

BEING CATHOLIC....AND GETTING MARRIED: PART II

It's always best to "get it right" the first time, but that doesn't always happen these days in an "anything goes" world. Last week, I tried to explain why it's so important—really essential—for a Catholic to celebrate marriage in the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons—sometimes for a lack of awareness, sometimes because of selfishness—that doesn't happen. So what can be done to "fix" things and "get it right?"

The "fix" (probably not the best word to use here in the state of Illinois) is called a *validation* or *convalidation*; a more common description is "having your marriage blessed." When a Catholic has chosen, for whatever reason, to be married anywhere other than in a Catholic church (or non-Catholic church with a dispensation), it's possible—and really important—to have the marriage validated in the Catholic Church if there are no obstacles to that, e.g., a previous valid marriage that ended in divorce and was never annulled through the Church. I addressed the issue of annulment in a previous article a year or so ago, so I won't go into all that now. But feel free to ask if you missed that or have a question about annulments; they're no longer as complicated as they once were or as expensive as they were incorrectly thought to be, and there are even other simpler remedies for a marriage that ended in divorce long ago and was succeeded by a strong and lasting second marriage.

It's important for Catholics to enter into marriage validly in the Church because marrying outside the Church excludes them from the other sacraments. And it's really relatively easy to remedy this through that simple ceremony called a *validation*. Here's how it works.... Catholics who have been married outside the Church can simply call their parish priest to arrange for a validation. There's some paperwork to be filled out and documents to be obtained. At an initial meeting with a couple, the priest will try to get a sense of the strength of their current civil marriage in order to make a decision about how much "marriage preparation" might be necessary. In most of the cases I've encountered, couples have been married for some time or knew each other for many years before even becoming engaged, so I seldom require them to attend the marriage preparation class for "older couples." I'll simply ask them to do an online course, usually a tool called the *Catholic Couple Check-up* which can help them assess for themselves the strengths and/or weaknesses of their relationship. Once all of this is completed—rarely more than a few weeks—a simple five to ten minute ceremony is scheduled in church where their immediate family can be present to support them and celebrate their union in the Sacrament of Matrimony. Nine times out of ten, this situation arises in the course of baptismal preparation for a newborn, so the validation takes place on the same day as the baptism.

So think about it. If you didn't "get it right" the first time, don't wait to "fix" things and strengthen your relationship with both your spouse and your Church.

Fr. Bob

