

Were you married by a Catholic priest or deacon?

As Catholics, we value marriage. Marriage is a vocation in which man and woman grow in holiness through their mutual love and support and by God's help, but it is also filled with its own difficulties and challenges. Jesus Christ knew this and so instituted marriage as a sacrament. He performed his first miracle at a wedding in Cana, changing water into wine. In his preaching, He spoke about how marriage is something for life and that man and woman become one flesh by their marital love. The Church has always valued marriage as a sacrament, which gives grace to couples so that they might live this life with love, fidelity, and courage.

How do Catholics receive the sacrament of Marriage?

Catholics receive the sacrament of marriage when they freely and with the right intention make their vows in the presence of a Catholic priest or deacon. It doesn't matter whether the other partner is Catholic or not, for Catholics to receive the sacrament of marriage (and the grace they need to live that life effectively), they need to be married in a Catholic ceremony. We call this requirement to be married in the presence of a Catholic priest or deacon in a Catholic ceremony, *Form*. It means that anyone who is baptized Catholic must be married in a Catholic church. So important is this requirement that those Catholics who are not married by a Catholic priest or deacon should not receive communion until they are. [Note: in some instances, the Bishop has dispensed the Catholic party from the requirement of being married in the Catholic Church.]

But I wasn't married in the Catholic Church!

Unfortunately many Catholics do not get married in a Catholic ceremony. Many people, perhaps, haven't heard of this requirement. Perhaps in some cases, a non-Catholic partner didn't want to get married in a Catholic church. Maybe, they desired to be married somewhere special and could not find a Catholic church. Maybe, one of the partners was already married and so they couldn't get married by a Catholic priest or deacon. Whatever the reason, it could still be possible to receive the sacrament of marriage and the graces needed to live the married life.

How do I get my marriage to be a sacrament?

For couples where one or both of the members have been married previously, there is the possibility of applying for an annulment. In the annulment process, a priest or deacon assists you in examining your prior marriage to see if you truly were free to marry, had the right intentions, or were married by a Catholic priest or deacon. For the first two areas, the process might take 6 or more months. For the last area, it might only take a few weeks and some paper work. For couples (never married before) who were not married by a Catholic priest or deacon, the fix is really simple. You can meet with a priest for one of two options. You could have a ceremony called a *Convalidation*. Sometimes a convalidation is called "getting our marriage blessed" or "getting married in the church." In it you profess your vows with the intention of receiving the sacrament of marriage. There is a second and even easier way of receiving the sacrament of marriage. If you were not aware of the need for form or unable for some reason to get married in a Catholic ceremony, you can meet with a priest to receive a *Radical Sanation* from the bishop, which blesses your original wedding with the graces of the sacrament of marriage. It is a very simple process and only requires a short meeting with a priest.

Why should I do anything to get the sacrament of marriage?

Why, because the Lord wishes to be a part of your marriage. At the wedding feast of Cana, the Lord was invited and so was able to work a miracle. By receiving the sacrament of marriage, you invite Christ into your marriage so that he might work the miracle of giving you the grace you need to live the married life. It's the grace to endure difficulties and troubles. It's the grace to be good parents, raise your children in the faith, and share with them in the joy and grace of Holy Communion. It is the grace to be a good and faithful spouse.

The following article was written by Fr. Adam Streitenberger, priest of the Diocese of Columbus. For information about having your marriage validated, please contact Fr. Kitsmiller at rkitsmiller@stsimonjude.org. You may also contact the Tribunal of the Diocese of Columbus, 614-241-2500.