

Marriage Helps Us Understand the Church

How does a loving relationship between husband and wife help us understand the Church?

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the students should be able to

- compare the union between a husband and wife to the union between Christ and His Church.
- explain how the Mystery of Crowning blesses the union of a man and a woman.
- identify the domestic church as a family in a relationship of love and faithfulness with the Lord.

For the Catechist

The greatest parallel in human life to the relationship of Christ and His Church is the relationship between husband and wife. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the sacred writers use married life to illustrate the relationship of God and His chosen people. The prophets (Hosea, Isaiah, Ezekiel) often spoke of God as 'married' to His people. The faithfulness of a loving marriage helps us understand God's fidelity to us.

Christ often compares the fullness of life in His kingdom to the celebration of a wedding. The joy of the wedding banquet offers us a hint of the unending joy that will be ours when Christ accepts the Church as His bride in the eternal kingdom (Rev. 19:7-9, 21:2, 22:17). Saint Paul calls on married couples to reflect in their lives the same faithful and sacrificial love as Christ has for His Church (Eph 5:22-33). Both unions are unbreakable and lead to the sanctifying of the members.

The most significant part of the marriage ceremony in the Eastern Churches is the crowning of the husband and wife. The priest places crowns upon their head, making them "king" and "queen" over their household. They are responsible for its spiritual welfare and material prosperity. Their household is a domestic church in which the couple exercises a royal priesthood for the glory of God.

In the God With Us series, this is the first lesson on the Mystery of Crowning. The aim of the lesson is to go beyond a discussion of marriage to an understanding of the nuptial imagery in Scripture.

Materials Needed

Opening and Closing Prayers: Prayer page and New Testament

Review: Action Plan from Lesson 7

Introduction: Pictures from a wedding

The Message: Wedding crowns if possible, note cards and pencils

Application: Envelopes, heart stickers, and pens and pencils

Icons and Pictures

Icon Packet II: The Wedding at Cana

Teaching Pics: Holy Matrimony (S12-S16)

For Next Week's Lesson

Invite a parishioner who serves the church regularly such as an altar server, catechist, reader, custodian, or secretary to the class for the interview.

Connections

1. Opening Prayer (3 minutes)

Invite the class to stand by the icon and remain silent for a few seconds before making the sign of the cross.

- Pray Psalm 128/129 (Prayer page)

[Hebrew and Greek Bibles number most Psalms differently. Modern Bibles usually follow the Hebrew (first) number. Liturgical texts use the Greek (second) number.]

2. Review (*The Church*) (5 minutes)

Ask the students to turn back to lesson 7 in their books. (The "Action Plan" asked the students to draw everything they saw in two sections of the church.) Have them work in groups or as a class and share what they wrote or drew. Have the children discover how their own church helps them become God's people.

Alternate: If the students did not complete the "Action Plan" from lesson 7, have them turn to that page now. Have them write a guide to their church by listing what is found in each section of the church. Add the reason for each section.

3. Introduction (5 minutes)

Materials: Pictures from a wedding—your own pictures or magazine pictures

Show the pictures and have the students say the words they think of when they see the picture. Make a list and separate the words into two categories:

What We See and **What We Think About**

Possible answers:

dress	love
cake	husband and wife
dancing	forever

Ask: *What happens to things we see?*
(They do not last long.)

Connect this discussion to the focus of the lesson: the loving relationship between a husband and a wife reflects the love God has for us—it is forever!

Notes for the lesson:

(Use this space to write helpful hints to use each year)

Supplementary Activity:

Suggest that the students ask their parents about their marriage day and have them look at some of their wedding pictures. (This activity is only a suggestion because we need to be sensitive to individual family situations.)

The Message

4. The Wedding Day (2 minutes)

a) Ask: *Have any of you ever been at a wedding? What are some things you remember?*

b) Read the paragraph. Ask: *Was this a good description of the wedding you remembered?*

5. The Relationship (3 minutes)

a) Have the students read this paragraph.

b) Ask:

- *What are some good things you know about husbands?* (They take care of their families; they pray with their families; they go places and have fun with their wives.)
- *How could these nice activities remind you of God?* (They are showing that the husband is taking care of his wife just as God takes care of us.)

Supplementary Activity:

(Activity 1 on the back of the unit page) Write the question for this lesson on the board or on a poster board: How does a loving relationship between a husband and a wife help us understand the Church? Write the following answers when they are read in the text.

1. The husband loves his wife as the Church loves its people.
2. The husband is faithful and God is faithful.
3. The wife respects her husband; the Church respects God.
4. The Mystery of Crowning crowns the husband and wife as the head of their domestic church.

9

Marriage Helps Us Understand the Church

How does a loving relationship between a husband and a wife help us to understand the church?



The Wedding Day
Excitement! Gifts! New clothes! Flowers! A celebration! A wedding is all this and more. It is the beginning of a new life for the husband and wife. Married life is a special relationship for Christians. It is a Mystery of the Church, an event where Christ meets the couple and begins the lifelong work of making them one.

The Relationship
The Bible often says that God loves His people like a good husband cares for his wife. Think of all the good things you know about husbands—your father, uncles, perhaps even older brothers. How could these good things remind you of God?

One of the most important things a husband and wife do for each other is to be faithful to each other. A faithful husband and wife are always there to do what is needed for their relationship. A faithful wife and husband respect each other.

46 *We Are God's People* Grade 5 Unit 2: The Church

Background Reading:

(Marriage)

"Marriage is an icon of Christ and His Church when service is at the heart of the relationship. . . The forms of service will differ from couple to couple. Perhaps the greatest service spouses can do is to challenge one another in love: to urge self-examination and stimulate growth. Done in a spirit of mutual submission (Eph 5:21), spouses can help one another to an ever-deeper maturity.

"The ultimate service is complete self-sacrifice after the model of Christ, a model which St. Paul says was done to sanctify the Church 'that she might be holy and without blemish' (Eph 5:27)" (ID 123-124).

5. The Relationship (continued)

(6 minutes)

b) On the board write the words *love, devotion, loyalty, honor, respect, and faithful*. Ask: *What do these words have in common?* (They identify the way we can relate to someone who means a lot to us; they are good words.)

c) Read the first two paragraphs on this page. Ask:

- *What relationship is described with all the words we have on the board?* (The one between God and His people and the one between a husband and wife.)
- *What is being compared?* (God to the husband and the Church to the bride)
- *Why?* (God takes care of His people and they honor Him; a husband takes care of his bride, and she respects him.)

d) Before the reading, ask: *What does subordinate mean?*

(Under the power is one definition.) Encourage the students to think about that definition. Have the students read Ephesians 5:21-33 aloud. Tell the students to complete the passage as you read the final verse aloud again.

Ask: *If husbands and wives follow what they have been told, what are some things they would do for each other?* (Help around the house; give each other gifts; say kind words to each other.)

Background Reading:

(Marriage)

"The reason Christian marriage is considered a mystery of faith may be found in the epistle of St. Paul as is read at the marriage ceremony, '[Marriage] is a great mystery; I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church' (Eph 5:32). The committed love of a man and woman is the most intense human love there is. It is a singular image of the relationship between God and the human race. In the Old Testament, God revealed Himself to His people Israel as their bridegroom, 'I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy' (Hos 2:21). In the Gospels, John the Baptist testified that Jesus was the Messiah, the bridegroom of the Church. John proclaims, 'I am not the Messiah, I am sent before him. It is the groom who has the bride. The groom's best man waits there listening for him and is overjoyed to hear his voice. That is my joy and it is complete' (Jn 3:28-29). . . . Each marriage, therefore, is a personal manifestation of the mystery of God's love for all" (LLII 83).

6. The Mystery of Crowning

(6 minutes)

a) Have the students read the first paragraph silently. [Take out the container with the crowns and show the children.] Now read the scriptural passage aloud together and look at the crowns or you can look at the picture of the crowns in the book. Ask: *How do you think the bride and groom feel when they put on the crowns? Are crowns a symbol? For what?* (Rulers of a kingdom)

b) Before they complete the reading, tell the students that the word domestic means having to do with the home and family.

c) Ask: *Can you think of anything we keep in our houses that shows our family is a domestic church?* (Icons, crosses, holy water)



In the New Testament Saint Paul further explains this comparison of the husband's love to God's love. He states that the love and devotion of a husband to his wife reflects God's love and loyalty to His people, the Church. In return the love and honor the Church shows God can be compared to the love and respect a wife gives her husband. If we think about this comparison, we see that Saint Paul is telling us the Church is God's bride. A loving relationship between a husband and his wife reflects the relationship between God and His people, the Church.

God is always faithful to the Church, His bride. He is always with us, doing what is needed at the moment for us. Always and everywhere, God is with us!

Let's read the Scriptures to hear how Saint Paul describes this relationship. Read Ephesians 5:21-33 and complete the final verse:

"In any case, each one of you should
love his wife as himself
and the wife should
respect her husband"
(v. 33)

These words are read at the Mystery of Crowning.

The Mystery of Crowning
In the Eastern Churches, the groom and bride receive the Mystery of Crowning on the day of marriage. According to the Church Fathers, the Mystery of Crowning or marriage began in Paradise. In the beginning God made man and woman as rulers and priests over all creation. This belief is reflected in the most solemn part of the marriage ceremony. The priest places crowns on the heads of the groom and bride as he prays this verse from Psalm 8:

"Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor (and give them dominion over the works of Your hands)."

Through this Mystery the husband and wife are brought together with God. They are to spend the rest of their lives helping each other live out their baptismal vows to grow closer to God.

47

7. Let us remember...

(3 minutes)

Divide the students into groups of two. Give each one a note card. One student writes the word betrothal on one side and adds the definition on the back and the other writes crowning with the definition on the back. Have them list the symbols for both. Each student teaches the other one the meaning of their word.

Ask: How can these symbols be used for God's relationship with His people, the Church?
(The ring = never-ending — the crowns = the family as a unit in the Kingdom of God)

Supplementary Activity:

Use the *Teaching Pics* (Holy Matrimony S12-S16) to review the Mystery of Crowning.

8. Please, Holy Spirit

(4 minutes)

Have the students read this section aloud. Ask if anyone could think of a time they needed the Holy Spirit's help. Have the students remain silent for a few seconds before they begin writing. Give them two minutes to write.

Supplementary Activity:

Ask the students to watch two family television shows. Tell them to compare the kinds of marriages television portrays. What happens in the show that portrays the kind of marriage Saint Paul describes? What happens in the other shows? Tell them to be prepared to share their findings next week.

Background Reading:

(The Domestic Church)

"As with theosis itself, this transformation of marriage into a mystery is a process and each couple that sets out on this journey is at a different place. But when a man and woman approach their marriage in this way and seek to live out this sacramental vision they become an icon proclaiming Christ's love for His Church. This is the ultimate transformation of the mystery of crowning: to represent the intimate relationship of love between Christ and His people (See Eph 5:21-33, read at the service of crowning)" (*ID* 123).

"At this, the most solemn moment in the service, the priest crowns the man and woman to be king and queen, priests of the domestic church. To this end he invokes the transfiguring power of the life-giving Spirit" (*DC* 93).

We can think of this wedding day as the beginning of the "domestic" church for this couple. They are united as one as they grow in their love of God and each other.

When Christians marry, they are meant to remain together for the rest of their lives. They are to be faithful to one another. Every day they are to do what is needed for each other. Whether they feel like it or not, they will go to work or prepare meals, run errands or clean the house. They will plan together for the future and raise a family because they know that they have chosen to be together for the rest of their lives.

The faithfulness that a loving husband and wife have for each other reflects God's faithfulness to His people. God continues to love us and give us His blessings. That is the reason a loving marriage reminds us of the way God and His Church love one another.

Let us remember that . . .
The Mystery of Crowning blesses the union of a man and woman, places it in union with Christ, and consecrates it to God's service. In this Mystery, the Holy Spirit gives the husband and wife the help they need to love and be faithful to each other and to bring up their children in the Christian way.

The blessing of a marriage has two parts. **Betrothal** is the first part, during which the couple declare their intention to marry. The priest blesses and places on their hands the rings, a symbol of the endless relationship they are beginning. Sometimes this rite is performed at the engagement; at other times it is performed, usually in the narthex, immediately before the Crowning. In some traditions the promises are not made until the Crowning.

The second part is the **Crowning**. The priest blesses the marriage and crowns the bride and groom with wreaths or crowns as a symbol that they are the head of a new unit in God's kingdom. In some Churches the bride and groom are led in a procession around the sacramental table as lyrics similar to the rites of priestly ordination are sung.

Please, Holy Spirit, . . .
Defining the word love is difficult because it can mean so many different ideas. The best way to understand love is to see it in action. Turn to **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** to read Saint Paul's description of love.

Write a prayer that asks the Holy Spirit to help you learn to act with love always.

Dear Holy Spirit,

48

Application

9. Today's Witness to Christ (10 minutes)

This activity has the questions for married couples. You might want to invite an older and a younger couple and have the students divided into two groups.

Because each church is unique, use your own judgment as to whom you should invite.

The catechist should contact the person in advance and give him or her the list of questions that will be asked. Also, inform them of the time they should be there. [A 10-minute interview session at the end of class would work well with the lesson plan, but you need to adjust the time accordingly.]

All the students should be prepared to take notes on the day of the interview, but have one student only ask the questions. Have a different student for each class session. At the end of the interview, that person thanks the guest and leads the singing of "God grant you many years."

Also, use one of the following ways to thank your guest:

1. Have one student write a thank-you note and everyone signs it.
2. Buy a thank-you note and have the students sign it.

If the interview is at the beginning of class, have the students complete the "What do you think?" section immediately.

If the interview is at the end, ask the students to complete this section at home.

Encourage them to share their answers with their parents.

Optional Activity 1

Ask the children to interview married couples in their family. Comparing the answers from their parent and grandparents might prove interesting.

Optional Activity 2

Take a picture of the couple and place it onto the copy (found at the end of this lesson) of the question and answer sheet. Have the students share the way they wrote their answers and decide on the best ones to use. Have someone with good printing skills print the answers. Place this page into a three-ring binder or a folder with clasps.

Ask the students for suggestions for the title for the booklet. At the end of the year, add this booklet to your library in the

room—or even the church library.

Today's Witnesses to Christ

Our Guests,
Mr. and Mrs. _____

We have learned that a husband and wife share a relationship that reflects the way God loves His Church. That means we can look at a Christian couple and see how much God loves us.

Today you are going to ask a married couple from your church some questions about how the daily actions of their life show this love for each other and for God.

When and where were you married?

What did you have to do to prepare to be married?

What do you think are some of the qualities that are needed for a couple to stay happily married?

Is there a special way that your family shows its love for each other and its love for God?

(Use this space to write any other questions you want to ask or to take notes.)

Do you have any stories that you would like to share to help us understand the importance of marriage and family life?

What do you think?
(Answer these questions after the interview.)

What was a surprising fact that you learned about marriage?

Think about how your family members show their love for each other. Identify two ways that you show your love to the members of your family.

49

10. Action Plan (8 minutes)

Help the children see the good examples around them every day. If you are sensitive to the fact that they might not have good examples, share some stories of your own. Ask them to think about neighbors, relatives, or other church members.

Duplicate this page and have the students write the letters and give them to the people. [If possible, provide envelopes and heart stickers.]

11. Summary (3 minutes)

Write the words *love* and *faithfulness* on the front board. Have the students divide into two groups: one group lists all the ways a wife and husband show these qualities and the other group lists the way God and His people, the Church, show these qualities. The groups share their answers with each other. [Possible answers: they love each other; they take care of each other; they want what is best for the person.]

12. Closing Prayer

(3 Minutes)

Materials: New Testaments

Pray 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. Have the students read different verses aloud from their New Testaments

For Next Week's Lesson:
Invite a parishioner who serves the church regularly such as an altar server, catechist, reader, custodian, or secretary to the class for the interview.

Action Plan

We Are Faithful

We spend our entire life practicing being faithful to God. Each day we have to make choices that show we are following God's way. We see other people making good choices too. Many times we follow the example of our parents and other family members to help us decide what we should do. On the following lines, write thank you notes to your parents and other family members who have helped you learn how to be faithful to God.

Dear,

Love,

Dear,

Love,

50

Psalm 128/129

I.
Happy are all who fear the Lord,
 who walk in the ways of God.
What your hands provide you will enjoy;
 you will be happy and prosper:
Like a fruitful vine
 your wife within your home,
Like olive plants
 your children around your table.
Just so will they be blessed
 who fear the Lord.

II.
May the Lord bless you from Zion,
 all the days of your life
That you may share Jerusalem's joy
 and live to see your children's children.
Peace upon Israel!

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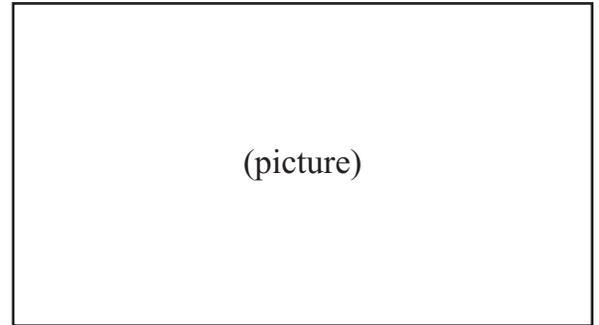
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Name:



1. When and where were you married?
2. What did you have to do to prepare to be married?
3. What do you think are some of the qualities that are needed for a couple to stay happily married?
4. Is there a special way that your family shows its love for each other and its love for God?
5. Do you have any stories that you would like to share to help us understand the importance of marriage and family life?