

The Orthodox Marriage

Marriage (also called *matrimony*) is one of the holy mysteries (sacraments) in the Orthodox Church, as well as many other Christian traditions. It serves to unite a woman and a man in eternal union before God with the purpose of following Christ and His Gospel and, where possible, raising up faithful children through their holy union. It is referred to extensively in both the Old and New Testaments. Christ declared the essential indissolubility of marriage in the Gospel.

Married life, no less than monastic life, is a special vocation, requiring a particular gift or charism from the Holy Spirit, a gift bestowed in the sacrament of Holy Matrimony. The same trinitarian mystery of unity in diversity applies to the doctrine of marriage as it does to the Church. The family created by this sacrament is a small or house church.

The Orthodox Church teaches that man is made in the image of the Trinity, and he is not intended by God to live alone, but in a family, except in special cases. Just as God blessed the first family, commanding Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, so the Church now gives its blessing to the union of man and woman. The mystery of marriage in the Church gives a man and a woman the possibility to become *one spirit* and *one flesh* in a way, which no human love can provide by itself. The Holy Spirit is given, so that what has begun on earth is fulfilled and continues most perfectly in the kingdom of God.

Orthodoxy regards the marriage bond as indissoluble, and it condemns the breakdown of marriage as a sin and an evil. The Orthodox Church does permit remarriage after divorce in some cases – as an exception, a necessary concession to human sin. While condemning sin, the Church desires to help the sinners and to allow them another chance, with an act of divine economy (*oikonomia*). When a marriage has ceased to be a reality, the Orthodox Church faces this fact with *philanthropia* (loving kindness).

Civil Marriage & Divorce from an Orthodox Point of View

The Church does not deny that those involved in a civil marriage are married civilly; it would make no sense for the Church to accept a civil marriage as a sacrament, since the person who performs civil marriages would either deny that they are sacraments or would have no intention and authority to perform a sacrament, let alone that he or she has no authority to do so.

Persons, who have been married civilly or in another church or a different religion, are still considered unmarried in the eyes of the Orthodox Church.

Their divorce in civil court hence would be a moot issue, since they weren't married in the eyes of the Orthodox Church in the first place.