, we read about our Lord Jesus Christ attending a wedding ceremony in Cana of Galilee. By attending this wedding and in performing His first miracle there, our Lord Jesus Christ forever blessed marriage and set it apart as a “sanctified” way of life. This first miracle performed by the Lord at the wedding of Cana of Galilee is also symbolic of the first wedding in the Garden of Eden; the transformation of water into wine is symbolic of the Sacramental transformation of the earthly reality of marriage into something heavenly and spiritual. (Adapted from an article by Fr John Meyendorff).

Marriage, as a Sacrament, belongs to an entirely different order than the mere union of man and woman through civil contract. Basically, it regards the husband and wife as symbols of another marriage namely, the marriage of our Lord Jesus and the Church: **“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord … therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything,” Eph5:22, 24.**

**“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it … so husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church,” Eph5:25, 28-29.**

**INSTITUTION OF THE SACRAMENT**

Holy Scripture does not explicitly mention when our Lord instituted this Sacrament. Nevertheless, some Fathers have said that He instituted it when He attended and blessed the wedding at Cana of Galilee (John2:1-11).Others have said that the Lord instituted it during His discussion with the Pharisees about divorce when He said, **“What God has joined together, let no man separate,” Matt19:6.** In any case, StPaul explicitly calls marriage **“a great mystery (**Sacrament**),” Eph5:32.**

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ORTHODOX MARRIAGE**

* **No Mixed Marriage**

In **2Cor6:14-16**, St Paul gave six reasons why a believer should not marry an unbeliever. **“Do not be equally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you *are* the temples of the living God”.** These reasons include:

1. God’s command, “Do not be equally yoked together with unbelievers”.

2. Righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness.

3. Light has no communion with darkness.

4. Christ has no concord with Belial.

5. Believers have no part with unbelievers.

6. The temple of God has no agreement with idols.

When St Paul said, in **1Cor7:14, “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband”,** he was talking to people who believed and were already married but their spouses had not accepted the Faith yet. Immediately before the above verse he said, **“If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him,” 1Cor7:12-13.** Then he also said, “**if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases,” 1Cor7:15.**

* **Monogamy**

“Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband,” **1Cor7:2.**

* **Divorce For Sexual Immorality Only**

“Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery,” **Matt19:9.** Adultery and fornication lead to hell (Pro7:27; 9:13-17; 1Cor6:9, 10).

**ENGAGEMENT AND COURTSHIP**

An engagement is the honourable announcement to the community that the couple plans to marry soon, likely within a year. To the couple, it is a time of getting better acquainted and ascertaining whether or not they are prepared for marriage and are really meant for one another.

It is natural that engaged couples will be together, talk together, and will exchange views on marriage, children, birth control, likes, ambitions etc. But they must not take liberties one with another, for they are not married. Marriage privileges must be reserved until after marriage, lest love turns to hate and mutual respect be lost completely (2Sam13:15).

Avoid petting and caressing lest passion override reason and will, and ruin it all. Let the couple be honest and sincere with one another. Do nothing that will hinder your private prayer or spiritual purity. It is very important for future happiness that both be virgins at marriage.

**THE GOAL OF THE ORTHODOX MARRIAGE**

Very often couples get married for the purpose of fulfilling certain needs that they have in their own personal lives. Therefore, they come to marriage expecting happiness, emotional well-being and personal satisfaction, without even having to work for them. When they don’t get these things, they feel cheated or blame their spouse. As Orthodox Christians, we approach marriage very differently. The goal of marriage is not the fulfilling of one’s needs; rather, the ultimate goal of marriage is heaven.

**EQUALITY AND OFFICE OF CHRISTIAN PARTNERS**

In modern society, as well as in Christendom, a recurring debate is going on. It deals with the tension between equality of the partners in marriage and office or order in marriage. Often, this tension has turned into a polarity between men and women, and sometimes even breeds hostility. There are two elements in the Orthodox service of marriage which serve to heal such tension, while making clear the teaching of the Church on the twin themes of equality and order concerning husband and wife.

As to equality, during the ceremony crowns are placed on the heads of the bride and groom. This act is symbolic of their citizenship in the Kingdom of God, where **“there is neither male nor female,” Gal 2:28** and of their dying to each other (the crown is often a symbol of martyrdom; see Rev2:10). The words of St Paul are clear on marital equality: **“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does,” 1Cor7:4.** Husband and wife belong to each other as martyrs, they belong to God as royalty, and they are called to treat each other accordingly.

But within marital equality there is also order. The epistle passage read at the Sacrament of Marriage is Ephesians5:20-33; the exhortation to husbands and wives which begins with a call to submit to each other (Eph5:20). The husband is to serve God as head of his wife, as Christ is head of the Church (Eph5:23). The wife is to be subject to her husband as the Church is subject to Christ (Eph 5:24). There is nothing here to suggest that the wife is oppressed in marriage, anymore than one would call the Church oppressed in relationship to Christ. He who calls us “brethren” (Heb2:11) and “friends” (John15:15) exhorts the husband to love his wife, to nourish and cherish her as He Himself does the Church (Eph5:28, 29).



Thus, marriage is a sacrament: holy, blessed, and everlasting in the sight of God and His Church. Within the bonds of marriage, husband and wife experience a union with one another in love, and hopefully the fruit of children and one day the joy of grandchildren. And within the bonds of marriage there is both a fullness of equality between husband and wife, and clarity of order with the husband as the icon of Christ, the wife as the icon of the Church.

(Adapted from *“*The Church Sacraments”by Habeeb Guirguis).