

LESSON TWENTY-SIXTH.

ON MATRIMONY.

282 Q. What is the Sacrament of Matrimony?

A. The Sacrament of Matrimony is the sacrament which unites a Christian man and woman in lawful marriage.

“Christian,” because if they are not Christians they do not receive the grace of the sacrament.

\* 283 Q. Can a Christian man and woman be united in lawful marriage in any other way than by the Sacrament of Matrimony?

A. A Christian man and woman cannot be united in lawful marriage in any other way than by the Sacrament of Matrimony, because Christ raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament.

“Lawful.” Persons are lawfully married when they comply with all the laws of God and of the Church relating to marriage. To marry unlawfully is a mortal sin, in which the persons must remain till the sin is forgiven. “Sacrament.” Before the coming of Our Lord persons were married as they are now, and even lawfully according to the laws of the Old Testament or old religion; but marriage did not give them any grace. Now it does give grace, because it is a sacrament, and has been so since the time of Our Lord. Before His coming it was only a contract, and when He added grace to the contract it became a sacrament.

\* 284 Q. Can the bond of Christian marriage be dissolved by any human power?

A. The bond of Christian marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power.

“**Dissolved**”—that is, can married persons ever—for any cause—separate and marry again; that is, take another husband or wife while the first husband or wife is living? Never, if they were really married. Sometimes, for good reason, the Church permits husband and wife to separate and live in different places; but they are still married. Sometimes it happens, too, that persons are not really married although they have gone through the ceremony and people think they are married, and they may think so themselves. The Church, however, makes them separate, because it finds they are not really married at all—on account of some impeding circumstance that existed at the time they performed the ceremony. These circumstances or facts that prevent the marriage from being valid are called “**Impediments to Marriage.**” Some of them render the marriage altogether null, and some only make it unlawful. When persons make arrangements about getting married they should tell the priest every circumstance that they think might be an impediment. Here are the chief things they should tell the priest—privately, if possible. Whether both are Christians and Catholics; whether either has ever been solemnly engaged to another person; whether they have ever made any vow to God with regard to chastity, the religious life, or the like; whether they are related and in what degree; whether either was ever married to any member of the other’s family—say sister, brother, or cousin, etc.; whether either ever was god-parent in baptism for the other or for any of the other’s children; whether either was married before, and what proof can be given of the death of the first husband or wife; whether they really intend to get married; whether they are of lawful age; whether they are in good health or suffering from some sickness that might prevent their marriage, etc. They should also state whether they live in the parish, and how long they have lived in it. They should give at least three weeks’ notice before their marriage, except in special cases of necessity. They should not presume to make final arrangements and invite friends before they have made arrangements with their



pastor; because if there should be any delay on account of impediments it would cause them great inconvenience. Let me take an example of a fact that would render the marriage invalid or null though the persons performing the ceremony might not be aware of it. Suppose a woman's husband went to the war, and she heard after a great many years that he had been killed in battle, and she, believing her first husband to be dead, married another man. But the report of the first husband's death turns out to be false, and after a time he returns. Then the Church tells the woman—and she knows it now herself—that the second marriage was invalid, that is, no marriage, because it was performed while the first husband was still living. She must leave the second man and go back to her husband. You see in that case the Church was not dissolving or breaking the marriage bond, but only declaring that the woman and second man were not married from the very beginning, although they thought they were, being ignorant of the existing impediment, and the priest also being deceived performed the ceremony in the usual manner. If it ever happens, therefore, that you hear of the Church permitting persons, already apparently married, to separate and marry others, it is only when it discovers that their first marriage was invalid, and by its action it does not dissolve the bond of marriage, but simply declares that the marriage was null and void from the beginning, as you now easily understand. Thus persons might unwittingly marry with existing impediments that would render their marriage invalid or illicit. Such things, however, happen very rarely, for the priest would discover the impediments in questioning the persons about to marry.

Protestants and persons outside the Catholic Church teach that the marriage bond can at times be dissolved, but such doctrines bring great evils upon society. When the father and mother separate and marry again, the children of the first marriage are left to take care of themselves, or receive only such care as the law gives them. They are left without Christian instruction and the good influence of home. Then

persons who are divorced once may be divorced a second or third time, and thus all society would be thrown into a state of confusion, and there would be scarcely any such thing as a family to be found. It is bad enough at present, on account of divorces granted by the laws and upheld by Protestants; and only for the influence and good public opinion created by the teaching and opposition of the Catholic Church, it would be much worse. Again, if husbands and wives could separate for this or that fault, they would not be careful in making their choice of the person they wish to marry, nor would their motives be always holy and worthy of the sacrament.

**285 Q.** Which are the effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony?

**A.** The effects of the Sacrament of Matrimony are: first, to sanctify the love of husband and wife; second, to give them grace to bear with each other's weaknesses; third, to enable them to bring up their children in the fear and love of God.

The union and love existing between a husband and wife should be like the union and love existing between Our Lord and His Church. The grace of the sacrament helps them to have such a love. "**Weaknesses**"—that is, their faults, bad dispositions, etc. "**Bring up their children.**" This is their most important duty, and parents receive grace to perform it, and woe be to them if they abuse that grace! Children should remember that their parents have received this special grace from God to advise, direct, and warn them of sin; and if they refuse to obey their parents or despise their direction, they are despising God's grace. Remember that nothing teaches us so well as experience. Now your parents, even if God gave them no special grace, have experience. They have been children as you are; they have been young persons as you are; they have received advice from their parents and teachers as you do. If your parents are bad, it is because they have not heeded the advice given them. If they are good, it is because



they have needed and followed it. The years of your youth quickly pass, and you will soon be thrown out into the world, among strangers to provide for yourselves, and will perhaps have no one to advise you. If you neglect to learn while you have the opportunity you will be sorry for it in after life. If you waste your time in school, you will leave it knowing very little, and an ignorant man can never take any good position in the world; he can seldom be his own master and independent; he must always toil for others as a servant. God gives us our talents and opportunities that we may use them to the best of our ability, and He will hold us accountable for these. It is good and praiseworthy to raise ourselves and others in the world if we do so by lawful and proper means. You may have the opportunity of getting a good position, and will not be able to take it because you are not sufficiently educated. Many young men live to be sorry for wasting time in school, and try to make up for it by studying at night. You cannot really make up for lost time. Every moment God gives you He gives for some particular work, and He will require an account from you, at the last day, for the use you made of your time. Besides, you can learn with greater ease while you are young. But what shall I say of neglecting to learn your holy religion? If you neglect your school lessons you will not be successful in the world as business men or professional men; but if you neglect your religious lessons, you will be miserable, not merely in this world, but in the next, and that for all eternity. Again, will you not feel ashamed to say you are a Catholic when persons who are not Catholics ask you the meaning of something you believe or do, and you will not be able to answer? When they tell falsehoods against your religion, you will not, on account of your ignorance, be able to refute them. Almost the only time you have to learn the truths and practices of your holy religion is during the instructions at Sunday-school or day-school, and after a few years you will not have this advantage. When you grow up you may hear a sermon, and if you attend early Mass, only a short instruction, on Sundays; and if you do not know your

Catechism, you will be less able to profit by the instructions given. Therefore the time to learn is while you are young, have sufficient leisure, and good, willing teachers to explain whatever you do not understand.

When you attend Sunday-school, bear in mind that your teachers have frequently to sacrifice their time or pleasure for your sake, and that you should not repay them for their kindness by acts of disobedience, disrespect, and stubbornness. By spending your time in idleness, in giving annoyance to your teacher, and in distracting others who are willing to learn, you show a want of appreciation and gratitude for the blessings God has bestowed upon you, and please the devil exceedingly; and as God will hold you accountable for all His gifts, this one—the opportunity of learning your religion—will be no exception.

286 Q. To receive the Sacrament of Matrimony worthily, is it necessary to be in the state of grace?

A. To receive the Sacrament of Matrimony worthily it is necessary to be in the state of grace, and it is necessary also to comply with the laws of the Church.

“The laws,” laws concerning marriage. Laws forbidding the solemnizing of marriage at certain times, namely, Advent and Lent; laws forbidding marriage with relatives, or with persons of a different religion or of no religion; laws with regard to age, etc.

\* 287 Q. Who has the right to make laws concerning the sacrament of marriage?

A. The Church alone has the right to make laws concerning the sacrament of marriage, though the State also has the right to make laws concerning the civil effects of the marriage contract.

“Civil effects”—that is, laws with regard to the property of

persons marrying, with regard to the inheritance of the children, with regard to the debts of husband and wife, etc.

\* 288 Q. Does the Church forbid the marriage of Catholics with persons who have a different religion or no religion at all?

A. The Church does forbid the marriage of Catholics with persons who have a different religion or no religion at all.

\* 289 Q. Why does the Church forbid the marriage of Catholics with persons who have a different religion or no religion at all?

A. The Church forbids the marriage of Catholics with persons who have a different religion or no religion at all because such marriages generally lead to indifference, loss of faith, and to the neglect of the religious education of the children.

We know that nothing has so bad an influence upon people as bad company. Now, when a Catholic marries one who is not a Catholic, he or she is continually associated with one who in most cases ignores the true religion, or speaks at least with levity of its devotions and practices. The Catholic party may resist this evil influence for a time, but will, if not very steadfast in the faith, finally yield to it, and, tired of numerous disputes in defence of religious rights, will become more and more indifferent, gradually give up the practice of religion, and probably terminate with complete loss of faith or apostasy from the true religion. We know that the children of Seth were good till they married the children of Cain, and then they also became wicked; for, remember, there is always more likelihood that the bad will pervert the good, than that the good will convert the bad. Besides the disputes occasioned between husband and wife by the diversity of their religion, their families and relatives, being also of different religions, will seldom be at peace or on friendly terms with one another. Then the children can scarcely be brought up in the true re-



ligion; for the father may wish them to attend one church, and the mother another, and to settle the dispute they will attend neither. Besides, if they have before them the evil example of a father or mother speaking disparagingly of the true religion, or perhaps ridiculing all religion, it is not likely they will be imbued with great respect and veneration for holy things. There is still another reason why Catholics should dread mixed marriages. If the one who is not a Catholic loses regard for his or her obligations, becomes addicted to any vice, and is leading a bad life, the Catholic party has no means of reaching the root of the evil, no hope that the person may take the advice of the priest, or go to confession or do any of those things that could effect a change in the heart and life of a Catholic. For all these very good reasons and others besides, the Church opposes mixed marriages, as they are called when one of the persons is not a Catholic. Neither does the Church want persons to become converts simply for the sake of marrying a Catholic. Such conversions are, as a rule, not sincere, and do no good, but rather make such converts hypocrites, and guilty of greater sin.

\* 290 Q. Why do many marriages prove unhappy?

A. Many marriages prove unhappy because they are entered into hastily and without worthy motives.

“**Hastily**”—without knowing the persons well or considering their character or dispositions; without trying to discover whether they are sober, industrious, virtuous, and the like; whether they know and practise their religion, or whether, on the contrary, they are given to vices-forbidden by good morals, and totally forgetful of their religious duties. In a word, those wishing to marry should look for enduring qualities in their life-long companions, and not for characteristics that please the fancy for the time being. They should, besides, truly love each other. Again, the persons should be nearly equals in education, social standing, etc., for it helps



greatly to secure harmony between their families and unity of thought and action between themselves.

“**Worthy motives.**” The motives are worthy when persons marry to fulfil the end for which God instituted marriage. It would, for example, be an unworthy motive to marry solely for money, property, or other advantage, without any regard for the holiness and end of the sacrament. There are many motives that may present themselves to the minds of persons wishing to marry, and they will know whether they are worthy or unworthy, good or bad, if by serious consideration they weigh them well and value them by their desire to please God and lead a good life.

Every person’s motive in getting married or in entering into any new state of life should be that he may be able to serve God better in that state than in any other.

\* 291 Q. How should Christians prepare for a holy and happy marriage?

A. Christians should prepare for a holy and happy marriage by receiving the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist; by begging God to grant them a pure intention and to direct their choice; and by seeking the advice of their parents and the blessing of their pastors.

They should pray for a long time that they may make a good choice. They would do well to read in the Holy Scripture, in the Book of Tobias (viii.), of the happy marriage of Tobias and Sara, and how they spent their time in prayer both before and after their marriage, and how God rewarded them. Advice is very necessary, as marriage is to last for life, and is to make persons either happy or miserable. They should ask advice from prudent persons, and should try to learn something of the former life of the one they wish to marry. They should know something about the family, whether its members are respectable or not, etc. It is an injustice to parents for sons or daughters to marry into families that may have been disgraced, or that may bring disgrace upon them. Some-

times, however, parents are unreasonable in this matter: they are proud or vain, and want to suit themselves rather than their children. Sometimes, too, they force marriage upon their children, or forbid it for purely worldly or selfish motives. In such cases, and indeed in all cases, the best one to consult and ask advice from is your confessor. He has only your spiritual interests at heart, and will set aside all worldly motives. If your parents are unreasonable, he will be a just judge in the matter, and tell you how to act.

I have now explained all the sacraments, but before finishing I must say a word about the *Holy Oils*. We have seen that oil is used in the administration of some sacraments. There are three kinds of oil blessed by the bishop on Holy Thursday, namely, oil for anointing the sick, called "oil of the infirm;" oil to be used in Baptism and in the ordination of priests, called "oil of catechumens" (catechumens are those who are being instructed for baptism); the third kind of oil is used also in Baptism, in Confirmation, and when the bishop blesses the sacred vessels, altars, etc.; it is called "holy chrism." Therefore the sacraments in which oil is used are: Baptism, in which two kinds are used; Confirmation, Extreme Unction, and Holy Orders.