

Sacrament of Matrimony

Objectives

To understand the meaning of a Christian marriage and to understand the spiritual significance of the marriage ceremony

References

- “The Sacraments of the Coptic Orthodox Church” H. G. Bishop Mettaous (Book 6: The Holy Matrimony)
- “The Chaste Marriage” H.G. Bishop Moussa
- Question to H.G. Bishop Youssef - www.suscopts.org
- “Youth and Family Life” H.G Bishop Moussa

Scriptural Verse

“So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6)

Lesson Guidelines

Marriage is simply the creation of a church, a temple for the Holy Spirit, or a manger for the Lord to live in. When the Lord said, “Where two (the husband and wife) or three (the husband, wife, and child) are gathered together in My Name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matthew 18: 20), He was speaking of the family as a small model of the Church.

The Unity in Christian marriage is not accomplished in a magical way but through participation of the bride and groom by their prayers and their positive response to the work of Grace.

The work of the Holy Spirit makes two individuals into a couple and one Entity.

A. Characteristics of the Christian Marriage

1. Unity

- 1 Adam + 1 Eve = 1 in Christ, (Matthew 19: 6) (1 Corinthians 7: 2) (Ephesians 5: 28). Monogamy originated from the beginning when God created only one Eve for Adam.
- It is not a contract between two people but two people unified in love, sacrifice and harmony, with no more duality.
- Spirit - the two are united in God
- Mind - the two have the mind of Christ
- Emotion - It is more blessed to give than to receive
- Will - The Holy Spirit is the leader of each of their will

2. Continuity

- No divorce except for adultery and denial of faith.
- The church authorizes the annulment of Matrimony in case of infidelity (Matthew 19: 3- 8)

3. Bearing Fruit

- Christian Virtues - reflected in their lives
- Children, if any - blessed and raised in the fear of God
- Service and good deeds - to every one around them

B. Ritual of the Sacrament of Marriage

- The Certificate of Marriage
- The Procession of the Bride and Groom – the deacons accompany the bride and groom chanting the Coptic Hymn “Ep-ooro = O king of peace” in a procession to crown them as king and queen over their house. The bride walks and sits on the right side of the groom as in Psalm 45: 9.
- The three signs of the Cross -the bride and groom present their rings to the priest who places them in a red silk ribbon denoting the bond of the couple to the blood of Christ, the 3rd partner in every Christian family. He makes three knots, making the sign of the cross and saying: “It is a triangular chain not easily cut. What God has joined, let no man separate”.
- The Pauline Epistle - Ephesians 5: 22- 6: 3 - describes the relationship between the couple with a special commandment for the groom to “love your wife, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for her”.
- The Gospel - Matthew 19: 1-6 includes important principles for a stable marriage and formation of an ideal Christian house.
- The three Major Litanies
- Raising of Incense
- The 12 Supplications - supplications of blessings and grace of God for the bride and groom, as He blessed Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, etc.
- Anointing and crowning the couple - *both* bride and groom are united to become priests, kings, and prophets together as one entity united by the Holy Spirit. The crowns are placed on their heads to appoint them as king and queen in the kingdom of God to rule this new family with God’s constitution, the Holy Bible. The priest puts his cloak (the Chasuble) on the shoulder of the groom and bride appointing them as priests over the house. A red ribbon is placed around the bride and the groom to signify their prophetic role; they receive the message of God and declare it to their children.
- Commandments to the Groom and Bride - the priest recites the commandments before the altar becoming a witness that they are wedded before the Lord and must keep what the church advises them to do.
- Kneeling in front of the Altar and placing their hands on the Holy Bible – a promise to keep the Biblical commandments in their lives

Conclusion

Marriage is a holy Sacrament in the Orthodox Church because in it the Holy Spirit unites the two into one. Therefore this marriage is expected to continue even when a couple is faced with difficult circumstances. The ritual of the marriage ceremony is filled with deep spiritual meaning to remind us of the importance of this unity before God and our responsibility towards keeping this unity while being spiritually fruitful.

Activities / Discussion points

1. Discuss the Commandments to the groom and bride in two groups, with the girls working on the groom’s commandments and the boys working on the bride’s.
2. Is there a “Boss” in a Christian husband and wife relationship?