

An Orthodox Christian Reflection on Marriage

"As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." (Ephesians 5:24-25).

The greatest tragedy in human history is the fall of Adam and Eve, their subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and loss of immortality in paradise. It was the fall that introduced sin into God's creation, and it was their sin that separated them from God, Who Is the Source of love, holiness, and eternal life. Once expelled, Adam and Eve have also separated themselves from each other, and since that time, human beings have continued to alienate themselves from God and each other.

God sought to restore humankind to Himself and human beings to one another through the law and the prophets, but as the Old Testament reveals, human beings continued the fall from Grace. It was only through the coming of Jesus Christ (i.e., God becoming a human being) that the restoration of humanity began. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God, united Himself to our human nature, and through this union of natures into the single person, the God-man Jesus Christ, was the destructive power of sin and Satan halted.

Christ brought to us the unity of His natures into one person. Through His personhood, teachings, and miracles, Jesus Christ sought to unify us to God and one another. What are the two Great Commandments of the New Testament? "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all you soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

Satan's perpetual temptation to separate us from God and one another is stopped. Christ comes and preaches union with God and human beings through His love. What is marriage then, but a reversal of Satan's power to separate us from God, and to divide us from one another? It is a sacrament of love and unity. With that in mind, it is no wonder then that in the Gospel of John the first public miracle of Christ takes place at a wedding feast!

Our personal relationship with God and our marriage to one another in Christ are among the holiest we experience. St. Paul likens the marriage of a man and a woman to the eternal marriage that exists between Jesus Christ (the Bridegroom) and the Church (the Bride). This eternal and holy marriage between Christ and the Church is our role model for marriage as well (Ephesians 5:21-33).

The Orthodox Church does more than simply "bless" a marriage, as some may believe. For the Orthodox, marriage is much more than a legal or emotional bond, and infinitely more than a romantic ceremony. It is a holy sacrament like Baptism and Holy Communion. In the wedding sacrament, the presence of Christ is manifested in the person of the priest, and it is Christ Himself that unites the husband and the wife into one being in the eyes of God.

Thus, when planning a marriage in the Orthodox Church, we must be careful not to approach this sacred event simply as "a romantic religious ceremony," but rather with utmost reverence and devotion as a holy sacrament of the Church.

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