

THE MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

I. DEFINITION AND DIVINE INSTITUTION

Marriage is the Holy Mystery in which, through the Blessing of the Church, the physical bond between man and woman is Sanctified.¹ Husband and wife are joined for their lifetime in a Holy Communion of Life. Divine Grace restores the Blessing given to the first-formed and aims at the fulfilment of the Divine Plan as described in the Book of Genesis. Thus marriage is firstly the Divine Institution commanded by the Creator for the assistance of the one to the other of the first couple and the granting of the Divine Blessing for the multiplication of the human race for the filling of the earth. Marriage was instituted as a Mystery by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the New Testament. The physical union of husband and wife was raised to the Image of the Mysterious Union of Christ with His Church in an insoluble and Holy Union, which secures Divine Grace given to those who enter into the Community of Marriage in order to achieve its high and sacred goals.

1. The Physical Institution of Marriage Raised into a Divine Mystery

Marriage is the Divine Institution, which was established by the Creator Himself, Who Blessed the first couple at the Creation. This is manifested by the fact that God formed two different sexes, “*male and female*,”² right from the beginning implanting in their nature the instinct of multiplication. This is witnessed literally by the narration of the Creation of the first couple in the Old Testament, which presents God as Blessing the first couple and instructing them to “...*increase and multiply, and fill the earth*.”³

The physical bond that is created is closer than any other bond. The woman is made of the same flesh, living and sharing in everything together with her husband, who in the same way is combined in flesh and spirit to his lawful wife. This bond was indicated by the creation of Eve from the side of Adam who, when seeing her and being Enlightened by God, said: “*This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of her husband. Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh*.”⁴ These words, although uttered by the mouth of Adam, were ascribed by the Lord to be of God.⁵

The closeness of this relationship is manifested not only because the natural bond between parents and children is overruled, (“...*therefore shall a man leave his father and mother...*”) but also because the man “...*shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh*.” According to these words, God did not Command the man to simply come to the

¹ Cf. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, pp. 158-159. Evdokimov, *Orthodoxia*, pp. 394-401. Kefalas, *Catechesis*, pp. 187-188. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 215-216. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 324-326. Labadarios, *Sermons*, v. 1, pp. 89-92. Meyendorff, *Theology*, pp. 196-199.

² Gen. 1:27. Matth. 19:4.

³ Gen. 1:28.

⁴ Gen. 2:23-24.

⁵ Matth. 19:5.

woman, but that he was to ‘*to cleave to his wife,*’ expressing the inseparability of the bond.⁶

After the Fall the first couple multiplied but their descendants were overwhelmed by evil and wickedness; and the Wrath of God prevented them from filling the earth even more, for God said: “*I will blot out man whom I have made from the face of the earth,*” “*for I Am grieved that I have made them.*”⁷ And God destroyed the wicked generation of mankind through the Cataclysm. “*And all things which have the breath of life, and whatever were on the dry land, died. And God blotted out every offspring which was upon the face of the earth, both man and beast, and reptiles, and birds of the sky, and they were blotted out from the earth.*”⁸ However, God in His Kindness and Love for man made provision for a new generation of mankind to come forth through the Righteous Noah and his family. Thus He Commanded Noah to build an Ark so that he, his sons and their wives, together with pairs of every species of animal, were saved from the worldwide catastrophe. After the Flood, God repeated His Blessings to Noah saying: “*Increase and multiply, and fill the earth and have dominion over it.*”⁹ Nonetheless, because of the invasion of sin into man’s nature, these repetitions of God’s Blessings did not secure either the monogamy or inseparability of marriage proclaimed by the God-inspired words of Adam. Consequently, it was necessary not only to re-establish the Institution but also to renew the Grace given to those who are united in Christ, strengthening them in order to achieve the high goals of marriage.

According to the New Testament there is, on one hand, the renewal and assurance of the words addressed to the first-formed couple by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, referring to the God-established Institution as well as the renewal of the Blessing of Marriage. On the other hand, there is the invisible Grace that strengthens the couple, working together with God’s Grace to achieve the ideal of Marriage predetermined by the Creator. Hence Marriage according to the New Testament was raised to a God-established Mystery. Furthermore, the renewal of God’s Words by means of which the Divine establishment of the natural Institution of Marriage and its indissolubility was proclaimed by our Lord when He was asked by the Pharisees: “*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?*”¹⁰ Then the Lord answered: “*Have you not read that He Who made them at the beginning made them ‘male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate.*”¹¹ By these Words the Lord confirmed that they were Words of God and consequently vested with indestructible Authority by proclaiming that “*He Who made them at the beginning made*

⁶ St Cyril of Alexandria, *To Malachi 2:14*, in Migne, P.G., 72, 324. Zigabinos, *To Matthew 19:5*, in Migne, P.G., 129, 516. St John Chrysostom, *To Matthew 19:5*, in Migne, P.G., 58, 597.

⁷ Gen. 6:8.

⁸ Gen. 7:22-23.

⁹ Gen. 9:1.

¹⁰ Matth. 19:3.

¹¹ Matth. 19:4-6.

*them 'male and female.'*¹² *"In other words, one male and one female, that he may have one (woman)."*¹³

Thus the interpretation of the Divine Will of God gives the Law of monogamy and the insolubility of Marriage. Truly, if God wanted man to have more than one wife, then at the beginning He would have created many more females. But because He did not create more women than were necessary, His Will is for men not to divorce their wives and that one man is joined to one woman. In addition to the above, the Lord added: *"Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate..."*¹⁴ and the proof of this is that it is *"...abnormal and against the Law..."* to divorce. Divorce is *"abnormal"* because the one flesh in which the couple are united as one, is divided; and *"against the Law"* because *"God united them and commanded them not to separate."*¹⁵ Thus Marriage is elevated by the Lord above its first value, since polygamy is absolutely forbidden as well as divorce, since he or she who divorces commits adultery. *"But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for a reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery."*¹⁶

In addition our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Blessed the Marriage in Cana of Galilee. In order to honour the decency of Marriage with a God-given Sign, He performed the first Miracle thereby Blessing the Marriage, not just with His presence alone but by *"...honouring it with a Gift..."*, having *"... changed the water into unmixed wine..."* and *"...offering to the wedding the greatest Gift of all."* Thus by means of His Holy support and participation in the joy of Marriage, *"He Sanctified the beginning of man's birth."* He went there (to Cana), He Who is *"...the desire and joy of all, to draw away the ancient gloom of childbirth..."* that was the curse of women:¹⁷ *"I will greatly multiply thy pains and thy groanings; in pain shall thou shall bring forth children, and thy submission shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee."*¹⁸

The mysterious nature of Marriage is clarified by St Paul who commands that it should be joined *"...only in the Lord..."*,¹⁹ proclaiming Marriage as an Institution inseparable, Sacred and above that which was in the Garden of Eden because the Christian is a member of the Mystical Body of the God-Man to Whom he belongs in spirit and body. When two Christians are united through Marriage, they are not just two human beings or two souls gifted with Grace but two Sanctified Members of the Mystical Body of Christ who are united in order to expand this Body by childbirth and predestined to be incorporated into the Body of Christ. Those Christians who are joined in the Community of Marriage act only in the Lord, in the Name of the Divine Head to Whom they belong, for Whom they work as Its members. They cannot multiply except with the

¹² Matth. 19:3.

¹³ Zigabinos, *To Matthew 19:3*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 129, 513.

¹⁴ Matth. 19:4-6.

¹⁵ Zigabinos, *To Matthew 19:3*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 129, 513.

¹⁶ Matth. 5:32.

¹⁷ St John Chrysostom, in Migne, *P.G.*, 51, 210. St Epiphanius, *Pnanrion, Heresy 67*, 6. St Cyril of Alexandria, *To John 2:1*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 73, 225.

¹⁸ Gen. 3:17.

¹⁹ 1 Corinth. 7:39.

consent and in the spirit of Christ, for their bodies are no longer their flesh but the Flesh of Christ. They cannot join with one another unless their union is based on Christ.²⁰

St Paul declared that, on the one hand, “...*the woman who has a husband is bound by the Law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the Law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that Law, so that she is no longer an adulteress, though she has married another husband.*”²¹ On the other hand he exhorted “... *the married...*” by Command of the Lord that “...*a wife is not to depart from her husband...*” “...*and a husband is not to divorce his wife.*”²² St Paul, forbidding the dissolution of Marriage of the husband to the wife, expressed the opinion that not only the woman becomes an adulteress if she marries another man as long as her first husband lives, but the man, too, becomes an adulterer under the same circumstances.²³

Finally, St Paul sees the union of husband and wife through Marriage as the Image of the Mysterious and Confidential Union of Christ with His Church.²⁴ When the Apostle stated that Marriage must be according to the Lord, he meant “...*not in fornication or adultery, not in stealing Marriage, but lawful, in frankness...*”²⁵ “...*with wisdom, with decency.*”²⁶ Christ left His Father and came down to His Bride and became one Spirit with Her. This is a Union of Grace, since the Union of Christ with His Church becomes through her members, a Fountain of Divine Grace and a Communion of Holiness and Divine Prosperity.²⁷ “*This is a great Mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*”²⁸ Since Marriage is a type of Mystery of Christ and the Church, it remains as “...*pure with him...*” as he who has recently ascended from the Baptismal Font and who has been Regenerated.²⁹ For “...*Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled.*”³⁰ It becomes a means of transmitting Sanctification since “...*the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband...*” and as a result, the children from this union “...*are holy.*”³¹ This presupposes Divine Grace within the Marriage, which is transmitted through the Holy Mysteries.

The meaning of Marriage as a great Mystery obviously depends on the way one relates to Christ and the Church. This relationship can be considered as merely symbolic or as a Reality. The Apostle, at first, presented Marriage in its natural essence as the symbol of the supernatural union of Christ and His Church. Marriage would not simply

²⁰ Scheeben, *Les Mystères*, p. 602.

²¹ Rom. 7:2-3.

²² 1 Corinth. 7:10, 11.

²³ Rom. 7:3.

²⁴ Ephes. 5:22-33.

²⁵ St Epiphanius, *Pnanrion, Heresy 59*, § 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 41, 1028.

²⁶ St John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians 7:39*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 160.

²⁷ *Ibid*, *To Ephesians*, Homily 20, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 140.

²⁸ Ephes. 5:32.

²⁹ St John of Damascus, *To Ephesians*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 95, 852. Theodorus Mopsuestias, in Migne, *P.G.*, 66, 920. St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 40 to the holy Baptism*, § 18, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 381.

³⁰ Heb. 13:4.

³¹ 1 Corinth. 7:14.

have been a Mystery but only the image of a Mystery of the union of Christ with His Church, being alien to it. In reality this is the Marriage among non Christians and this was the Marriage everywhere before Christ, even in Israel being considered as a Divine Institution. Nonetheless, the Christian Marriage is realised in a true, essential and internal relationship with the Mystery of the union of Christ and the Church. It is joined upon this Mystery and it is organically united with Him, participating in His Divine and Mysterious Nature. Christian Marriage is not merely symbolic but also an imitation derived from the union of Christ with the Church, being ruled and inspired by Her. Therefore, in this manner the Apostle considered Marriage. He wanted every Christian to gather the nature and the responsibilities of Marriage with a Christian woman from the union of Christ and His Church as its ideal and source.³²

2. Marriage According to the Tradition of the Orthodox Church

In the Tradition of the Orthodox Church we find testimonies that witness to the Holy Mystery of Marriage: in some circumstances as an ecclesiastic ceremony performed and blessed by the Officiators while in others literally characterised as a Mystery.

St Ignatius the Theophorus of Antioch proclaimed that “...it is proper for men and women who marry to be united with the consent of the Bishop that the Marriage may be in accordance with the Lord and not due to lustful passions.”³³ He also advised the wives “...to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands physically and spiritually. In the same way command my brothers in the Name of Jesus Christ to love their wives, as the Lord loves the Church.”³⁴ If anyone is able to remain chaste to honour of the Flesh of the Lord, let him so remain without boasting. If he boasts, he is lost; and if it is made known to anyone other than the Bishop, he is ruined.”³⁵

Tertullian confirmed that among the Christians illegal and secret unions not made known before the Church, are considered as adultery and fornication.³⁶ On the contrary, however, he exalted the Marriage that is Blessed and Sealed by the Church, which the Angels announce and the Father Confirms.³⁷ Elsewhere he drew the attention of the Christian to the attempts of Satan who constantly struggles to humiliate the Holy Mysteries of the Church by imitating them and falsifying them in the ceremonies of the idolaters. Thus Satan does not only imitate the Baptism and the Eucharist but also imprints his seal on the foreheads of his soldiers, even calling the high Priest to bless the Marriage of the pagans.³⁸ Thus Tertullian relates Marriage to the Christian Baptism, Divine Eucharist and Chrismation, ascribing to it the title “Mystery.”

St Basil the Great calls Marriage a “...bond through the Blessing.”³⁹

³² Scheeben, *Les Mystères*, pp. 604-605.

³³ St Ignatius, *To Polycarp*, 5, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 117.

³⁴ Cf. Ephes. 5:25, 29.

³⁵ St Ignatius, *To Polycarp*, 5, 1-2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 116.

³⁶ Tertullian, *De pudicitia* 4, in Migne, *P.L.*, 2, 1038.

³⁷ *Ibid*, *Adversus uxorem*, II, 9, in Migne, *P.L.*, 1, 1415.

³⁸ Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, c. 40, in Migne, *P.L.*, 2, 66.

³⁹ St Basil the Great, *Hexaemeres*, Homily VII, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 29, 160.

St Gregory of Nazianzos informs us that at Marriages “...*the golden Olympics, were present in the group of Bishops.*”⁴⁰

St John Chrysostom advises us “...*to call a Priest...*” to the weddings “...*and through Prayers and Blessings to unite the oneness of mind of the match.*” He strictly condemned improper music that fills the bride’s ears and the fruitless procession that casts away the modesty of Marriage.⁴¹

St Augustine literally spoke of Marriage as “*Sacramenti Nuptiarum*” assuring us that in Christian Marriage the Holiness of the Mystery has greater Power than the fertility of the mother. He proclaimed that Marriage is not only a Marital Bond but an insoluble Mystery.⁴²

The opinion of St Hippolytus is even more remarkable. He accused Pope Callistus of allowing elderly women belonging to a higher society to enter in the Community of Marriage with men not equal to their social level “...*to have one who they desire as a husband, either a slave or a free man.*” He characterised such secret weddings as not only illegal but also pointing out that we must “... *see to what ungodliness came the illegal ... teaching adultery.*”⁴³

Kritopoulos determined Marriage as “...*the legal union of man and woman...*” and that “...*it is called a Mystery by the Apostle, not because it contributes to the Eternal Life...*” but because it is considered “...*as the other two Mysteries...*” of Baptism and Eucharist. It is called a Mystery, because “...*it is assimilated to Christ and the Church. As it is said that ‘Christ loved the Church, likewise the husbands must love their own wives;’*⁴⁴ *even more ‘Great is the Mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*”⁴⁵ Marriage is considered to be honourable, and the bed spotless and undefiled, according to Apostolic Teaching.⁴⁶

3. The High Objectives of Marriage

The high objectives of marriage, according to the Lord, are: “...*wisdom and self-control, childbirth, and the dominion over the house for which the woman was given.*”⁴⁷ When the Creator of all wanted to create Eve, He said: “*It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make for him a help suitable to him.*”⁴⁸ As a bond Marriage

⁴⁰ St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle 193 to Procopius*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 37, 316.

⁴¹ St John Chrysostom, *To Genesis*, Homily 48, § 6, in Migne, *P.G.*, 54, 443. Ibid, in Migne, *P.G.*, 51, 211. Ibid, in Montfaucon, v. 3, p. 260. Ibid, *To Genesis*, Homily 56, § 1, in Montfaucon, v. 4, p. 625.

⁴² St Augustine, *De Nupt. Et concup.*, I, c. 10, § 11, in migne, *P.L.*, 44, 419. Ibid, *De bono conjugal*, c. 18, § 21, in migne, *P.L.*, 40, 387. Ibid, *De Genesis ad litter.*, IX, 7, in migne, *P.L.*, 34, 397.

⁴³ St Hippolytus, *Heresies*, IX, 12, in *B*, v. 5, p. 352.

⁴⁴ Ephes. 5:25.

⁴⁵ Ephes. 5:32.

⁴⁶ Kritopoulos, ch. 12, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 542.

⁴⁷ Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, III, § 12, in *B*, v. 8, p. 38.

⁴⁸ Gen. 2:18.

makes the couple helpers of one another in life, exercising and urging them to tolerate one another, to bring to harmony to their different characters, to love and serve one another, to suffer and to enjoy together, to help one another in sicknesses and different needs, carrying together the burden of life and the responsibilities of the family. The help for which Eve was given to Adam does not refer simply to physical needs. It is also an exercise of patience and tolerance that makes the woman, through her obedience to her husband "...of the same body..." and "...some how mixed in flesh and spirit with the man..." through the cultivation of the sameness of mind and love, with which Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for Her.⁴⁹⁵⁰ The expression "...let us make for him a help suitable to him..."⁵¹ applies to the man as well because he is obliged to offer help to his wife and it expresses the struggle of each step in life that brings forth the fruit of moral progress and perfection of the couple.

The wisdom and self-control are one aspect of this moral progress and perfection of the couple. St Paul categorically and without any hesitation expressed the admonition: "*Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*"⁵²

Finally, childbearing crowns the objectives of Marriage although this is not the primary objective of Marriage since we have Marriages that are unfruitful with regard to childbearing. Furthermore St Paul stressed that "...because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife..."⁵³ not only for childbearing because he instructed: "*Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time that you may give yourselves to Fasting and Prayer; and come together again...*" not to become fathers of children but "...so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control."^{54 55}

It is obvious that childbearing and the raising of children according to God's Will are high objectives of Marriage. For this reason St Paul proclaimed that the woman "...will be saved in childbearing, if she continues in faith, love and Holiness, with self-control."⁵⁶

4. Monogamy as a fundamental requirement

Monogamy was the main characteristic of Marriage right from the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, proclaimed that God from the beginning made "...male and female..." and that they are to be "...one flesh."⁵⁷ Since God made one male and not many, and gave him one woman whom He took from the male's side in order that the two shall be one flesh, it is obvious that the

⁴⁹ Ephes. 5:25.

⁵⁰ St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 37*, § 9, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 293.

⁵¹ Gen. 2:18.

⁵² 1 Corinth. 7:2.

⁵³ 1 Corinth. 7:2.

⁵⁴ 1 Corinth. 7:5.

⁵⁵ St John Chrysostom, *About virginity*, ch. 19, in Migne, *P.G.*, 48, 547.

⁵⁶ 1 Tim. 2:15.

⁵⁷ Matth. 19:5.

Creator excluded polygamy as being alien to His Divine Plan of Creation. Without any doubt, polygamy contradicts the first form of Marriage as the Creator had instituted it, for it dissolves the family, putting obstacles in the path of natural gestation and normal childbirth, thereby creating differences between the half-siblings. Polygamy is incompatible to the idea of a true family and to the morality of couples by encouraging sexual immorality of the man as well as jealousy and division between his many wives, even though it may contribute to the multiplication of the human race. Polygamy is an act of rebellion against God's Divine Plan, a "dis-Grace" for the human race and an instrument of sinful sexual desires.

In the Old Testament we see Lamech taking two wives⁵⁸ as a result of his sins, for he had "...slain a man..." to his "...sorrow and a youth to..." his "...grief."⁵⁹ This sin continued even among the Patriarchs Abraham⁶⁰ and Jacob.⁶¹ Hence, Moses placed Laws concerning children born from polygamous relationships.⁶² Polygamy was also practised during the time of the Judges⁶³ and Kings⁶⁴ as in the case of King Solomon. *"And it came to pass in the time of the old age of Solomon, that his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. And the strange women turned away his heart after their gods. Then Solomon built a high place to Chamos the idol of Moab, and to their king the idol of the children of Ammon, and to Astarte the abomination of the Sidonians. And thus he acted towards all his strange wives, who burnt incense and sacrificed to their idols."*⁶⁵

Although this regime was tolerated in the Old Testament, in the New Testament our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, renounced it by proclaiming that the Creator "...at the beginning made male and female..." and that "...the two shall become one flesh. So then, they are no longer two but one flesh."⁶⁶

St Paul also assures that "...the woman who has a husband is bound by the Law to her husband as long as he lives..." and only "...if the husband dies..." is she "...released from the Law of her husband."⁶⁷ St Paul renounced the miserable regime of polygamy since elsewhere he also proclaimed that "...because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife..."⁶⁸ and referring to the words of the institution of natural Marriage, explained: *'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'*⁶⁹

Hence the Apologists stressed that monogamy is practised by the Orthodox Christians. Athenagoras observed that the second marriage, after the death of the first

⁵⁸ Gen. 4:19.

⁵⁹ Gen. 4:23.

⁶⁰ Gen. 16:3.

⁶¹ Gen. 29:23, 28; 30:4, 9.

⁶² Deut. 21:15.

⁶³ Judges 8:30.

⁶⁴ I Samuel (I Kings) 18:7; 25:42, 43. 2 Samuel (2 Kings) 3:2, 7.

⁶⁵ I Kings (3 Kings) 11:1, 4.

⁶⁶ Matth. 19:4, 5-6.

⁶⁷ Rom. 7:2.

⁶⁸ 1 Corinth. 7:2.

⁶⁹ Gen. 2:24. Ephes. 5:31. 1 Corinth. 6:16.

wife, is considered as “*a noble adultery*,”⁷⁰ whereas Theophilus stated that among the Orthodox Christians “*...self-control is practiced, monogamy is observed, chastity is kept.*”⁷¹

Clement the Alexandrian observed: “*...the Lord renewing the old did not forgive polygamy, for then the time requested, when it was necessary to increase and multiply, He introduced monogamy.*”⁷²

St Epiphanius repeatedly proclaimed that “*...the Church honours the noble marriage and the monogamy...*,” thereby placing noble marriage and monogamy immediately after virginity and being widowed.⁷³

The Eastern Orthodox Church insists on monogamy, revealed by Her opinion of second and third Marriage. According to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, he who enters into a second Marriage after the death of his first wife “*...does not sin...*,” although, “*...if the survivor remains single, one gains for oneself greater honour and great glory with the Lord...*” as well as reassuring us that “*... even if one does remarry, one does not sin.*”⁷⁴

St Cyril of Jerusalem urged those who had conducted a first Marriage, not to disregard “*...those who entered in a second Marriage...*” observing that “*...chastity is good and admirable...*” although it is forgiven for one to enter into a second Marriage, in order that “*...the weak not commit fornication.*”⁷⁵

5. The Insolubility of the Sacred Bond of Marriage

The insolubility of Marriage is combined with its monogamy. The testimonies of Holy Scripture concerning monogamy simultaneously prove the insolubility of this Holy Bond. The fact that the institution of Marriage was proclaimed in the beginning by Adam and that the one man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his one wife, becoming one flesh with her, implies that Marriage is composed of two people of different genders. The union “*...in one flesh...*” makes Marriage inseparable and insoluble⁷⁶ and, according to the words of Christ “*...what God has joined together, let not man separate...*,”⁷⁷ shows that divorce, by means of which the unity of one flesh is divided, is “*...abnormal and against the Law; abnormal because it divides one flesh; against the Law because God United and Commanded not to separate...*” through divorce.

⁷⁰ Athenagoras, *Deputation* 33, in **B**, v. 4, p. 308.

⁷¹ Theophilus of Antioch, *Autolycus* III, 15, **B**, v. 5, p. 58.

⁷² Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, III, 12, **B**, v. 8, p. 38.

⁷³ St Epiphanius, *Panarion, Heresy* 48, § 9, in Migne, *P.G.*, 41, 868. Ibid, *Brief true homily about faith*, § 21, in Migne, *P.G.*, 42, 824.

⁷⁴ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 4, 32, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 219. Methodius, *Symposium*, Homily 3, 12, in Migne, *P.G.*, 18, 80-81. St Epiphanius, *Panarion, Heresy* 48, § 9, in Migne, *P.G.*, 41, 869.

⁷⁵ St Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, IV, § 26, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 488.

⁷⁶ St John Chrysostom, *To Matthew 19:5*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 58, 597.

⁷⁷ Matth. 19:6.

Simultaneously, the Lord recognises one reason for divorce: if one of the two commits adultery. *“But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced, commits adultery.”*⁷⁸ Obviously according to these Words of the Lord the right of the person who suffered injustice is recognised and thereby allows a divorce as well as permitting entry into a new Marriage without sinning.

Concerning inter-faith Marriages, it is understandable that since the Holy Mysteries are for those who are members of the Mystical Body of Christ, they should not be given to unbelievers, heretics, schismatics, Jews and Muslims because these, being non-Orthodox Christians, may disregard and mock them, as the Lord very clearly stated: *“Do not give what is Holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.”*⁷⁹

6. Mixed Marriages

It is true that in the first centuries, one of a couple might have been drawn to the Faith. Concerning these couples, St Paul advised that they should not separate since *“...the unbelieving husband is Sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is Sanctified by the husband...”* and that the children of such Marriages *“are Holy.”*⁸⁰ In addition, because of the persecutions and the difficulties of the times, some married Jews or idolaters. These marriages were regarded by the Orthodox Church as unholy, sodomite matches and those who conducted such marriages were considered worthy of Excommunication from the Church because to enter into the Community of Marriage with an unbeliever was considered equal to delivering the members of Christ to fornication.⁸¹

The gravity with which the Orthodox Church considered marriage with any non-Christian can be understood as having been unacceptable considering that it was strictly forbidden to give any Orthodox member into the Community of Marriage to a heretic or schismatic.

Today Orthodox families are advised to raise and maintain their children in the True Faith. Should the other member of the married couple not be Orthodox Christian, then they should strive through pure love to bring the non-Orthodox into the True Christian Faith. This must only be done without force and according to the free will of the non-Orthodox.

II. EXTERNAL ASPECT OF THE HOLY MYSTERY

⁷⁸ Matth. 5:32.

⁷⁹ Matth. 7:6.

⁸⁰ 1 Corinth. 7:14.

⁸¹ Tertullian, *Adversus uxorem*, II, 3, in migne, *P.L.*, 1, 1405. St Cyprian, *De lapsis*, 6, in migne, *P.L.*, 4, 483.

The external aspect of the Holy Mystery of Marriage as the natural bond consisting of the common consent of the couple that is expressed according to their free will. As a Mystery, it is a ceremony celebrated by the Officiator (Bishop or Priest) of the Orthodox Church. Thus for the composition of the Christian Marriage the couple are not the main Officiators through their common consent to be joined in the Community of Marriage. The physical bond of Marriage is Sanctified by Christ through the Officiator Bishop or Priest who joins the hands of the newly wed couple and through Prayers calls upon them the Grace and Blessings of the Holy Spirit. This invisible Divine Grace contributes to the growth of the Holiness of the couple, making them worthy of co-operating with God in order “...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in Sanctification and honour, not in passion of lust.”⁸² Consequently Marriage remains “...honourable among all, and the bed undefiled.”⁸³ The couple is united in one flesh through the harmony of their wills and desires, and their whole life to the Will of our Lord Jesus Christ. From the moment they have children, they must raise them according to the education and Law of the Lord, for “...God is able to make all Grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have abundance for every good work.”⁸⁴

1. The Ceremony as the External Aspect of the Holy Mystery

The common consent of the couple is a necessary requirement so that the Holy Mystery of Marriage may take place. This involves the physical bond that is Blessed by the Creator, although, because of the invasion of sin, it did not remain as it was established and Blessed by God. Hence, as a Mystery, by means of which Divine Grace is transmitted to the newly wed, assisting them to raise their physical bond to a higher level of Holiness, it has as its external aspect their consent to receive the Blessing that only the Officiating Bishop or Priest can give.

2. The Invisible Aspect of the Holy Mystery

Few words can be characterised as the “...addition of Holiness...” with regard to the Divine Grace that is granted through the Holy Mystery. The married couple “...have Christ in their midst...” teaching them “...to be wise...” and to keep their “...marriage honourable and their bed undefiled...” as well as to keep themselves in all Holiness, so that they will “...be clean after the wedding. Clement the Alexandrian observed that “...those who have been Sanctified, Holy is their sperm.” This is according to the Teachings of St Paul who said: “The unbelieving husband is Sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is Sanctified by the husband” and that, as a result, their children “are Holy.”⁸⁵ Having Christ in their midst, they become members of their members as well as

⁸² 1 Thess. 4:4-5.

⁸³ Heb. 13:4.

⁸⁴ 2 Corinth. 9:8.

⁸⁵ 1 Corinth. 7:14.

“...honourable members...,” bringing “...the union of the contrary...” closer and combining both “...in flesh and in spirit...” being one body. Similarly they become one soul, united through love and the Divine Law.⁸⁶

These are the secure Blessings that are granted by the Holy Mystery of Marriage, taking into consideration that the couple must approach with true and undefiled faith and repentance, having been purified through the Holy Mystery of Confession and the worthy participation in the Holy Eucharist so as to receive the Matrimonial Blessing. That Blessing, granted through the Holy Mystery, includes Prayers beseeching the Lord to grant the newly wed the fruit of the womb and the filling of their home with all the fruits of the earth and all good deeds.

⁸⁶ St John Chrysostom, *To the apostolic verse: “For your sexual immortalities”*, §§ 2, 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 51, 210 and 213. St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 40 to the holy Baptism*, § 18, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 381. Clement the Alexandrian, *Stromata*, III 6, in *B*, v. 8, p. 26. St Basil the Great, *Hexaemeros*, Homily 7, in Migne, *P.G.*, 29, 324.