



## Why Should I Marry in the Church?

One of a series • Archdiocese of Washington

Why should I have a Catholic wedding – and why should I get married in a church? I feel close to God when I'm outside, and I love the beach so why

### Marriage in the Bible

- ◆ On your wedding day you invite the Lord into your married life. He will be with you throughout your marriage to help you fulfill your vows. He intends the best for us and is always with us (Jeremiah 29: 11–14)
- ◆ Just as our Lord attended the wedding feast at Cana (John 2), He attends all marriages in the Lord. It is fitting to go before him in Church and receive His blessing.

### Kid Talk

- ◆ Have you ever been to a wedding in a church?
- ◆ Ask your Mom or Dad to tell you about a special wedding they've attended – maybe it was their own!

should it matter? Or for that matter, why marry at all? Who's going to judge us these days if we just live together? In Hollywood they never seem to get married, or at least not until they have kids. And doesn't everyone just wind up divorced anyway? Or miserable? Does marriage really matter?

Each year more than 1,600 couples marry in local Catholic parishes. Getting married in the Church certainly isn't easy – just ask the couples – there's documentation, marriage preparation classes, meetings with the celebrant. And it takes time. There's a required waiting period of at least six months.

Then why a Catholic wedding? Catholics see marriage through a decidedly non-worldly lens. For us, it isn't a case of "what's in it for me?" It's about believing in something so in-

credible that the answer is why wouldn't I? For a lot of couples, marriage may start off with satin and diamonds and maybe a good dance band. But marriage is more than a party or a stroll in the park together. It's closer to running a lifelong marathon: exhilarating, but challenging and not always easy. The Church offers us preparation and training to sustain us on this marathon of giving. And throughout the race God brings us friendship and the replenishing waters of the faith.

Is God calling me to marry? Say you've dated a number of different people over the years, some more seriously than others. Now there's someone extra special. Different. And you're wondering if this is "the one." These stirrings may well be from God, who had a plan for each of us even before we were created, and the feelings may well be His way of suggesting that you give some thought and prayer to the idea of marriage. The Church might say that what you're feeling is the prompting of the Holy Spirit – a call to discern whether God wants you to live out your Christian life as the spouse of this person.

Discerning any call takes time, and in the months leading up to marriage, the Church will help you distinguish your everyday fears from serious warning signs, and help you separate excitement over the idea of a wedding from the essential peace and consolation that tell you this is a true call. Living together before marriage or having intercourse before marriage, cloud the process, with couples often "sliding into marriage" simply because they are living that way already, but without really stepping back and making sure this is their lifetime vocation.

Obey? If we marry after careful listening and praying, we see our decisions as obeying God's call and marriage as being completely open to our spouse. So even when our own needs "aren't met," it is not a cause for breakup, but for staying focused and committed.





There's no room for growing apart. This is like any other Christian call to service, but obviously, so challenging it's hard to imagine it possible without the Lord's help.

### Which brings us to the sacrament of marriage.

Our human relationships have moments of absolute and utter joy, don't they? And even though these moments may be rare, the memory of them sustains us through many a bad day. So, too, with the sacraments, when the Lord comes particularly close to us, bringing us massive quantities of love and grace.

With that grace, He infuses us with everything we need to live out our call with essential peace and joy. He bolsters us to live sometimes difficult lives of service to one another and our children. He fortifies us to resist the temptations to break apart. What's more He enables us, through prayer, to tap this grace throughout our lives, in times of great challenge and great joy.

**OK, I get that, but why does it matter where I get married?** When we make that commitment to marry, we become a single entity in the eyes of society, not just in the eyes of God. As the nuptial blessing reads, "Father...You gave man the constant help of woman so that man and woman should no longer be two, but one flesh, and you teach us that what you have united may never be divided."

We step into roles that have significance in the larger social and civic worlds. We become open to parenthood and leaders of a family. This is a public event, thus the need for witnesses. And in the Catholic Church, the witnesses – by their very presence – assume a unique

responsibility to bless this new family, and signal their willingness to help the couple live out their marriage vows. The priest or deacon represents the Church witnessing and blessing your marriage. Together these witnesses become a source of grace to the marriage. In fact, community is so important that the Marriage Rite begins, "You have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence

of the Church's minister and this community."

Why the church? Because the parish church is a special place that has been set aside and dedicated as a place of prayer to nourish our spiritual lives together as a community. It is where we go to Mass and celebrate baptisms and special events throughout our lives. It only makes sense to celebrate

one of the most important sacraments in our lives – our vocational sacrament to marriage, this covenant to each other before God – in this sacred space.

Couples aren't necessarily articulating all of this when they start out to marry at a Catholic wedding. But they know, intuitively, that having God in their marriage will somehow make it better. And in our experience, when couples pray regularly and go to weekly Mass (together, when they can) the rate of divorce plummets.

No wonder so many want to be married in the church. You can always have the reception in the backyard.

*For Catholics, marriage is the exclusive union of a man and a woman, for life, for the good of each other and their children. It's loving, faithful, freely-chosen, exclusive and open to children, and it's a path that makes spouses holy as we work with God in His ongoing act of creation. So much does God join us on this journey that marriage itself is worthy of a sacrament – a sign that God is right there, in the midst of their lives, filling it with His love. This is why family life is often called a domestic church, Christ present in their midst.*

### For More Reading..

- ◆ United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, Chapter 21
- ◆ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1640 and 1644