

## What Is Marriage?

Marriage is a communion of a man and a woman that reaches its fullest fruition with children, such that the marriage becomes a family. By the exchange of their consent, the spouses surrender themselves to one another within “a partnership of the whole of life” (CCC 1601). There, they strive to foster and deepen their mutual love, which includes the act of procreation. Intrinsic to the definition of marriage are: 1) the one-flesh union (Gen 2:24; Mt 19:5; Eph 5:31) made possible by the complementarity of the sexes and; 2) the procreative potential of that union. The one-flesh union is the consummation or enfleshment of the marriage.

Children deepen and fulfill this union, transforming the marriage into a family, which, by its nature, necessarily includes the rearing and formation of children. Of course, children are gifts and not ends to be achieved by any means, but only through the marital embrace of their parents. Marriage confers the right on the couple to perform those completed sexual acts, which, if the couple is fertile, will produce children...though procreation does not have to be their direct intention for each conjugal act. However, the couple may not deliberately frustrate the union’s procreative power...or said positively, each marital embrace must remain open to life. Any other use of the sexual faculty is a form of masturbation or unchastity (i.e., some measure of selfishness, even if not intended to be so), because such does not achieve complete self-giving...rather, it disfigures or impedes the one-flesh union.

A union of the sexes is still marriage if the couple is per accidens infertile (i.e., not by their deliberate choice), so older people can still marry, for example, if they are still capable of sexual relations, because marriage is a good in itself, though one perfected by children. Impotent people, on the other hand, cannot form a true marriage, because of their incapacity for a one-flesh union. (CIC 1084.1)

The current misconception is that marriage can be defined as an emotional bond, a shared household, and mutually agreeable sexual activity. But while these are (or can be, depending on the circumstances) aspects of marriage, they are not what specify marriage per se (i.e., in its nature)...which is, the "one-flesh union" of the sexes and the (not deliberately impeded) procreative potential of that union...a union in the fullest sense that, by its nature or design, must be permanent, exclusive, and fruitful. In summary, sexual reproductive complementarity is, by the design of nature, integral to marriage.

Jesus raises the human or natural institution of marriage to a Sacrament (cf. Mt 19:3-6; Jn 2:2 and 13:34-35; Eph 5:22-27). Matrimony is the only Sacrament where form and matter are written into creation, because the design of marriage (which implies the existence of a Designer...), as described above, is written in the human heart and even visible in the human body. Then, with the New Covenant, “Christian spouses signify and partake of the mystery of that unity of fruitful love which exists between Christ and his Church, helping each other to attain holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of children.” [Fr. Hardon, SJ]