

Sacrament of Matrimony

PURPOSE: To understand the significance of the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Holy Church.



Marriage is one of the holy mysteries or sacraments in the Holy Syriac Orthodox Church. Matrimony is defined as "the sacrament by which a baptized man and a baptized woman bind themselves for life in a lawful marriage and receive the grace to discharge their duties." It is the symbol of the divine union between Christ, the Bridegroom, and His Church, the Bride. It sanctifies the conjugal union and the life of the Christian faithful who celebrate it, and gives rise to the Christian family, the domestic church, and the "first and living cell of society". Therefore, through marriage the husband and wife participate not only in God's creative act but in the redemptive act of Christ.

Marriage was instituted at the time of creation of the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve. "So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God he created them; male and female He created them." (Genesis 1:27). Noticing Adam's loneliness and need of companionship in the Garden of Eden, He created Eve. She was not created in the same way as Adam; rather, God took one of Adam's ribs during a deep sleep and formed her. Even at the beginning, God had distinct and unique purposes for man and woman. God instituted the sacrament of marriage to be a monogamous relation between the opposite sexes: man and woman

The Sacrament of marriage is:

1. A Covenant: A covenant is an agreement that involves promises and commitments for everlasting. A marriage covenant involves more than an individual, their spouse, and the law of the land; it involves God and the covenant that He has bound when a man and woman vow their commitment before Him. God describes His relationship with human just like a covenant relationship of husband and wife (Jer.31:31-32). Through Hosea, God expressed His everlasting love, towards His people by forgiving adultery and by making them more faithful to Him (Hos. 2:14).



2. Mutual: In a successful marriage, there is no such thing as one's way. Both husband and wife have the right to share the responsibility to take decision and also the duty to face the consequences and the right to enjoy the rewards too.

3. The Holy bond and unity: Marriage is a long lasting holy bond between two people. The sacramental nature of marriage makes it more than a physical bond and more than an emotional bond. It is, in its deepest meaning, a spiritual and holy bond, built out of the depth of love between two souls. The unity of marriage is meant that a man can have only one wife, and a woman only one husband. They are two in one flesh, not many in one flesh.

The unity of marriage is opposed to polygamy (many wives) and polyandry (many husbands).

4. A Great Mystery: "This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph.5: 32). St. Paul says the relation between Christ and the Church cannot be fully understandable because it is a mystery and marriage is similar to this relationship. Since God instituted marriage as a mystery for the good and happiness of mankind, there are other reasons for its establishment and consideration:

- ❖ **Procreation and furtherance of human species** "And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:28).
- ❖ **Guarding against sexual immorality** "But because of the temptation to immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1 Corinthians 7:2).
- ❖ **Help and assistance of one to another** "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2: 18). It is God's design that man and woman should complete each other, draw strength from each other, and contribute to one another's spiritual growth.
- ❖ **Building block of a strong, stable, sound society** The family is the basic building block of society, thus the stability of the community depends on the constancy of the families that comprise it. Values and principles learned from the family unit will result in a society stable enough to promote development of the whole person.

Life Partner Selection:

The Church does not completely prescribe the selection of a life partner but gives importance to submission and prayer in these matters. As a general rule, the husband should be older to the wife as Adam was to Eve. The physical appearance of a life partner is important but also considers spiritual compatibility, family background, and likeminded in personality traits, financial situations, educational, etc. "But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."" (1 Samuel 16:7). Marriage is a gift from God; a blessing that is characterised by God.

But He said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given" (Matthew 19:11). "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favour from the Lord (Proverbs 18:22). Marriage is the major life choice and therefore the people who wish to marry should prepare themselves with prayer to receive this blessing from God. He who sees the best for you will fulfill it in due time. "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalms 37:4). God gave Eve to Adam and he accepted Eve as his wife. Adam trusted God's hand in his life. (Genesis 2:23)



Pause & Ponder

Think of your favorite married couple (could be parents, aunts/uncles, family friends etc) What do you value about their relationship? What would you change?

Prerequisites for the Couple

To be married under the tradition of the Syriac Orthodox Church:

- ❖ The marriage should be officiated by a canonically ordained clergy for one man and one woman who obtained a valid Holy Baptism and Holy Chrism.
- ❖ They should be in their legal age to marry; and should be sound mentally, physically and emotionally, to lead a successful family life.
- ❖ They should not have close blood relations (should count 7 generations in both parties, relation through godfather and godmother, breastfeeding are also considered)
- ❖ They should not have any other living life partner legally or illegally.
- ❖ They should receive the Sacraments of Holy Confession and Holy Qurbono.
- ❖ The couple should also undergo a premarital counseling arranged by the Holy Church.

DID YOU KNOW?
The Syriac Orthodox Church does not use the cross with the crucified Christ because our faith and belief is in resurrected Christ.

Syriac Orthodox Marriage Service

For the Syriac Orthodox Christian, the marriage service (wedding) is the Church's formal recognition of the couple's unity, a created image of God's love which is eternal, unique, indivisible and unending. The early Church simply witnessed the couple's expression of mutual love in the Church, and their union was blessed by their mutual partaking of the Holy Eucharist.

When the sacrament of Holy Matrimony was developed in the Church, it was patterned after the service for baptism and chrismation. The couple is addressed in a way similar to that of the individual in baptism. They confess their faith and their love of God.

They are led into the Church in procession. They are prayed over and blessed. They listen to the Gospel. The service contains no vows or oaths. It is, in essence, the "baptizing and confirming" of human love in God by Christ in the Holy Spirit. It is the veneration of human love in the divine perfection and unity of the eternal Kingdom of God as revealed and given to man in the Church. There is no "legalism" in the Orthodox sacrament of marriage. It is not a juridical contract, it is a spiritual bond.

It is reiterated that marriage is a sacrament and thus insists that the marriage is solemnized by a priest and they must do so in a Church, not in a private quarters. These specifications are necessary because of the sacramental nature of the matrimony. It is essential to keep in mind that the words of Jesus would mean that man and woman can be united in the wedlock only by God acting through the vicar of God.

The Church, with the whole congregation participating, bears witness to the administration of this Sacrament performed by a bishop or priest under the authority bestowed upon him by God.

The marriage service is divided into two parts, in earlier times held separately, but now celebrated together.

1. The Blessing of the Rings: is the Betrothal service in which the blessed rings are placed on the right hand of the bride and groom by the celebrant.
2. The Blessing of the Crowns: is when crowns of gold (chains with crosses) are ceremoniously placed on the head of the bride and groom.

Sacramental Items for Marriage:



Minnu/Wedding Pendant: The *minnu* is tied around the bride's neck with a knot, which signifies the bonded relationship between the couple. By this they declare that they are tied together for life. In the minnu that we use has seven beads (muthu) in it signifying the seven Sacraments of the Holy Church.

Manthrakodi /Bridal Wedding Saree: "Manthra" means specially blessed and "kodi" means new clothes. The draping of the bride with the bridal saree signifies her welcome to the household of the groom. It also reminds her of Rebecca who took a veil and covered herself when she first saw Isaac. This was an act of humility, chastity, and devotion to her lifelong partner united in marriage by God (Genesis 24:16). The groom henceforth, accepts the responsibility to care for and cherish his bride. Traditionally when a woman dies, she is covered/ or wears her manthrakodi, showing eternal and long-lasting love between husband and wife discouraging remarriage of the widower.

Minnu and Manthrakodi are two components that the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church has adapted into the service of Holy Matrimony with a distinct touch of the Indian (Hindu) culture.

DID YOU KNOW?

Unlike western weddings, it is not the couple that exchanges the wedding bands rather the Celebrant, the representative of Christ, that places the blessed ring on the finger of the bride and groom signifying the importance of God in the marriage.



Blessing of the Rings: The matrimonial service is rich in symbolism. In the betrothal service, rings are blessed and put on the fourth finger of the right hand of the bride and groom. The rings symbolize a contract sealed and placed on the bride and the groom by the priest who is a representative of God. It is an outward sign that the couple is desirous to marry one another of their free will without compulsion. Since a ring has no loose ends, it signifies the permanency and the lifelong nature of the relationship expected from the couple.



The Crowning: In the Sacrament of the Holy Matrimony, crowning the groom and the bride is very symbolic and significant. On many occasions, Jesus Christ is called "King" in the Old and the New Testaments. And "kingship" and "queen ship" as honorary labels are bestowed generously upon those Christian believers who enter into the sacred bond of marriage.

During the marriage ceremony we sing "In your mercies, O Lord, grant rejoicing to the bridegrooms in their crowns and felicity to the brides in their bridal chamber.

Likewise, the groom and the bride are expected to share alike not only in the good things in life but also in the bad things, "in sickness and in health": they are expected to be there for each other. Jesus is the heavenly groom and the Church is His bride. The symbolism is that of sacrificial love. "The Blessing of the Crowns," signifies the

special grace of the Holy Spirit descending on the couple. The "Crowns" represent the crown of thorns placed upon the head of Jesus Christ who laid down His life for the Church. The crowns symbolize the glory, the reward and the honor of God granted to the newly married couple.

The bishop/priest then joins the right hands of the bride and groom entrusting each other and declares them as husband and wife.

Marriage Life - Organization and Duties



After every wedding is a powerful challenge to ensure the marriage continues in the Lord's way. St. Paul pictures the union between husband and wife like the holy union between Christ and the church. And thus marriage turns into a great and holy bond and mystery. St. Paul talks about the mystery of marriage in the following manner: St Paul says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior"

(Eph.5:22);. To the word "submission," many women immediately become offended. This controversial concept has been highly debated and misunderstood. Some husbands and wives actually believe submission indicates that women are inferior to men in some way. Some women who think that if they submit they will lose their identity and become "non-persons." Others fear that submission leads to being used or abused. In a body, head and all other organs are submitting mutually for the smooth functioning of the body. In the same way marriage requires a good deal of mutual submission with respect and love. Jesus was perfectly submissive to the will of His Father, but the fact that He submitted did not alter His status of equality.

St Paul continued, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." (Ephesians 5: 22-33).

The wife is ordered to submit, obey and respect her husband. The husband, in turn, is ordered to love his wife and in no way he is superior to her. Likewise, "for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God" (1 Corinthians 11:12).

Facing Challenges in Married Life

Since marriage is a union between two individuals with their own personalities, tastes, likes and dislikes, there can be several challenges in the married life.

To make it through the challenges of life couples must have certain virtues that they are willing to bring to the relationship, like prayer, forgiveness, patience, humbleness, and mutual respect.



Pause & Ponder

You are part of a family. How will life be for you if each member bears the fruit of the spirit? "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23).

Family Life

In-Laws and Extended Family: The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is not just the joining of two individuals rather two families. As part of the union, the bride and groom must willingly respect, love and care for the spouse's family as his/her own. Although disagreements and differences of opinions may occur, it must be handled with utmost Christian virtues. All parents of both the bride and groom should be treated as their own. The married couple should always keep in mind that in the Ten Commandments that God gave His people, "Honor your father and mother". The relationship between Ruth and Naomi is an excellent example and model of the love and commitment between family members after marriage (Ruth 1:16). As parents age, it is imperative that the children care and support them in the best possible way.



Children: Children are a gift from God, so parents have a huge responsibility to bring them up in the way of the Lord (Psalm 127: 3). When God entrusts a couple with the blessing of children it is not only for their physical and emotional nourishment but more over their spiritual foundation and nurturing. The scripture advises parents: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). The couple must carefully balance the necessary means to ensure the child grows in faith and spirit by encouraging daily family prayer, Church attendance on a weekly basis, active participation in Sacraments, open communication, discipline, and communion with all members of the family.



Teaching right and wrong from an early age is critical "he who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him (Proverbs 13:24). As the child matures in various stages of life, utilize the Holy Church and the parish priest to assist in support and/or advice.

Pause & Ponder

How has the Holy Church and culture influences your upbringing? Do you view it as a blessing or a curse?



Widows and Widowers: The Orthodox Christian tradition encourages widows and widowers to remain faithful to their spouses who are dead to this world but alive in Christ.

Divorce: Orthodoxy regards the marriage bond as indissoluble, and it condemns the breakdown of marriage as a sin and an evil (Matthew 19: 8-9). No man is justified in marrying another woman while his wife is alive or divorcing his wife except for reasons specified in the Canon. The Orthodox Church does permit remarriage after divorce in some cases, as an exception.



Second Marriage: The Orthodox Church teaches that a second union can never be the same as the first. In the service for a second marriage, some of the joyful ceremonies are omitted and replaced by penitential prayers.

Pause & Ponder

How can you follow the Biblical teachings of marriage when the world around you may not encourage the same?

CHECKPOINT:

1. Explain the two parts of the sacrament of matrimony.
2. List and describe the sacramental items used in matrimony.
3. What is the Holy Church's stance on extended families/in law responsibilities?

CHALLENGE:

Discuss why the Holy Church views marriage as a building block of society.

PRAYER

WEDDING HYMN: Sabhayam thiru sabhayamee njan

The hymn describes the special relationship of marriage patterned after the relationship between Christ and the Church.

MANGLISH

Sabayam thiru sabhayamee njan /Athyannuthanude manavatti

Paavana Sabha Chonneedunnu / En varanevan njan dhanya
Vannikkunnen vannen / Vettoru manavalan thanne

Priyanenne vettoru naalil / Sathwaramunnathi njan poondu
Sruthikal athilathi shyamaandu /Mahimayaninjol njaan dhanya

Enne mamodheesayal /Aalmeeyayudham aniyichan
Viralinmel mey rekthangal / Mothiramayen perkeki

Dhurgama margangalilude / Choranmare koosathe
Yordan nadiyingal njan che / Navane jana madhye thedi

Sangadamodu nillavilli kooti / Seeyonil njan chennapol
Kabarathilavane yoodanmar / vachennnu avar ennode othi

Skeppayal njan vettoaam / Sumukhee swagathamodthunnen
Thatha nikeketham njan pooki / viteedaam njan roohaye

ENGLISH:

Church am I, the ho-ly Church | Bride of Heavenly- Bridegroom |

Holy Church thus speaketh,"who | Is my groom! Blessed am I |
Worship I my groom who came | And was betrothe-d to me" |

"That day I was be-trothed |Veil'd me anon no-bleness | Creatures
were all as-tounded | Dressed in glory, grea-t am I!

Armour spirtual-put on | Me, by holy ba-ptism | His sacred Body and
blood | Adorn my finge-r as ring |

Traversing ways ha-zardous | Daring robbers on-the way Came I to
River Jordan | Seeking him among-people |

Overcome with grie-f, waiting | I reached Zion to see him | "He was
entombed by-the Jews"| People there appri-sed me thus

The Lord replies, "I greet you the most beautiful bride, whom I
married by means of the Cross. I have gone up to My Father's House
and have sent you the Holy Spirit.