

# Epiphany III

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[ 0 : 00 ] This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, where it's from this morning's Holy Gospel in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

It shouldn't surprise us that Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding. Why? Because marriage matters.

Marriage is the first sacrament God gave, and the only sacrament instituted before the fall. In Genesis chapter 2, verses 23 and 24, we are told, Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Marriage is the foundational human social relationship. It is essential to the good order and future of the church and of society.

[ 1 : 12 ] Not that everyone has to be married, but marriage between one man and one woman for life. The sacrament, as God instituted it in Genesis chapter 2, needs to be encouraged, supported, protected, honored, and esteemed.

This is what Jesus teaches in St. Matthew chapter 19, verses 1 through 12. The Pharisees came and asked if divorce should be granted for just any reason.

Jesus answered them by quoting Genesis 2, 24, and then added, Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.

Jesus teaches marriage is intended to be indissoluble. When they pressed him, Jesus said the only reason Moses allowed divorce is because of the hardness of man's heart, and not because it is what God desires.

Why? Because marriage matters. Scripture provides few reasons for allowing divorce.

[ 2 : 27 ] Here again in St. Matthew 19, Jesus identifies sexual immorality, adultery, for being the primary reason. In 1 Corinthians chapter 7, verses 10 through 17, St. Paul adds the situation where a husband or wife abandons the marriage because their spouse has committed themselves to Christ and the unbeliever chooses to leave.

The church has never permitted divorce, but recognizes and is placed in the canon law circumstances that form the grounds for annulments. But for annulment to be granted, it needs to be shown there was a flaw to the marriage at the time it was entered into.

These grounds are and should be few. Marriage matters. Now I need to step back here and make it clear that divorce isn't some sort of higher or some sort of unpardonable sin.

Given how broken society and how broken the church is, divorce does happen. The circumstances are more often complicated than we can or that we should know.

At times, divorce is necessary for reasons besides adultery or abandonment, such as cases of physical or emotional abuse. There may be an innocent party.

[ 3 : 55 ] And even when there is not, forgiveness is always available. Therefore, those who have been divorced should not be looked down upon or treated as outcasts. Instead, the church needs to show compassion and be supportive towards them.

Some who have been divorced may be in a healthy second marriage. The church should accept and encourage those couples. Some of you may have been raised by a step-parent whom you love and are grateful to have in your life.

Or you may be a step-parent who loves your step-children as much as any natural children you may have. These relationships should be valued and supported by the church.

But this said, Jesus is clear about the indissolubility of marriage. And the church can never be supportive of serial monogamy.

Marriage, divorce, marriage, divorce, marriage, divorce. That's serial monogamy. The church, our church, needs to uncompromisingly teach what scripture and tradition teaches about marriage. [ 5 : 09 ] She cannot turn a blind eye to failed commitments or be an annulment factory. Marriage matters. Each of us who are married needs to realize its value and its blessings and commit ourselves ever more deeply to our spouses.

The unbelievably high divorce rate within the church first and then hopefully within society at large needs to be reversed. Do you know that a couple who got married in 2021 has a 50-50 chance of being divorced within three years?

And that the number one reason for divorce isn't adultery, isn't abandonment, or even abuse. It's incompatibility. What used to be called irreconcilable differences.

43% of all divorces are for that one self-centered reason. What is more startling is the percentage of marriages of at least 10 years that are ending in divorce.

That rate is between 40% and 66%, depending on the age of the couple when they were married. Again, incompatibility is the number one reason for those divorces.

[ 6 : 39 ] While overall divorce rates are going down, part of that decrease is the number of marriages is also going down. More people than ever, across all age groups, are living together as if they were married.

Scripture calls this fornication. That is not the answer to lower the divorce rate. Marriage matters. The marital relationship is to be an icon. It is to be a visible testimony of the relationship between Christ and His church. In Ephesians 5, verses 31 and 32, St. Paul states, For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. The relationship between Christ and the church is one of self-sacrifice, unquenchable love, and unbreakable commitment. The same is to be true with marriage, especially Christian marriage. Marriage isn't about self-fulfillment in sex. It's about forming an inseparable bond between two lives, making them one, and those two walking together for richer or poorer in sickness and in health, with fidelity to one another, and if possible, bearing and raising children in the new covenant for their salvation.

[ 8 : 19 ] Ephesians 5 teaches marriage is a life of mutual submission. Jesus exemplified and exemplified servant leadership by giving himself up upon the cross for us.

And in turn, we surrender our lives, we take up our cross, and we follow him. Therefore, husbands are to love, serve, and give themselves up for their wives as Christ did for the church.

Wives are to love and submit to their husbands, following them the way the church follows Christ. The Lord is the bridegroom. The church is his bride.

Especially Christian marriages should reflect this truth. Marriage matters. Marriage matters. So what about our marriages?

What about the marriages of those whom we know? Our family, our friends, children, grandchildren. Do they matter? What about those of you who are single?

[ 9 : 24 ] Does marriage matter to you? Does marriage matter enough for us to remain committed to it, help others remain committed to it, or be willing to commit to it when the right relationship comes into your life?

Are we willing to say, I'm not leaving? Are we willing to say, divorce is not an option? Are we willing to, with our spouse, work through whatever is needed for our marriages?

To not merely survive, but thrive. Not in some superficial Facebook or Instagram way, but in a real way.

Are we willing to build our own marriage into something that strengthens and grows through the ups and downs, the gains and the losses, illnesses, and aging? Does marriage matter?

Brethren, I don't think it was by some accident that Jesus' first miracle was performed at a wedding. Though his hour had not yet come, I believe our Lord specifically chose to act because of the great value he has given to the sacrament of marriage and his desire to bless that couple in Cana who were starting theirs.

[ 10 : 48 ] I believe he acted to show marriage matters. I pray it matters this much to us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.