

Here are a few chapter titles in the book: Married for Life: Inspirations from those married 50 years or more, by Bill Morelan—

You only get out of marriage what you put into it.

Realize that neither of you is perfect.

Keep two cozy chairs side by side, and enjoy time each day just sitting together.

Learn to put up with her little quirks – she has certainly learned to put up with yours.

Don't get mad over little things – they will soon pass.

These chapter titles, and many more like them, support the idea that when you tell another person on the day of your wedding – you love them enough to be true to them in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health – for all the days of your life – it's not something done once and then you get on with your life – it's something that needs to be lived every day. And because you do make the choice to love that person – and not abandon them, or to start loving someone else with the same intensity – it determines everything you do throughout the day – and throughout your life. Or as one of the chapters in the book states:

Put each other first. Do everything with your spouse in mind.

The Church certainly believes and teaches that a sacramental marriage – one that actually does change us from the inside out – is indissoluble.

That is once someone freely and without reservation says they will have and hold each other from this day forward until death do they part – we actually mean that. . . and that with the grace of God, with sacramental grace --- it can and does happen couple after couple ---- year after year.

Now, the Church does NOT expect anyone to stay in an abusive relationship, or one in which fidelity with one other person cannot be achieved. But neither does it expect someone just to walk away from a relationship without putting some effort into it – through counseling or renewed commitment. But, as we all know, in spite of grace and effort – divorce occurs – even in the best of Catholic families. And divorced Catholics – CAN STILL RECEIVE COMMUNION – because divorce is not the issue – remarriage, without first seeking an annulment of the prior marriage – is the issue.

So just to repeat this all-important statement: divorced Catholics can still receive the Eucharist – only those who are divorced and remarried outside the Church – cannot.

So what is the difference between a divorce and an annulment?

A divorce is a legal decision taking place in a court which states a marriage which once was – is no more. Anyone with a lawyer can get one.

An annulment is a decision by the Church which states a marriage which was legally contracted in every way --- was NOT a Sacramental marriage – it was somehow lacking in the qualities that kept it from being considered a covenant – an unbreakable bond – similar to the covenant relationship God has with His people – that no matter what is done, or how far we humans stray – cannot be broken. And unlike a divorce where anyone who has a lawyer can get one – annulments are not always granted.

An annulment is a decision by the Church which states a legal marriage – was NOT a Sacramental marriage – because it was somehow lacking in the qualities that kept it from being considered a covenant – an unbreakable bond.

Those reasons range from the very simple – one called the lack of Catholic form, to very complex psychological reasons. . .

A Catholic is to be married in a Church before a priest or deacon --- and two witnesses – unless permission to do otherwise is given. Sometimes Catholics don't know that – and they run off to get married in Las Vegas. Sometimes they do know that and so they ask for permission to get married in her

parent's Protestant Church – where her father is the minister. The first can eventually be annulled due to the lack of Catholic form – the 2nd would be a bit more complex to get annulled through what is called a “formal” case.

Formal annulment cases are those in which everything that was supposed to be done – had been done. Marriage preparation had occurred, and if the marriage was taking place outside a Catholic Church – permissions had been obtained.

The work becomes a bit more complex because then this question needs to be answered: why did this marriage fail? What should have been there – but wasn't?

Did the exchange of vows take place “freely and without reservation?” Alcohol or drug use can hinder one's free will. So can doubts about the choice one is making – but let's face it – money, and usually lots of it – has been spent – and how can one ever tell their parents weeks or days before the wedding that they are having serious doubts ---and so they go through with the wedding. Psychological immaturity can give someone reservations about long-term or exclusive commitment to one other person.

Pregnancy can also play havoc with one's free will and commitment. Pressure from parents, friends, and the spouse to be – can also.

The annulment process tries to unpeel the onion -- one skin at a time to get back to the reason which kept this from being more than just a legal exchange – one that was supposed to go to the heart – changing one from the inside out in the covenant relationship of marriage.

Annulments take time. And Pope Francis has recently decided they take too much time – and I agree with him. When I first began ministry in this diocese – we were told to make no promises to someone seeking an annulment – but to tell them it would take at least nine months. Now we are to tell them it will take at least two years. That's not very realistic or just ---

And so I am supportive of the Pope's changes that will NOT make annulments easier to get --- just faster to get. . .

Some things I wanted to accomplish today. First-- is to get rid of the falsehood in many people's mind that divorced Catholics cannot go to the Eucharist. Yes – they can. Because divorce is not the issue – remarriage outside the church is the issue.

A second, if you or someone you know is in the situation where remarriage is the issue – to encourage you to do something about it – especially in this coming year of mercy.

At least, let's have a conversation.

