

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

She Said, "Yes!" – Ok, Now What?

Two people find one another and, after some time, they believe that they want to spend the rest of their lives together. They decide to make a commitment to one another and prepare for their marriage.

Marriage is one of the most beautiful and interesting Sacraments in our Church. As Catholics, we are intimately aware that marriage is so much more than a ring, a ceremony and a party. Marriage is the self-gift of two people to each other. It is the gift of oneself for the life of the other. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] states it this way, "The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring; this covenant between baptized persons has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament." [CCC 1601] It is interesting that the *Catechism* should use the term "covenant". A covenant is stronger than a contract. A covenant involves matters of life and death and usually lasts for the life of the parties. In respect of this arrangement, the *Catechism* uses the term "a partnership of the whole of life." This term represents two realities of marriage. The first is that the matrimonial covenant lasts for the lifetime of the spouses. The second is that it encompasses all of their lives. A true marriage involves the entirety of each of the spouses' life. They do not offer merely a facet of their lives to one another, but the whole of it.

This discussion leads us to another interesting fact about the Sacrament of Marriage. In the Sacrament of Marriage, it is the spouses who are the ministers of the Sacrament. "According to Latin tradition, the spouses as ministers of Christ's grace mutually confer upon each other the Sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church." [CCC 1623] The priest or deacon, as a representative of the Church, is a witness to the exchange of matrimonial consent. Then, why get married in the Church? It is in exchanging their consent before Christ and His Church that the marriage bond is raised to the level of a sacrament, and with the sacrament comes the grace that is proper to that sacrament. "[The] grace proper to the sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couple's love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they 'help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children.'" [CCC 1641] The "indissoluble unity" of the marriage bond becomes a sign of the love of God for His people and of Christ for His Church. "Christian marriage in its turn becomes an efficacious sign [of] the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church." [CCC 1617] St. Paul further elaborates this reality, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one." [Eph. 5:25, 31]

Next week, we will conclude our discussion of the vocations of life, and then move on to a discussion of the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Mass.

