



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** *Saint Peter's Square*

Wednesday, 6 May 2015 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

The family - 13. Marriage (II)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

In our journey of catecheses on the family, today we touch directly *on the beauty of Christian marriage*. It is not merely a ceremony in a church, with flowers, a dress, photographs.... Christian marriage is a sacrament that takes place *in* the Church, and which also *makes* the Church, by giving rise to a new family community.

It is what the Apostle Paul says in his celebrated expression: “This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul says that the love between spouses is an image of the love between Christ and his Church. An unimaginable dignity! But in fact it is inscribed in the creative design of God, and with the grace of Christ innumerable Christian couples, with all their limitations and sins, have realized it!

St Paul, speaking of new life in Christ, says that Christians — each one of them — are called to love one another as Christ has loved them, that is to “be subject to one another” (Eph 5:21), which means be at the service of one another. And here he introduces an analogy between husband-wife and Christ-Church. It is clear that this is an imperfect analogy, but we must take it in the spiritual sense which is very lofty and revolutionary, and at the same time simple, available to every man and woman who entrusts him and herself to the grace of God.

Husbands — Paul says — must love their wives “as their own body” (Eph 5:28); to love them as Christ “loved the Church and gave himself up for her” (v. 25). You husbands who are present here, do you understand this? Do you love your wives as Christ loves the Church? This is no joke, these are serious things! The effect of this radical devotion asked of man, for the love and dignity of woman, following the example of Christ, must have been tremendous in the Christian community itself. This seed of evangelical novelty, which reestablishes the original reciprocity of devotion and respect, matured throughout history slowly but ultimately it prevailed.

The sacrament of marriage is a great act of faith and love: a witness to the courage to believe in the beauty of the creative act of God and to live that love that is always urging us to go on, beyond ourselves and even beyond our own family. The Christian vocation to love unconditionally and without limit is what, by the grace of Christ, is also at the foundation of the free consent that constitutes marriage.

The Church herself is fully involved in the story of every Christian marriage: she is built on their successes and she suffers in their failures. But we must ask in all seriousness: do we ourselves as believers and as pastors, accept deep down this indissoluble bond of the history of Christ and his Church with the history of marriage and the human family? Are we seriously ready to take up this responsibility, that is, that every marriage goes on the path of the love that Christ has for the Church? This is a great thing!

In the depths of this mystery of creation, acknowledged and restored in its purity, opens a second great horizon that marks the sacrament of marriage. The decision to “wed in the Lord” also entails a missionary dimension, which means having at heart the willingness to be a medium for God’s blessing and for the Lord’s grace *to all*. In deed, Christian spouses participate *as spouses* in the mission of the Church. This takes courage! That is why when I meet newlyweds, I say: “Here are the brave ones!”, because it takes courage to love one another as Christ loves the Church.

The celebration of the sacrament must have this co-responsibility of family life in the Church's great mission of love. And thus the life of the Church is enriched every time by the beauty of this spousal covenant, and deteriorates every time it is disfigured. The Church, in order to offer to all the gifts of faith, hope and love, needs the courageous fidelity of spouses to the grace of their sacrament! The People of God need their daily journey in faith, in love and in hope, with all the joys and the toils that this journey entails in a marriage and a family.

The route is well marked forever, it is the route of love: to love as God loves, forever. Christ does not cease to care for the Church: he loves her always, he guards her always, as himself. Christ does not cease to remove stains and lines of every kind from the human face. Moving and very beautiful to see is this radiation of God's power and tenderness which is transmitted from couple to couple, family to family. St Paul is right: this truly is a “great mystery”! Men and women, brave enough to carry this treasure in the “earthen vessels” of our humanity, are — these men and these women who are so brave — an essential resource for the Church, as well as for the world! May God bless them a thousand times over for this!

Special greetings:

In the next few days various capital cities will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. On this occasion I entrust to the Lord, by the intercession of Mary

Queen of Peace, my hope that society may learn from the mistakes of the past and that, faced with the current conflicts that are tearing asunder various regions of the world, all civil leaders may persevere in their search for the common good and in the promotion of a culture of peace.

I offer an affectionate greeting to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's Audience, including those from Denmark, Switzerland, Indonesia, Korea, the Philippines, Canada and the United States. May Jesus Christ confirm you in faith and make your families witnesses to his love and mercy. May God bless you!

I address a special thought to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. Last Friday we began the Marian month. May the Mother of God, dear *young people*, be your refuge in the most difficult moments; may she sustain you, dear *sick people*, in facing with courage your daily cross and may she be your reference point, dear *newlyweds*, so that your family may be a domestic source of prayer and mutual understanding.