

Talk Three

Marriage is a Communion of Love and Life.

Let us pray:

Almighty and Eternal God, Creator and Maker of all mankind; by Your divine wisdom You Chose and blessed the union of married couples so that they might reflect the union of Christ with His Church. Look with love and kindness upon all married persons. Renew their marriage covenant by increasing within them Your love and strengthen their bond of peace so that they may always rejoice in the gift of Your blessing. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

It may seem strange to talk about the “ends” or “purposes” of marriage. It’s doesn’t fit our vocabulary today or our idea of marriage. What does “end” or “purpose” mean?

Strange it may be, but our Prayer Book liturgy reflects the Church’s consistent teaching since 1549.

1. The primary end of marriage: the procreation of children and their education and spiritual formation.
2. The secondary end of the marriage: the good of the spouses, their physical, psychological, spiritual, and moral development.

IMPORTANT: *It has always been understood, and it should be understood that both of these “ends” of marriage are equal and inseparable; and together they make up what is the nature of marriage.*

In the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, it reads:

[Holy Matrimony] is commended of Saint Paul to be honorable among all men; and therefore is not to be enterprised, nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men’s carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding: but reverently, discretely, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God. Dually considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained. One cause was the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and the praise of God. Secondly it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such persons as be married, might live chastely in matrimony, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ’s body.

What is printed in the 1549 is also in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, which is the current BCP used in the Church of England.

In the 1926 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of Ireland, it reads:

[Holy Matrimony] to be honorable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained:

First, for the increase of mankind, according to the will of God, and for the due ordering of families and households, that children might be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name;

Secondly, for the hallowing of the union betwixt man and woman, and for the avoidance of sin;

These two “ends” or “purposes” are listed in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer in the final paragraph of the Declaration on page 423. But what is different?

The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God’s will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord.

1. The order of the “ends” or “purposes” of marriage are reversed. Of first importance are the needs of the husband and the wife, their help and comfort.
2. Children are second.

This flip represents popular thinking today. First take care of one’s needs and comforts and then, take care of others. When we survey the growing disconnect between marriage and children we see increased dysfunction in family life and in society.

Remaining childless: Many couples today (even Christian couples) are choosing to remain childless. Children are seen as burdensome and hindering. Careers and material goals are ahead of starting a family. Birth control and abortion.

Remaining single and having children: In addition, today more single persons are deciding to have children and adopt children. In 2007, nearly four in ten births were to unmarried women, and many of them were in cohabitating relationships. Most of those relationships did not lead to marriage, and those that did marry, the marriage did not that lasts.

According to God’s plan, husband and wife generously welcome the gift of a child(ern), and their stable, *sacrificial* loving relationship provides the environment in which children grow and flourish.

Scripture

Sacred Scripture reveals that God is love (1 Jn 4:8). We learn that every part of creation comes forth from this divine love (Gen 1:1-26). We know from Divine Revelation that in addition to being created from God’s love, man was created in His image and likeness. (Gen 1:27).

Man is:

1. Created from love.
2. This love bears the image and likeness of God.

Husband and wife:

1. Co-create children from love.
2. Their children bear their image and likeness as well as God's own image and likeness.

All human beings have an interior, subjective need to reflect God, and this reflection is present at all times because we always bear His image and likeness.

Examples:

1. We mirror God primarily as persons, as beings endowed with an intellect and free will. Just as God has an intellect, so does His image: the human person.
2. God is a communion of three loving persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As God's image and likeness men and women are made to form relationships. Christianity teaches that God has given all persons the vocation *to love* like God, and in loving form right relationships. This is the universal call to holiness.

Marriage a unique communion of persons

Marriage is a unique in our pursuit to form right communion between persons. God designed marriage to bring together the totality of a man and a woman: mind, body and soul, and form a complete communion *to love* and *to give life*.

Marriage creates a "one flesh" union between husband and wife. The marital vow establishes a partnership for the whole of life.

- Exclusive fidelity
- Marriage is always open to life
- Marriage is participating in God loving
- Marital love forms the gift of self to another
- Husband and wife serve as a sign of life and love in a way that no other relationship can.

Christians have a great responsibility to be good stewards of the gifts of life and love.