

The Sacredness of Marriage

God's Life-Long School of Love



Outline of the presentation

- ❖ **Sacramentality of Marriage**
 - ❖ Christ-centred aspect of marriage
 - ❖ Eternal character of marriage
- ❖ **Application of the Vision in the Daily Life of the Couple**
 - ❖ The 3 "C's" to a happy marriage

Different Views of Marriage

- ◆ throughout the centuries the institution of marriage has been challenged
 - ◆ **openly**: today's society which has witness the desecralisation of marriage
 - ◆ **more tacitly**: reductionist understanding of marriage
- ◆ This is not surprising: marriage is a universal societal phenomenon common to all people
- ◆ differences in understanding amongst the academic disciplines
- ◆ the importance of the faithful's familiarisation with the Church's understanding of marriage
- ◆ not in an restricted, intolerant and authoritarian manner



Marriage as Sacrament



- ◆ opens up a **pathway** for two specific persons - husband and wife - to enter into God's kingdom
- ◆ for the couple, marriage is the **very revelation of God's kingdom in the world**
- ◆ a **theophany**
- ◆ an entrance into the realm of the miraculous and not the mundane
- ◆ equipped with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to embark upon a common life together towards God's kingdom
- ◆ therefore, more than the mere cohabitation of two people for their own individual gratification

“the kingdom of heaven may be compared to the wedding banquet”
(Mt 22:2)

The Sacramental dimension of marriage

- ❖ this understanding distinguishes the Eastern Orthodox vision from all other understandings
- ❖ therefore **not** an merely human or legally binding institution
- ❖ **not** to be reduced simply to a sanctioned way of procreation
- ❖ loving one another becomes the means by which the kingdom of heaven is attained



“we know that we have passed from death to life because we love” (1 Jn 3:14)

The Sacramental dimension of marriage

a means for encountering God



St Gregory the Theologian (4th cent.):

“for marriage does not remove us from God, God brings us all the more closer to him, for it is God himself who draws us to it”

Reflection:

- in uniting to God's love in their love for one another, marriage enables a couple to experience by way of foretaste the life giving fellowship and unitive love existing between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- God is encountered through the other
- marriage - an opportunity to become 'god-like'; experiencing the life-giving fellowship and unitive love existing between Father, Son and Holy Spirit

“I love God by loving my spouse”

Salvific dimension of marriage

- ◆ **Marriage - not a loss of freedom**
 - ◆ Through the “sending down ... of love perfect” the couple is united to one another and to God, thereby enabled to experience God who is freedom
 - ◆ **Freedom - ???**
 - = being freed from the isolationist and individualist tendencies which lead to a miserable existence and ultimately death.
 - ◆ Marriage - a means to make the eternal and liberating joy of God’s loving and communal mode of existence a present reality



“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (2 Cor 3:17)

Salvific dimension of marriage

- ◆ the **natural bond** between husband and wife is **transformed, uplifted** and **sanctified** in the Church,
- ◆ “O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honour [Κύριε ὁ Θεός ἡμῶν δόξη καὶ τιμῇ στεφάνωσον αὐτούς].”
 - ◆ **GIFT:** conferral of royal status; king and queen of their own kingdom, their household Church
 - ◆ The Church is the miraculous presence of God here on earth; for the couple, the gift of God’s presence becomes a reality within their marital relationship
 - ◆ **GOAL:** Crowns are a reminder that the couple is tasked with the responsibility to actually become a united kingdom.



“Receive their crowns into your kingdom”

Christ-centred aspect of Marriage

- ❖ The sacramental dimension of marriage has its roots in Christ
- ❖ Christ - is the marital bond between husband and wife making them **“one flesh”**
- ❖ Note Christ’s presence at the wedding in Cana of Galilee



Christ-centred aspect of Marriage

Fr Alexander Schmemmann:

“In a Christian marriage, in fact, three are married: and the united loyalty of the two towards the third, who is God, keeps the two in an active unity with each other as well as with God.”



Wedding in Cana of Galilee

- ❖ **Change of water** into wine is a symbol of the transformative power of Christ
- ❖ **Water** - signifies the daily and even mundane tasks
- ❖ **Wine** - a symbol of joy, creativity and fulfilment
- ❖ Christ's presence can transform daily mundane tasks into new life, one's filled with meaning and permanence, ultimately filled with glimpses of **eternity!**



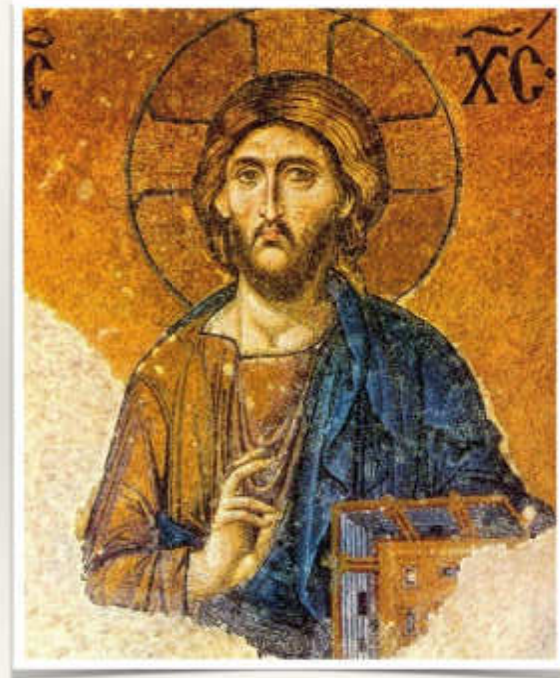
Wedding in Cana of Galilee

- ❖ **“You have kept the good wine until now”** (Jn 2:20)
- ❖ highly instructive for the way husband and wife ought to relate to one another.
- ❖ As relationships move forward the **‘good’** of each partner self should be revealed **at the end** in the same way that good wine matures and becomes richer in taste and texture the more it is left



The Epistle Reading

- ❖ **Ephesians 5:20-33**
- ❖ marriage referred to a “great mystery”
- ❖ marriage - a sacrament of unity
- ❖ man and woman presented as an icon of the unity between Christ and the Church
- ❖ the unity between Christ and the Church is the prototype for the unity to be enjoyed by husband and wife - indeed so intimate that they are called to become “**one flesh**” (Eph 5:31)
- ❖ **σύζυγος** [meaning marriage partner] = two permanently yoked together



The Epistle Reading

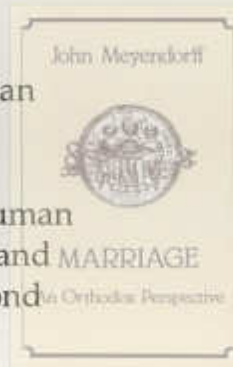
- ❖ **St John Chrysostom**
the couple becomes “one single person [ἕνα τινα ἄνθρωπον]”
- ❖ **Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra**
“Whenever two people are married in the name of Christ, they become the sign which contains and expresses Christ himself. When you see a couple conscious of this, it is as if you are seeing Christ.”
- ❖ **How might this unity be achieved?**
“be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21)



Eternal Character of Marriage

- ❖ With Christ's presence, the natural **bond** between a couple is given new impetus - it is transformed into an **eternal one**

- ❖ **Fr John Meyendorff:**
"the peculiarity of Christian marriage consists in transforming and transfiguring a natural human affection between a man and woman into an eternal bond of love which cannot be broken even by death."



Eternal Character of Marriage

- ❖ in light of the common misconception regarding the dissolution of marriage at the death of one of the partners, it is important to highlight that, as a sacrament of the kingdom, marriage is understood as an eternal reality.
- ❖ "bless this marriage, and grant to these your servant (*name*) and (*name*) a peaceful life, length of days, moderation, love towards each other in the bond of peace, long-lived offspring, grace upon their children and *the unfading crown of glory* [δόξα αὐτοῖς ἀπό τῆς δρόσου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ]."

St John Chrysostom

on the eternal character of marriage



"I fell in love with the excellence of your soul, which I value above all gold. For a young woman who is discreet and ingenious, and whose heart is set on piety, is worth the whole world. For these reasons, then, I courted you, and I love you, and prefer you to my own soul... And I pray, and beseech, and do all I can, that we may be counted worthy to so live this present life, that we may be able also there in the world to come to be united to one another with great security. For our time here is brief and fleeting. But if we shall be counted worthy by having pleased God to exchange this life for that one, then shall we ever be both with Christ and with each other, with more abundant pleasure [πλείονος της ἡδονῆς]."

Path Towards Holiness

The 3 'Cs' to a happy marriage



Path Towards Holiness

Commemoration - Celebration

- ❖ Important to *acknowledge* and *remember* on a daily basis the innumerable blessings received on the wedding day
- ❖ Christ has to be invited in the couple's life on a daily
- ❖ unconditional forgiving love towards each other

Fr Alexander Elchaninov:

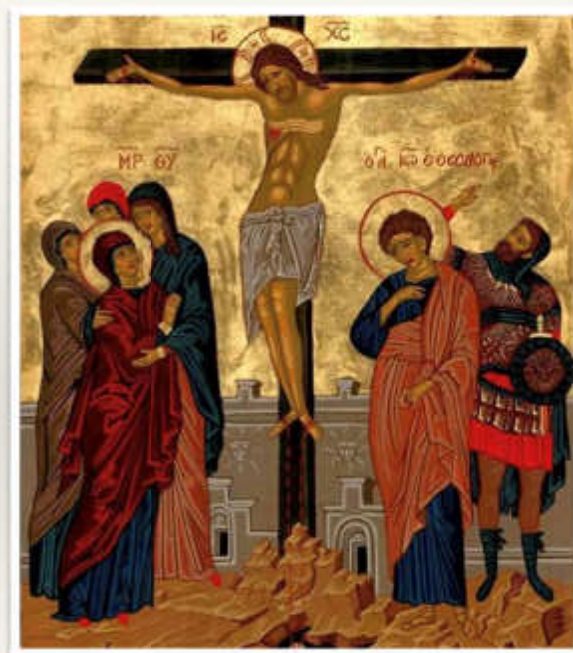
"in marriage the festive joy of the first day, should last for the whole of life: every day should be a feast day; every day husband and wife should appear to each other as new, extraordinary beings. The only way of achieving this: let both deepen their spiritual life, and strive hard in the task of self-development."



Path Towards Holiness

Cross

- ❖ Precisely because the joy of the kingdom is the goal of marriage there will inevitably be challenges
- ❖ *"For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life"* (Mt 7:14)
- ❖ Christ's love involves **self-sacrifice**; so too husband and wife are called to live not an egocentric existence, but one where primary importance is placed on the other
- ❖ *"joy entered into the world through the cross [ιδού γάρ ηλθε δια του Σταυρου χαρα εν όλω τω κόσμω]."*



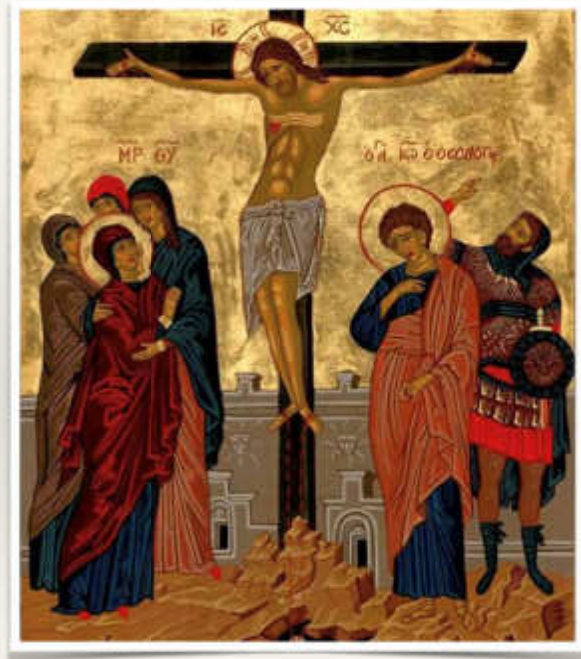
there needs to be a willingness to confront challenges and to embrace crosses

Path Towards Holiness

Cross

◆ David Ford

“a good marriage does take a lot of hard work with a great deal of self-sacrificial, self-denying, ascetical effort in many ways. But again, there is a certain glory in every act of self-sacrificial servanthood for one’s spouse... just as in an infinitely greater way, it was glorious for Christ to sacrifice himself on the cross for the sake of all of humanity.”



there needs to be a willingness to confront challenges and to embrace crosses

Path Towards Holiness



◆ Communication - Communion

- ◆ a daily striving to grow together to such an extent that what results is *profound harmonious unity, unanimous desire and unbreakable solidarity*
- ◆ standing in the presence of each other and sharing their *mind, soul, desire, dreams*
- ◆ Archbishop Stylianos: “an ineffable and captivating reciprocal embrace of infinite love [ένα άρρηκτο και άλληκτο αλληλοεγκαλιασμό άπειρου αγάπης]”
- ◆ life is realised as communion not autonomous self-existence which leads to alienation, loneliness and ultimately death

Deeper Communication

"Listen with your eyes. Look at me; watch me; My actions may be saying more than my words. You must listen with your eyes because I speak with my eyes. My eyes are the mouthpiece of my inner self, and the inner me is the real me, the me I need you to know."

Peter Kallelis, Holy Matrimony: Marriage in the Orthodox Church

Holy Communion

- ❖ Holy Communion seals the union of a couple
- ❖ In the early Church marriages were considered consummated when the couple together partook of Holy Communion

St Theodore the Studite (8th cent.)

"The culmination and goal of marriage is the holy and unique body and blood of Christ"



Holy Communion

❖ “medicine of immortality”

St Ignatius of Antioch

❖ “the cup of synthesis”

St Irenaeus

❖ “the recapitulation of the whole economy of salvation”

St Theodore the Studite

❖ “antidote for not dying”

Christos Androutsos



Holy Communion

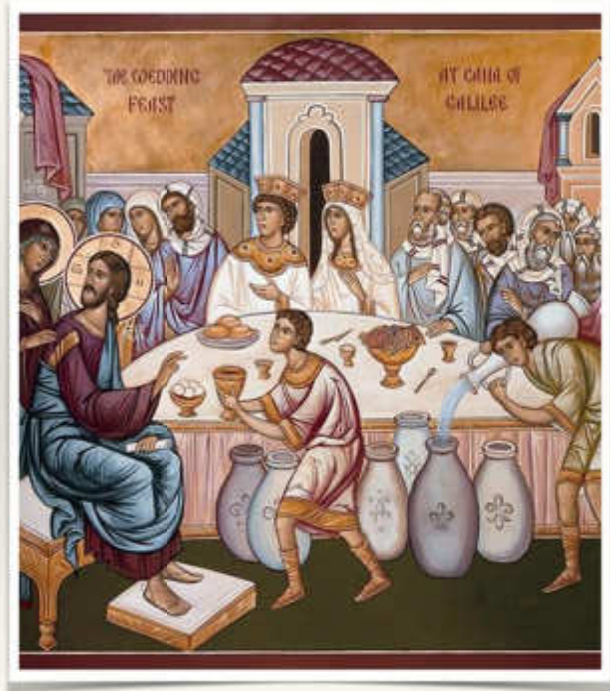
“We say communion [κοινωνία] and so it is for through it we have communion with Christ and partake of his flesh and deity, but through it we also have communion amongst ourselves and we are united with one another. Since we receive of one bread we all become the one body of Christ.”

- union brought about by Holy Communion is not something magical but needs requires the couples readiness to maintain this unity
- Eucharist has
 - 1. acts of offering - need to offer themselves to one another
 - 2. remembrance - need to be inspired by saintly couples as they are enumerated in the marriage service
 - 3. epiklesis - need to call upon the Holy Spirit



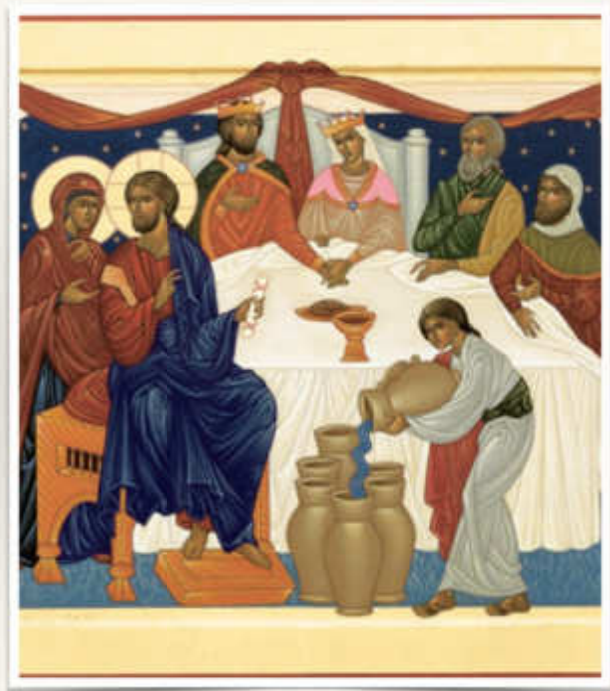
The Sacrament of Marriage

- ❖ **Dance of Isaiah** - the couple walk around the table which has a cross on it led by the priest holding the Gospel
- ❖ Christ will need to be at the forefront
- ❖ 3 hymns offer a kind of blueprint for this journey



The Sacrament of Marriage

- ❖ **“O Isaiah, dance: the Virgin in her womb conceived, and has borne a son who is Emmanuel; he is both God and man, dawning sun is his name; and magnifying him, we call the Virgin bless’d.”**
 - ❖ *the couple will need to celebrate the birth of Christ within their life.*



The Sacrament of Marriage

- ❖ **“O holy Martyrs, who have contested well and have been crowned, intercede with the Lord, that mercy be granted to our souls”**
 - ❖ *the couple will need to remember that there will be daily struggles; through patience and persistence husband and wife will be receive the victors' crowns*



The Sacrament of Marriage

- ❖ **“Glory to you, Christ our God, the boast of the Apostles, the gladness of the Martyrs, whose proclamation is: Trinity of one essence.**
 - ❖ *the couple will need to remember that the goal of their marriage is the kingdom of God, namely to be brought into the company of the saints whose joy is unfathomable since they are in the presence of the “Trinity, one in essence”*

