

Why do you want to be married in the Catholic Church?

I always begin my first meeting with engaged couples preparing for marriage by asking them this question: Why do you want to be married in the Catholic Church?

Generally, it is met with a combination of: “uh, because my grandmother will kill me if I don’t” or “I received all of the other sacraments so it just makes sense” or even “because my fiancé is Catholic and it means a lot to them.”

Those are all okay starting places but they don’t get to the heart of the matter. And those responses point to why couples, in general, are asking themselves, “Why involve a priest, use traditional vows, or even get married in a church?”

As church, we need to be able to answer these questions, not with a finger-wagging “no,” but with a compelling witness to what authentic love and marriage is all about.

Marriage isn’t just about us

Too often we forget that marriage is a sacrament of the church. The sacraments are a lot bigger than we are. Believe me, I liked Jim and Pam’s wedding on the television show, *The Office*, as much as anyone, but it doesn’t demonstrate the true dignity of the sacrament.

Just as with baptism or confirmation, the sacrament of marriage should normally be celebrated in a sacred space and witnessed by a cleric (priest or deacon) because it is a sacrament. But what is a sacrament? A sacrament is a visible sign of God’s invisible grace (love). Marriage, as a sacrament, bears particular significance because the couple is called to be an image of the invisible God, who is love. This may sound poetic or flowery, but hard work is what it really is.

The love that a married couple is called to image is a sacrificial love, a love that is willing to give everything for the other. Love is never about the least that that can be done for the beloved but the most that can be done. Some couples might be able to do this on their own...but I certainly can’t. The sacrament of marriage contains

within it a recognition that God is central to the marital covenant and we need God's grace to live out this beautiful, but often messy, sacrament.

Celebrating the sacrament of marriage in a church, with the so-called "traditional" vows and officiated by a cleric, is an awareness that marriage is about something bigger than just us. It means that we are participating in spiritual growth and sanctification (holiness) of our beloved – and, by our witness, the sanctification of whole world.

What does all this mean?

- If you are married, look for ways to more deeply image God's love in the way you love and serve your spouse, especially during this Easter season.
- If you were not married in the church, contact your local parish about entering into a sacramental marriage to more fully receive God's grace in your marriage.
- If you are dating or engaged, discuss these questions about faith and seek a genuine answer to: "why do we want to be married in the Catholic Church?"

And, consider joining us June 10 for Given: Unveiling the Mystery of Marriage at St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park as dating, married and engaged couples come together reflect, pray and connect with others about the sacrament of marriage.