

Divorce and Remarriage

Why would the Church want to make life difficult for those who have already gone through a painful civil divorce? According to some critics of the Catholic annulment process, the Church “re-traumatizes” those who want and may deserve, a second chance at marriage after their first marriage failed.

Why should the Catholic Church make people go through an annulment in the first place? No other Church or Christian community, Orthodox or Protestant, makes anyone go through this in such a detailed procedure. In fact, no other religion in the world forces anyone to review his or her previous marriage before being able to marry again. Couldn't the priest who is preparing the couple for marriage simply discern whether both parties have sufficiently “worked through” their previous marriage(s) and are now ready to “go on”?

Why is there need for a Church tribunal to discern whether or not there was a valid marriage that continues to bind someone, or if there was some problem that may need attention before someone remarries? Is not this matter a personal one, and not the business of anyone else? Why does the Church take marriage so seriously, and stop people from doing what they want to do?

The only answer to these questions is the seriousness in which the Church takes Jesus' prohibition of divorce. Jesus told the men of his time that although Moses permitted divorce, they should not (Matt 5:31). Jesus said that a man and wife are one before God and no man should “separate what God has joined” (Matt 19:6). In fact, Jesus taught that man and wife are “one flesh”, a very strong reminder of the beautiful unity of man and woman as husband and wife.

The Church takes divorce seriously because it takes marriage seriously. Marriage is a pact, a covenant between a man, a woman and God. Nonetheless, we know that people change, they make mistakes, and sometimes cannot keep promises and vows. The Catholic practice of annulment is an attempt to look carefully into the truth about certain marriages to determine what went wrong, and to declare that certain marriages had from their beginning flaws that would ultimately make the marriage invalid.

The use of a trained marriage tribunal is the best means we have been able to develop in the Church to help us honor both our Lord's prohibition of divorce and, at the same time, to accommodate the reality of broken marriages.

One special difficulty is when one of the parties is a non-Catholic and does not want to have to go through a process of annulment. This is understandable. Nonetheless, the Church has to respect every marriage entered into in good faith. We hope the non-Catholic party will be patient with this process.

Another problem often encountered is when the marriage took place a long time ago and information or witnesses are hard to find. This is particularly difficult, but not

insurmountable. The assistance of a priest or a trained tribunal official can be most helpful in this situation. Don't ever give up hope.

The Catholic party may understand the seriousness of marriage and want to do all they can to receive the Eucharist again, but often they feel discouraged if the non-Catholic party does not want to cooperate or lacks the necessary and required information for the tribunal. I only hope that you pray for patience and work closely with your priest. Nothing is impossible with God's help.

If you, a family member or a friend is divorced and remarried outside the Church and you think that it will be difficult to get back to the Church, I hope that you will not give in to any discouragement. Please contact your local parish priest, deacon or subdeacon to discuss what can be done to help you receive the Sacraments again. Likewise, I place myself in your service as well to begin the process. You can call me at 718-237-9913.

With a little good will and cooperation we can help. You may want to call Father Francis Marini, the Head of the Tribunal, at the Eparchial Tribunal at 300 Wyoming Avenue, Scranton, PA 18503-1279, Phone (570) 207-2246, Fax (570) 207-2274 or email: Maronitribunal@aol.com. We will assist in any way we can.

Bishop Gregory J. Mansour