

Today’s scriptures focus our attention on a relationship having its origins in the beginnings of the human life which getting renewed attention today in various cultures as debates and proposed or enacted legislation seek to define it. This relationship is marriage. This weekend also marks the beginning of our month-long annual observance of “Respect for Human Life.” This weekend’s Bulletin insert, “*Marriage, the Sanctuary of Life*” along with today’s scriptures are an appropriate entrance into our observance. All issues affecting human life: abortion, euthanasia/assisted suicide, religious liberty, financial assistance for parents to assist in educating their children, help to immigrants to provide for their families and assistance to become legal citizens, affordable health care for all citizens, a fair and just tax system, laws and policies to preserve, protect, and improve the quality of the air we breathe, the water we drink and the land that grows our food—all of these directly impact human life, marriage and the family.

For the Church marriage is an integral element in God’s work of creation, “the one blessing not forfeited by original sin or washed away by the flood.” (*Rite of Marriage—Nuptial Blessing*) In the first of Jesus’ six signs in the Gospel of John, the changing of water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus conferred on marriage its sacramental character as visibly expressing the loving union between God (symbolized by the wine considered a divine gift) and the human life (symbolized by water, a natural element of the earth). St. Paul and the author of the Book of Revelation develop this sacramental understanding further in speaking of the union of life between the risen Christ and the believers of the Church as that of Christ the “bridegroom” and the Church as “bride”. (*I Cor. 11:3; Rev. 18:23*). The Second Vatican Council, which began fifty years ago this week October 11, 1962, in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* teaches that the family is the *Ecclesia domestica/the Home Church*, the cradle of the faith and of Christian life from which the wider church. (CCC 1656)

Scripture and constant church teaching proclaim that marriage is a lifelong partnership of divine, not human origin. As the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (no.48)* further reminds us: “The intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state has been established by the creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws.... God himself is the author of marriage.” God has endowed marriage with certain essential attributes, without which marriage cannot exist as he intends. Marriage is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. This union, once validly entered and consummated through sexual intercourse (the physical sign of the commitment of the man and wife in the total gift of self to the person of the other in an exclusive and life-long relationship in every circumstance of life) cannot be dissolved by the will of the spouses a faithful, privileged sphere of intimacy between the spouses that lasts until death. In his preaching Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of marriage including its indissolubility. While the Church in its pastoral care, based on certified testimony supporting that some essential element or understanding of the sacrament of marriage and its demands was deficient for a particular couple in their marriage thus rendering it incapable of achieving the fullness of being a sacrament as proclaimed by the church, may grant a decree of invalidity, commonly called an annulment, this does not lessen the ideal established by God, taught and celebrated by the Church, to which all marriages are called. Given its divine origin, the Church also teaches that it is not given to any individual or group of people or legislative assembly to change the definition of marriage based on other criteria than those revealed through observance of the laws of nature or given in divine revelation.

Finally, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us: “The basic way in which any society is built depends on marriage. ... We must pay attention to this: Wherever two people give themselves to each other and, between them, give life to children, this touches the holiness, the mystery of human existence, which goes beyond the realm of what I can control and dispose of. I simply do not belong to myself alone. There is a divine mystery within each and every person. That is why the association of husband and wife is regarded as ...being answerable before God. ... This is not a commercial contract, but a surrender of myself to another person.