

Marriage outside the Church

By Fr. Vincent Pereira, JCD

The Catholic Church is filled with sinners and She loves every member of Her community. We are the Church, the people of God, because of our baptism. In baptism, we each become a child of God, belonging to a parish community that welcomes us to receive the other grace-filled sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ for our spiritual nourishment on our pilgrimage to God's kingdom. It seems that couples married outside the Church are in danger of missing out on those sacraments, such as Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist.

Some couples drift away, misled and are insufficiently informed of our faith and Church's teaching. To borrow an insightful phrase of St. Anselm: "faith seeking understanding", is of prime importance that our people constantly nourish their faith by seeking progress in understanding, deepening the Christian knowledge by exploring the saints' lives, studying the papal encyclicals and heeding the bishops' exhortations. The couples must keep their faith alive.

The couples married outside the Church remind us of the picture Jesus drew of a scattered flock of people without a shepherd. How intense is his compassion for them! Similarly, the Shepherd seeking one sheep goes astray, finding it and rejoicing immensely. The couples married outside of the Church are encouraged to seek a pastoral solution by meeting with a pastor. In our archdiocese, there are many caring pastors and good friends who can assist them to re-engage, reconnect and return to the core of their spiritual life.

The ecclesial community is compassionate, deeply concerned for the spiritual well-being of each couple married within and more so, outside the Church.

Blessed Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation on the Christian family affirms that "the aim of pastoral action will be to make these people understand the need for consistency between their choice of life and the faith that they profess and try to do everything possible to induce them to regularize their situation in the light of Christian principles. While treating them with great charity and bring them into the life of the receptive communities" [#82]. It's time that the pastors and God's people encourage those friends married outside, to be reintroduced to the sacramental grace by a simple process or formality called Convalidation.

The Convalidation of marriage is an act by which an invalid marriage is rendered valid. I am talking about a couple's one and only union that has taken place outside the Church. This sacrament is a channel of mutual sanctification for their inner beings, the means by which the couple in love makes each other holy and brings each other closer to God. The role of each one

of us is not only to be the stewards of the sacraments on earth, but also to be pathfinders of the road to heaven. Let each one of us be the real evangelizer, the messenger of the Gospel. When couples marry in the Church, they are married in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This article is the second of a series on the value of Marriage Law and the Tribunal Ministry. In the next issue, the article will be on divorce and remarriage.