

MARRIAGE IS FOR LIFE!



STRAIGHT ANSWERS FOR

Catholics on Marriage & Divorce

A Word to the Reader

DIVORCE IS ONE OF THE GREATEST EVILS OF OUR TIME, AFFECTING THE CATHOLIC POPULATION ONLY SLIGHTLY LESS THAN OTHER SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY.

These divorced Catholics are in an extremely vulnerable and dangerous position. Not only have they lost the partner with whom they set their hopes to share the daily burdens and pleasures of life, but at the same time their resolve to continue to lead a Christian life is being treacherously undermined by spurious pronouncements from the many false shepherds of today's Church, denying the objective evil of adulterous "second marriages."

If we truly believe in Christ, and truly want to love and serve Him in this life, we must accept His plain teaching that "re-marriage" after a divorce is not marriage at all, but adultery.

What divorced Catholics need now more than ever is a clear statement of what is right or wrong for them — that is, what the law of God requires of them — so they can live accordingly and avoid any part in the horrible sacrileges and scandals which are becoming commonplace in many Catholic parishes.

May this writing provide such a guide, and may it also serve to enable other Catholics to properly counsel, and practice real charity toward, their divorced relatives and friends ... *which cannot be done apart from the truth.*

What is marriage?

Marriage is a divine institution, established by God Himself from the very beginning of human history, and later elevated by Our Lord to be a Sacrament of the Church. Each particular sacramental marriage is the indissoluble union of a man and woman “in one flesh,” as a common principle for the generation and rearing of children: “Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh.” (GEN. 2:24)

For how long do marriage vows bind the spouses?

Having become “one flesh,” the man and woman remain united as husband and wife until that flesh is dissolved by God through the death of either of the spouses.

If a man and woman have the power to marry each other, don't they also have the power to end their marriage?

It is true that a man and woman marry by exchanging vows, but it is God Himself Who joins them in marriage. In other words, their marriage arises *as a result* of entering into a mutual contract, but their *relationship* as man and wife is *created directly by God*, not by their contract: “God hath joined [them] together.” (MK. 10:9)

This is why spouses are bound above all by the divine laws governing marriage, and not just by their mutual promises.

Does the Church ever allow the faithful to seek a civil divorce?

Only for grave reasons, and only with the local bishop's permission, may a Catholic do

so. A civil divorce decree may be needed, for instance, after a justified separation in order for the innocent party to re-establish his or her property rights. Likewise, after obtaining a decree of nullity from the Church, the parties would need to procure a civil divorce in order to regain a legal status reflecting the fact that they are still free to marry. In truth, however, regardless of the court's view of their history, such divorces are at best a sort of legal fiction. In the former case, the separated parties remain man and wife, and in the latter case (in which the supposed marriage was declared null) the two were never actually married to nor divorced from one another.

Are all divorced Catholics necessarily excluded from receiving the Sacraments?

No. Certainly an innocent party in a divorce, who has accepted the ensuing burden of living celibately, should not allow himself to be troubled by an exaggerated sense of guilt. To separate (with the local bishop's permission) from an unfaithful spouse; to secure one's immediate safety, or the safety of one's children, by separating (even before seeking the bishop's permission); to have been abandoned or divorced by one's legitimate spouse — these are hardships, not sins. In themselves, they present no reason for a person to consider himself excluded from the Church.

Any Catholic who has dutifully fulfilled the obligations of marriage, who has extended a willing offer to be reconciled with his or her true spouse (barring serious reasons against a reunion), and who has not taken up cohabiting with some new partner, should have no

hesitation about continuing to receive the Sacraments, including Holy Communion, provided only that he first examine his conscience to ensure that he is in the state of grace.

Even in regard to the guilty party in a divorce, if he or she has made a good Confession of his sins, with true repentance and purpose of amendment, he should take care not to allow his feelings of guilt to go too far. Our Lord instituted the Sacrament of Penance as a means of assuring sinners of God's forgiveness, and thereby bringing peace to our souls. After making a good Confession and embracing a celibate way of life in harmony with the Commandments, a divorced Catholic should cling to the certainty of God's forgiveness. For such a person, the mere fact of being divorced is no barrier to the worthy reception of the Sacraments.

What if, in a case in which there is no decree of nullity issued by the Church regarding a previous marriage, a Catholic or other baptized person obtains a civil divorce and then attempts to marry again while the original spouse is still alive?

Such an attempt at marriage is nothing more than an attempt. No second marriage takes place, and the ceremony itself is simply a scandalous public expression of the persons' intention to live in a continuous state of adultery — objectively speaking, in a state of mortal sin.

No conscientious person should dare to express any note of pleasure in, or congratulations for, such a societal and spiritual catastrophe, but rather should point out the path toward forgiveness of this sin, which

can only be achieved through the parties' repenting of and correcting their situation.

Wouldn't a longstanding relationship of this kind be praiseworthy in some ways, at least for its stability and for the mutual affection and loyalty that the persons show each other?

Not in the case of adulterous sexual relationships. Would anyone think of praising a pair of thieves or murderers for having worked together for a long period of time? Any man and woman who are living together (as if they were husband and wife) without marrying, or who (being Catholics) marry only civilly, or who have attempted to marry again while their true spouse remains alive, are engaged in objectively sinful acts of either fornication or adultery — regardless of whatever other moral responsibilities they may be fulfilling.

Couldn't some divorced persons' circumstances make it just a venial sin for them to "remarry," such that they could be forgiven without having to amend their lives?

There are no circumstances that can change the gravely sinful nature of adultery. This is why Our Lord spoke absolutely about this situation, saying "whosoever" attempts to remarry while his or her true spouse still lives, regardless of the circumstances, is guilty of adultery (a grave sin against the Sixth Commandment): "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if the wife shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery." (MK. 10: 11-12)

Such a grave sin can only be forgiven if the

sinner manifests both sincere repentance and a purpose of amendment — that is, a resolution to end the adulterous behavior. True sorrow for sin always includes such a resolution not to continue in the sin — and where there is no true sorrow, there can be no forgiveness.

Can divorced and “remarried” Catholics receive Holy Communion?

Not until they put an end to their sinful situation by breaking off all scandalous and unlawful bonds.

Don’t the divorced and “remarried” need the Eucharist as a spiritual medicine to help them on their way toward fully converting and amending their lives?

The Eucharist is truly a source of strength against temptations and inclinations to sin, but this speaks only of Its effects. In Itself, It is the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Thus in order to receive the Eucharist worthily in Holy Communion, we must ensure that we are in the state of grace.

The divorced and “remarried,” being objectively in a state of manifest grave sin, could only make a sacrilegious Communion, and thus receive not a spiritual medicine but rather a curse, as Saint Paul warns: “He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Body of the Lord.” (1 COR. 11:29)

But if some divorced and “remarried” Catholics are sincerely at peace about their marital situation, and are convinced in conscience of being rightly able to receive Holy Communion, shouldn’t they be allowed to do so?

It would be gravely sinful, both as a sacrilege and as a public scandal, for any divorced and “remarried” Catholic to receive Holy Communion while persisting in that manifestly sinful situation. Our consciences are not infallible, and no conscience can rightly be called sincere when it refuses to be informed by, and conformed to, the law of God, and instead stands in open contradiction to the Church’s teachings. If a person is truly sincere in his or her desire to approach God, he should begin by fervently asking Him for the graces needed to abandon his sins and to lead a virtuous life.

Doesn’t the Pope have the authority to allow the divorced and “remarried” to receive Holy Communion?

No. Since the Church’s teachings come from God Himself, not even a Pope has the authority to change them. Nor does he have the authority to relax any of God’s commands requiring us to order our lives upon His truth. The Pope does have the authority to establish or change Church discipline in some matters, but even then only in ways consistent with the revealed Truth and the salvation of souls.

The provision of Canon Law forbidding persons who obstinately persevere in manifest grave sin to be admitted to Holy Communion, is derived from the divine law. Therefore not even a Pope can introduce legislative changes or pastoral practices which would oppose this fundamental law and teaching of the Church.

The Fatima Center

In Canada: 452 Kraft Rd., Fort Erie, ON L2A 4M7
In U.S.A.: - P.O. Box 1470, Buffalo, New York 14240
Call toll-free: 1-800-263-8160 | 1-905-871-7607
www.fatima.org | Email: info@fatima.org