



Faithfulness

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Fidelity is an essential element in marriage and is the foundation on which it is based. Marriage is about more than love, as love is a mystery that is hidden under faithfulness, which represents the victory of love over time. The essential content of the spouses consent is the reciprocal promise of their fidelity as a guarantee of the *unity and indissolubility* of marriage.

Since St. Augustine, fidelity is one of the goods of marriage: *bonum fidei*. This fidelity can be seen from two distinct points of view which are, at the same time, complementary: the anthropological and sacramental point of view.

From an anthropological point of view fidelity is the quality of those who have faith in someone they trust; it is only possible to believe in someone who is trustworthy. At the heart of any personal relationship there is a minimum of faith and trust, even more so for the whole relationship of friendship, which is the mutual pursuit of good. Infidelity in a friendship is dangerous; but the deeper the friendship is, infidelity can cause pain that kills. If this is true in a simple friendship, the more it will be between a man and a woman, having loved and given to each other in such a way that formed, as Scripture says, one flesh (Gn 2,24).

Today we talk a lot about the relationship between faith and sacrament in regards to marriage. According to some, the faith that we discuss here has to do with the subjective degree of adherence to the mystery in the sacrament which is celebrated. In a case of poor faith or non-existent, some think that there would be no sacrament, and so it would be possible to cancel or dissolve this relationship. This interpretation can attract many supporters today in ecclesial public opinion.

We must, however, consider things from another point of view; from what in sacramental theology is called the *minister* of sacraments, which in the case of the sacrament of marriage, are the spouses themselves. Assuming the information from the theological tradition, namely St. Thomas Aquinas, the council of Florence and then the Council of Trent defined that, in order to give a sacrament, it is necessary to meet three conditions: things like matter, words like form and a minister who intends to do what the Church does. In addition, the efficacy of the sacrament does not depend on subjective conditions of the minister, but on Christ, for the sacraments instituted by Christ, gather from Him their effectiveness, mediated by the human instrument, which is the person of the ministry, acting in the person of Christ and the Church. In the sacrament of marriage, the ministers are the spouses themselves, the matter is consent and form the words with which they exchange vows. To be valid, it is necessary that the couple, as ministers of the sacrament, do what the Church intends, which is assumed as a minimum from the moment they ask to be married in the Church.



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So the foundation of the sacrament of marriage is not the subjective faith of the intending spouses, but the faith of the Church that the spouses, as ministers, should desire and serve. This faith of the Church is objective; it does not depend on the convictions nor the spiritual state of the minister, but on the Church and her faithfulness with regards to Christ. From this faithfulness, spouses united by the sacrament of marriage are an efficacious sign.

At this point you can bring up the question of mixed marriages: a Catholic who celebrated their union with a non-Catholic Christian. We know that the Church does not recommend these marriages, although they are accepted under certain conditions. The Church's reservation regarding these marriages has a reason for being and is a sign of prudence, considering the good of the spouses.

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