

FIVE PRE-MARRIAGE INSTRUCTIONS

ON THE CATHOLIC RELIGION

By Rev. Dr. RUMBLE, M.S.C.

FOREWORD

By His Eminence the Cardinal Archbishop of Sydney.

Because the requests came from so many Priests with such insistence, Rev. Dr. Rumble undertook to prepare a series of Pre-marriage Instructions that would conform to the mind of the Fathers of the Fourth Plenary Council of Australia and New Zealand.

Dr. Rumble was particularly well equipped to perform this task. Besides knowing with precision the teachings of the Catholic Church, he, as few others, knows the distorted versions that many erroneously believe to be the teachings of the Church. Not only can he explain simply and clearly what the Church really teaches, but he can teach it so as to render it interesting and intelligible to anyone who is willing to listen.

This booklet that he has prepared may be employed as a guide by Priests who wish to profit by Dr. Rumble's unique experience.

They will find in it sufficient matter to enable them to fulfil the requirements of the Decrees of the Plenary Council: to instruct without wearying, to interest without satiating and, please God, to engender the determination in their hearers to know love and serve God as God Himself desires.

Sydney, 22nd June, 1946.

N. T. CARDINAL GILROY,
Archbishop of Sydney.

INTRODUCTION

When a non-Catholic desires to marry a Catholic, but does not desire to become a Catholic himself, the Catholic Church requires, as a condition for the granting of a dispensation for such a marriage, that he receives at least five instructions about the Catholic religion.

The reason for this law is, not that the non-Catholic may be induced to alter his convictions, but that he may understand what the Catholic is expected to believe and do in the practising of her own religion.

The visits to a priest by such a non-Catholic are deeply appreciated, and his personal convictions are fully respected.

His visits are deeply appreciated, for he comes in deference to the law of a Church whose religious authority he does not acknowledge, as an act of generosity towards the Catholic party who does profess the Catholic Faith. His personal convictions are fully respected, for the Catholic Church herself insists that every man is obliged to be true to his own conscience.

At the same time, it is very much to the advantage of the non-Catholic to receive these instructions.

For its own sake, it is good to have some knowledge of the most widespread religion in the world, and of a Church which is the oldest existing institution in Christendom. Additional knowledge is always a good thing to have.

Again, the non-Catholic who loves a Catholic girl, wants above all to make her future happy. To understand the religion which means so much to her will contribute greatly to this, for the knowledge of her beliefs makes it possible to avoid even unconsciously wounding her feelings in matters of the highest importance to her, and the realization of her religious obligations in practice prepares for her fulfilment of duties which might otherwise seem unnecessarily irksome and inconvenient to one whose ways are not the same.

And these five visits are surely a small price to pay to enable the Church to grant a dispensation for a marriage in which one hopes to find a life-long happiness for himself even as he hopes to bring that same blessing into the life of another.

Let us, then, turn to the first basic teachings of the Catholic religion.

INSTRUCTION ONE

Existence of God

The Catholic Church teaches that the existence of God is known to us both by reason and by revelation.

When we pick up a book we know that blind chance did not arrange the words and the chapters. It had a human author. Moreover, on reading it, we find out a good deal about the author. An evil book reflects an evil mind; a good book reflects a good mind.

So, by reading the book of nature, we learn that there is a God, and much about Him.

But we are not left merely to our own study of the universe and to our own conclusions.

By revelation God tells us, "I am the Lord thy God"; and gives as the greatest commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength."

God alone exists in His own right. All else has a "borrowed existence," dependent upon Him. Our life is not our own, to do with it as we please. He who made us owns us, and has the right to lay down the conditions according to which we must use the life He gave us. That principle is of supreme importance in the Catholic religion. Our first duty is obedience to the Will of God.

The Holy Trinity

However, God did not content Himself merely with revealing to us His existence and supreme claims upon us as our Creator. Admitting us to a still closer friendship and intimacy with Himself, He has told us by revelation of His own personal interior life, giving us the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

The word "Trinity" means "Tri-Unity," and it is used to express the doctrine that, in the unity of one God there are three Divine Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

So Christ Himself, Who came to teach us about God, commanded that we should be baptized in the "name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

This doctrine is a mystery, for although we understand what a human nature and a human person are, we do not fully understand nature and personality as they are in God, nor how the three Divine Persons can share one and the same Divine Nature.

But the doctrine is not a contradiction. It is above reason, but not against reason. We do not say that there is only one Divine Nature, yet three Divine Natures. Nor do we say that there is only one Person, yet three Persons. We would contradict ourselves if we spoke like that. What we do say is that in God there is one Divine Nature, yet three Persons. It is mysterious; but it is not a contradiction. And we know the fact only by revelation.

Man

When we turn to man, we say that man is one of God's creatures, consisting of a body and of a soul, the soul being made to the image and likeness of God in so far as it is an immortal spirit endowed with intelligence and freewill.

Being immortal, a man must live on after death, whether he likes it or not; being intelligent and free, his future and eternal destiny depends upon his own choice.

If we wish to attain eternal happiness with God in heaven, our choice must be to know God, to love Him, because we know Him, and to serve Him because we love Him.

But, having freewill, we are able, though we have not the moral right, to repudiate these duties to God, and make wreckage of our eternal destiny.

So the question Christ put to us all can never lose its force: "What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?"—Matt. 16: 26.

Religion

Our relationship with God finds particular expression in the practice of religion.

Religion is a form of justice which impels us to render to God, both privately as individuals and publicly as social beings, the worship and acknowledgement we owe to Him.

As a form of justice, religion is concerned with what is right, not with what is merely pleasant or useful.

Catholics, therefore, look upon religion not as something optional, or as a kind of pastime, amusement or luxury, but as a duty. They do not practise it when they feel like it and neglect it when they do not. God is still God, whatever our variable feelings may be. And so long as we have the health and strength, we fulfil our religious duties to God according to the laws of the Catholic religion because it is right to do so.

This sense of duty and obligation where religion is concerned may seem strange to non-Catholics who have been brought up differently, but allowance must be made for the fact that it is the Catholic conviction.

The Bible

According to the Catholic Church, part of our knowledge of God's revelation is contained in the Bible. And all that the Bible does contain is the very Word of God, and infallibly true.

Since, therefore, the Catholic Church believes in the truth of the Bible, she could not, on her own principles, teach any doctrine opposed to the Bible. She is obliged to make sure that all her teachings and practices are in accordance with it, and not in any way opposed to it.

But she does not hold that the whole of God's revelation is contained in the Bible; nor that the Bible alone, privately interpreted by each reader, is a safe and sufficient guide for Christians.

The Bible does not pretend to contain all that Christ taught. Thus St. John tells us: "There are many other things which Jesus did which, if they were written every one, the world itself, I think, would not be able to contain the books that should be written."—Jn. 21: 25.

Christ taught His apostles by word of mouth, and sent them to teach all nations all things whatsoever He had made known to them. He sent them to teach others as He had taught them. He never directly ordered a line of Scripture to be written, nor insisted on the distribution of Bibles.

The teachings of Christ and of the apostles which are not written in the New Testament have been handed down to us under Divine protection in Christian Tradition.

But the Bible is not only incomplete as a source of Christian doctrine. It is not safe as a guide interpreted for himself by each reader. Private interpretation has, in practice, led to hundreds of conflicting sects. God could never have intended that method, for had He done so, He would have led all sincere readers to the same truth.

Catholics, therefore, hold that, whilst Scripture and Tradition are the remote sources of Christian doctrine, the immediate guide for Christians is the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. She sets out clearly for us the teaching contained in Scripture and Tradition; and by adhering to all that their Church believes and teaches Catholics of all nations are united in one and the same religion, free from all error and uncertainty.

Sin

Since religion teaches us that we must serve God, it necessarily forbids the violation of God's Will by sin.

Just as a man who violates the law of the land is a criminal in the eyes of the State, so sin is a crime against the Law of God. And it can be defined as any wilful thought, word, deed or omission contrary to the Will of God.

In the Bible God gives us the great basic principles of the moral law in the Ten Commandments, which are as follow: -

1. I am the Lord Thy God. Thou shall not have strange gods before Me; (nor shall you make graven images to worship them).
2. Thou shall not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain.
3. Remember, Thou keepest holy the Sabbath day.
4. Honour thy father and thy mother.
5. Thou shall not kill.
6. Thou shall not commit adultery.
7. Thou shall not steal.
8. Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
9. Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's wife.

10. Thou shall not covet thy neighbour's goods.

NOTE—Protestants number their Commandments differently from this Catholic list, making two Commandments out of words which Catholics regard as all belonging to the First Commandment. As a result the Catholic Second Commandment becomes the Protestant Third Commandment, the change continuing until finally the Catholic Ninth and Tenth Commandments are united by Protestants into one single Tenth Commandment. Naturally we hold that the Catholic division is more in accordance with the Commandments as intended by God.

By the violation of any of these Commandments sin is committed; and the sin may be either mortal or venial, just as crimes against State laws may be either capital or penal.

Mortal sins are those which are so grave that God's love and friendship are forfeited, together with the life of divine grace within our souls. So we are told that "the wages of sin is death, but the grace of God life everlasting in Christ Jesus."—Rom. 6: 23.

The guilt of mortal sin requires the violation of God's law in a serious matter; clear knowledge of what we are doing; and the deliberate consent of the will to the evil thought, word or deed.

Venial sins are sins in which one or other of the above conditions are not present. They are sins, but of less gravity than mortal sin, not putting us beyond the pale of friendship, but still carrying with them their just penalties

We are obliged before God to repent of all sins we have ever committed. Christianity begins with the message: "Do penance, repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand," "Repent, and be baptized."

Sorrow for sin should be second nature to us, and all should know the Act of Contrition. A brief form of this Act would be: "O my God! I am heartily sorry for having offended You, because You are all good. And I firmly resolve, by the help of Your grace, not to offend You again. Amen."

Man's Destiny

On earth, man is in a state of probation. Death puts an end to it. Immediately after death man's soul is judged, and the soul must account to God for the good and evil accomplished during life. So Scripture tells us: "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgement."—Heb. 9: 27.

As a result of that judgement, Catholics know that if the soul is QUITE UNFIT for Heaven it will go to Hell; if NOT QUITE FIT for Heaven it will go to Purgatory until it is fit; if QUITE FIT for Heaven it will be admitted at once to its eternal happiness.

The idea of Hell is not popular nowadays. But it is both treason to God and treachery to man to deny its existence.

Christ would not have died on Calvary to save us from a Hell which He knew to be non-existent.

He would have been the last in the world to attempt to frighten men with threats of a fate which He knew to be impossible. Yet He said, "I will show you whom you shall fear. Fear, all you, Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into Hell."—Lk. 12: 5. And He tells us that the sentence upon the wicked at the last day will be: "Depart from Me, all you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."—Matt. 25: 41.

Purgatory is a temporary state in which souls who have died in the grace of God, but have not expiated their sins in this life, are purified by suffering and thus fitted for the Vision of God in Heaven.

In Scripture we are told that "nothing defiled" can enter Heaven.—Apoc. (Rev.) 21: 27. Christ speaks of sins forgiven "neither in this world nor in the world to come."—Matt. 12: 32. And, again, of souls not released from prison until they have paid "the last farthing."—Matt. 5: 26. St. Paul speaks of those who will be saved, "but so as by fire."—I Cor. 3: 15. And the Old Testament tells us that it is "a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins."—II Mach. 12: 46. It is of no use to pray for souls in Hell. There is no need to pray for those in Heaven. Prayer for the dead presupposes Purgatory.

Heaven is the eternal state of happiness we must strive at all costs to attain in the end. Christ declares that "the just will enter into everlasting life."—Matt. 25: 46. He bids us "be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in Heaven."—Lk. 6: 23. Those who attain to Heaven will see and possess God in perfect and uninterrupted love. And this will mean eternal Light and Peace and Happiness.

With these convictions, Catholics realize that the most important thing in life is to heed the advice of Christ, and

before all else, to “seek first the Kingdom of God, and His justice.”

INSTRUCTION TWO

In our last Instruction we saw the Catholic doctrine about God and man, about religion as the bond between them, and about the Bible as a source of religious knowledge.

We also considered sin as the one thing that can come between God and us, forfeiting Heaven altogether if it be mortal sin and we die without repenting of it; detaining us in Purgatory if, having repented of it, we die without having expiated it during this life.

But if Heaven is possible for us at all, it is due to the work of Jesus Christ, to the consideration of whom we must now turn.

The Divinity of Christ

Holy Scripture teaches us that God, Who in past ages spoke to men by the prophets, has now spoken to us “by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom, also, He made the world.”—Heb. 1: 1.

The Catholic Church teaches that the Son of God existed as the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity from eternity. At a given point in time, some nearly 2,000 years ago, that Son of God, whilst still retaining His participation in the Divine Nature, took to Himself a human nature, being born into this world of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In that human nature He lived, suffered and died, and triumphed over death by His resurrection, for our salvation.

At His incarnation, the Son of God took the name of Jesus, which means Saviour; and Christ, which means the anointed or consecrated one.

In Jesus Christ, therefore, there is one Divine Person and two natures, the one Divine, the other human. And we believe Jesus Christ to be true God and true man.

Thus, as one and the same Person, Jesus could speak now in virtue of His uncreated Divine Nature, as when He said: “I and the Father are one.” (Jn. 10: 30); now in virtue of His created human nature, as when He said: “The Father is greater than I” (Jn. 14: 28).

If Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God, we owe Him absolute allegiance and obedience. If He has issued certain instructions to men and imposed certain obligations upon us, and if He is to be our eternal judge, as Scripture declares, then surely we must try to find out and to fulfil what He commands.

And one of the very first things He demands is that we hear and obey the Church He established to continue His work in this world.

The Christian Church

That Christ intended and established the Church is clear from a study of the Gospels.

He Himself described His mission in the words, “I must preach the Kingdom of God, for therefore am I sent.”—Lk. 4: 43.

That Kingdom He identifies with His Church. For when He said, “I will build My Church,” He at once told St. Peter, “and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom.”—Matt. 16: 18.

Christ, therefore, came with the intention of establishing a kingdom called the Church in this world.

That Church will be a visible organization. “A city set on a mountain cannot be hid.”—Matt. 5: 14.

To be officials in that Church, Christ chose the twelve apostles (Lk. 6: 13), and sent them with His own mission (Jn. 20: 21) to teach (Matt. 28: 20) to rule (Matt. 18: 17-18) and to sanctify the faithful (Jn. 15: 16).

As the head of this Church on earth He appoints St. Peter. “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.”—Matt. 16: 18.

He declares that He Himself will protect His Church “all days till the end of the world.”—Matt. 28: 20.

And He gives that Church His own authority, saying, “He who hears you, hears Me” (Lk. 10: 16); and, again, “If a man will not hear the Church, let him be as the heathen.”—Matt. 18: 17.

But Christ not only took great care in establishing His Church. He made sure that it would have certain signs, marks or notes, by which it could easily be recognized as true, to the exclusion of all other religious bodies.

Those outstanding signs are four. The true Church will be One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

The true Church must be One. Christ said, “I will build My Church,” not My “Churches.” He said that there would be “one fold under one shepherd.” (Jn. 10: 16). The true Church, then, must be one united body or having the same faith, worship, and organization throughout the world.

The true Church must be a Holy Church. Christ came to sanctify men. “For them do I sanctify Myself,” He said, “that they also may be sanctified in truth.” (Jn. 17: 19). And for that same work He sent His Church. The true Church will be holy in her Founder, Jesus Christ; in her teachings and worship; in the Christian virtue of all who put her teachings into practice; and in her devotion to works of, charity to all human beings in need. There is no guarantee that all who profess to belong to the true Church will put her teachings into practice. Knowing the weakness of human nature, Christ Himself predicted, “It must needs be that scandals will come”. and He compared His Church to a net “holding good and bad fish.” But bad fish do not mean a bad net. The Church is Holy, and cannot inspire anything but holiness. The bad fish are those who do not live up to her teachings, not those who do.

The true Church must be Catholic, i.e., universal. Christ established His Church for “all nations,” not for any particular nation only. Remaining one and the same Church, it will be adapted to all times, all places, all types of people.

Finally, the true Church will be Apostolic. Christ promised that He would protect His Church “all days” from its commencement till the end of the world. The true Church, therefore, will reach right back through history to the Apostles themselves, upon whom Christ built His Church in the first place. It must have been in the world all days since then, be here now, and continue till the end of time.

The Catholic Church

Catholics are absolutely convinced that theirs is this one true Church. The Catholic Church alone manifests that unity, holiness, universality and apostolic continuity which Christ intended.

As we go back through history, looking for the Church Christ personally established, we find that all other Churches disappear at various times subsequent to Christ, except the Catholic Church. Of all other Churches the names of the human founders are known. If Christ did not establish the Catholic Church no one can say who did.

Believing their Church to be the one true Church, Catholics acknowledge its Divine authority. The spirit of obedience to the laws of their Church is, therefore, a characteristic of all good Catholics. And, after all, the very essence of genuine religion must be obedience. We went from God by disobedience ; the road back must be by obedience; and if religion is to get us back to God, its very essence must be obedience.

But authority in the Catholic Church has no other purpose than the good of souls, every teaching and law being directed towards the promotion of true charity under its double aspect—the love of God and of one’s neighbour for the love of God.

The Church Infallible

If Christ established one permanent Church to which we should all belong, it must always be possible to belong to it without fear of being led astray in matters of faith and morals.

Christ could not command us to hear and obey the Church if His Church itself were a guide liable to be mistaken!

Moreover, He said, “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.”—Matt. 16: 18. Were the Church not infallible, the forces of evil and error could, and would have prevailed against it.

We believe, therefore, that Christ made the Catholic Church safe for Christians, guaranteeing its infallibility.

The Pope

The supreme head of the Catholic Church on earth is the Pope. In the name of Christ, and as successor of St. Peter, he is the supreme Bishop over the whole Christian Church throughout the world.

The authority derived from Christ, the Invisible Head of the Church, must be centred in the visible head appointed as His representative in the Church on earth.

That Christ did appoint a visible head on earth is again clear from the Gospels.

He certainly spoke to St. Peter as He spoke to no other amongst the Apostles. St. Matthew records the words of Christ to him, “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church and I will give to you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.”—Matt. 16: 18-19. That the other Apostles would look to Peter as the one in whom authority was centred is clear from the words of Christ recorded by St. Luke. “Do you (singular),” He said to Peter, “being once converted, confirm your (singular) brethren.”—Lk. 22: 32. And that to St. Peter the whole flock in general was committed is evident from Our Lord’s words to him, as recorded by St. John, “Feed My lambs; feed My sheep.”—Jn. 21. 15-17.

St. Peter, then, was appointed as visible head of the Church to act in the name of Christ and with the authority of Christ; and as the one true Church had to last till the end of the world with the same constitution as that which Christ personally gave it, the office entrusted to St. Peter must also continue till the end of time. Otherwise the Church would not remain the one particular society Christ founded, true to His intentions.

Now the only one in the world today who could possibly succeed to the office of St. Peter, and the only one who claims to do so, is the Pope. For St. Peter established his headquarters in Rome and died there in the year 67 A.D., under the Emperor Nero.

Either his office in the Church has lapsed (which is impossible), or the Pope, by lawful succession in St. Peter’s office, is today the visible head of Christ’s Church, exercising the duties and possessing the guarantees bestowed upon St. Peter himself.

All Catholics believe, therefore, that the Pope, as Bishop of Rome, is the supreme head of the visible Church on earth.

Papal Infallibility

We have already seen the Catholic doctrine that the Church of Christ must be infallible. But if the Church be infallible, so, too, must be the Pope as supreme head of the Church.

For if the Pope could officially teach a wrong doctrine, that would make acceptance of error a condition of communion with him, and therefore with the Catholic Church of which he is the head. But Christ could never allow the Pope to commit the whole Church to error.

Therefore it is Catholic doctrine that the infallibility as well as the authority of the Church finds its last court of appeal in the Pope as visible head of the Church.

But the Pope is infallible only as head of the Church. That is, he is infallible not as a private individual, but only in virtue of his office; and then only when he defines a doctrine of faith or morals to be held as an Article of Faith by all Catholics throughout the world.

Exclusive Claims

From all that we have seen, it is evident that Catholics cannot accept the idea that one religion is as good as another. They sincerely believe that the Catholic Church is the one true Church, and that all other Churches separated from her are mistaken. They credit people who belong to other Churches with good faith. They do not judge them, but leave that to God. They themselves, however, feel bound in conscience to maintain the truth of the Catholic Church to the exclusion of the claims of all others.

Christ Himself did not believe that one religion is as good as another. If that were true, the Jewish religion was all right as it was, and there was no need to preach another Law, saying, “He who believes not shall be condemned.”—Mk. 16: 16. Nor can many Churches, teaching contradictory doctrines, all be equally true Churches.

Consistently with their conviction that the Catholic Church is the one true Church, Catholics are not free in conscience to attend the religious services of other Churches. [Though since the reforms of Vatican II, Catholics are now permitted to attend other services for sufficiently serious reasons, including authentic ecumenical outreach, and providing there is absolutely no compromising of the Catholic’s duty to practise his own religion and to maintain the Catholic’s belief that Christ founded only one true Church. Such participation is in no way to be seen as sanctioning any non-Catholic belief.]

This is in no way due to lack of courtesy, respect, or love for the persons of non-Catholics. It is due simply and

solely to what Catholics believe to be their loyalty to Christ. They may not sanction by their active participation any forms of religion differing from, or separated from the Church Christ Himself established and commissioned to continue His work in this world.

I may love a non-Catholic friend very, very dearly. But, although he is my friend, his religion is not my religion. And if he is my friend, he would not want me to violate my conscience for his sake, even as I would not want him to violate his conscience for my sake.

It is not being narrow-minded to limit one's conduct to the dictates of one's conscience. People who are "broad-minded" at the expense of conscience, who are prepared to do what they believe to be wrong whenever expediency suggests it, far from deserving admiration, deserve only contempt.

And the Catholic refusal to take part in non-Catholic religious services is the only position consistent in one who is convinced of the truth of the Catholic Church, and who cannot believe that one religion is as good as another.

Good non-Catholics who realize this refrain from asking Catholics to attend non-Catholic religious services, sparing them the embarrassment of having to refuse, and not allowing this fact to interfere in the least with their mutual friendship and love.

INSTRUCTION THREE

Commandments of the Church

In our last talk we saw how, according to Catholic teaching, God sent His Son in the Person of Jesus Christ to give a Divine Revelation to mankind, and how Jesus sent His Church to continue teaching that Revelation to all nations until the end of time.

Now we Catholics look upon the Church as our spiritual mother, to whom we owe all that is due to a mother; love for all that she has been to us; respect for her advice; and obedience to her commands.

And since we believe that the Catholic Church has, not a merely human authority, but a divine authority, we know that in obeying the Church we are obeying the Will of Christ. For, to His Church Christ said, "Whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound also in Heaven"; and, "If a man will not hear the Church, let him be as the heathen."—Matt. 18: 17-18.

Using her God-given authority, the Church has made many laws to preserve, directly or indirectly, the spiritual welfare of Catholics. She has laws forbidding the reading of books which could poison the mind against Christian standards of belief and moral conduct, against cremation and membership of secret societies. [Cremation is now permitted, provided that there is no risk of implying that the person so cremated does not believe in the resurrection of the dead.] Her laws insist upon the education of Catholic children in Catholic schools where such schools are available.

But there are six outstanding laws dealing with our positive religious duties, laws commonly known as the six Precepts of the Church. And these are as follows: -

1. To hear Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation.
2. To fast and abstain on the days appointed.
3. To confess our sins at least once a year.
4. To receive Holy Communion during the Easter period.
5. To contribute to the support of our pastors.
6. To observe the laws of the Church regarding marriage.

Let us, then, consider each of these precepts briefly in turn.

First Precept

To hear Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation.

Catholics are obliged to assist at Mass on Sundays and the prescribed Holy Days under pain of mortal sin, unless they are hindered by serious difficulties such as ill-health, or too great a distance from a Church.

This does not mean that Catholics are terrorized into going to Mass. It is true that they do not want to commit

mortal sin. But in reality it is their own sense of justice that takes them to Mass.

If they pay the baker each week or month for the bread with which they nourish life, they realize how much more they are obliged to make due return to God for the life thus nourished.

God Himself, Who gave the Ten Commandments in their right order of importance, devoted the first three to duties to Himself, bidding us to “remember,” above all, our duties of weekly worship on the Sabbath Day, which for Christians is Sunday.

So God, as it were, presents His account every week, an account which must be honoured. And this acknowledgement of our indebtedness to Him is a matter of honesty and justice. Catholics do not wish to be dishonest and unjust. When, therefore, the Church tells them that their main religious duty is assistance at the Sacrifice of the Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation, they let nothing interfere with their resolution to be present on those days.

A non-Catholic husband should be delighted to see his Catholic wife faithful to her religious duties. A Catholic who is true to God and to conscience in these matters is likely to be trustworthy in all other aspects of life. But what reliance can be placed on one who is not even true to God and to conscience in the greatest of all obligations?

It can be noted here that the Holy Days of Obligation, in addition to Sundays, are:

1. Feast of the Nativity (Christmas Day).
2. Feast of the Circumcision (January 1).
3. Feast of the Ascension (Variable).
4. Feast of the Assumption of Mary (August 15).
5. All Saints' Day (November 1).

These Holy Days have been appointed by the Church to recall to our minds the greater mysteries of our religion, and the virtues of the Mother of Christ, together with the example of the Saints.

Second Precept

To fast and abstain on the days appointed.

The Second Precept obliges us to fast and abstain on the days appointed. This Precept is a definite application of the teaching of the New Testament. When the Pharisees complained that the disciples of Christ did not fast, He replied that they did not whilst He was with them, but that they would do so when He had gone from them. (Mk. 2: 18). St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “Let us exhibit ourselves as servants of God, in patience, in fastings.” (II Cor., 6: 5). Fasting is part of the Christian Law, and the Catholic Church appoints certain times when we are obliged to observe it.

Fasting limits the amount of food we may take. Abstinence forbids the eating of meat.

On some days we are bound to fast, but not to abstain from meat. On other days we are bound to abstain from meat, but not to fast. On yet other days we are bound both to fast and to abstain from meat.

Only those between the ages of 21 [that is, those who are adults,] and 60 are bound to observe the Law of Fasting. The Law of Abstinence binds all over the age of 7. In ill-health, of course, a dispensation from these laws may be obtained from the Church.

When days of fasting or of abstinence approach they are always announced to the people at Mass on the preceding Sunday, except in the case of the regular Friday abstinence from meat, of which all Catholics are aware, and to which they cannot fail to advert.

Fasting and abstinence are forms of self-denial, in accordance with Christ's words to His disciples: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”—Matt. 16: 24.

Abstinence from meat on Fridays is particularly intended as a tribute to the death of Christ on Calvary because of our sins. On the day He gave up His life for us in such dreadful suffering, Catholics give up the pleasure of taking meat; and no Christian surely could blame this act of grateful remembrance of all that we owe to the death of Christ.

Third Precept

To confess our sins at least once a year.

The third Precept of the Catholic Church obliges all Catholics to go to Confession at least once a year, under pain of grave sin. The Church insists that it is an additional and serious offence against God to go longer than a year without recovering His grace and friendship by a good confession.

But this law establishes only the outside limit. Good Catholics go to confession much more frequently, some monthly, others even weekly, though they may have only venial faults to tell.

Good Catholic parents are at peace in regard to their children when they see those children faithful to their regular confessions. They know the immense influence for good which regular confession has upon their lives. It is when children begin to grow careless and to neglect confession that parents feel that they have reason for anxiety and worry.

Fourth Precept

To receive Holy Communion during the Easter period.

Catholics are obliged, under pain of mortal sin, to receive Holy Communion at least once a year; during the Easter period, i.e., between Ash Wednesday and Trinity Sunday.

This again is only the outside limit beyond which Catholics may not delay their reception of Holy Communion. Good Catholics go much more frequently, monthly, weekly, or even daily.

Fifth Precept

To contribute to the support of our pastors.

Catholics are obliged in conscience to contribute according to their means towards the support of their religion.

As the Catholic Church teaches both the love of God and the love of one's neighbour, she is obliged both to promote the fitting worship of God and to undertake social and charitable work in this world

Our religion, therefore, demands the building of churches and the support of priests to care for the spiritual welfare of souls; schools and teachers for the education of children; works of charity for orphans, the sick, and the aged; and missionary activities both at home and abroad.

The support of these good works is a duty of charity and justice binding upon Catholics according to their ability. And good Catholics regard the support of their religion as one of the ordinary expenses of their daily living just as other expenses for the upkeep of the household.

When all Catholics in a parish do their share, the burden is not great upon each. And, after all, priests and nuns give their very lives to the cause of Christ and the good of souls. The laity, if not called upon to give their lives, are obliged at least to give something of the earnings their lives make possible. The same faith that inspired the priests and nuns to consecrate their lives to the work of God inspires the Catholic laity to contribute towards that same work.

Of course, those who cannot give are not expected to give; and no one is expected to give beyond his means. One thing is certain. Generosity to God brings a great blessing.

Sixth Precept

To observe the laws of the Church regarding marriage.

Finally, Catholics are obliged to observe the laws of the Church regarding marriage.

According to the Catholic Church and the teaching of the New Testament, marriage is not only a civil contract, but is also a Sacrament of the Christian religion. We shall consider the true nature of marriage more fully later.

Here it will be enough to say that, since marriage is a Christian Sacrament, it is part of the Catholic religion just as the other Sacraments, and the Church has the duty to regulate the marriages of her members.

The State has but the right to legislate for the civil effects of marriage in the interests of social order.

The laws of the Catholic Church declare that Catholics may not marry relatives within certain degrees of blood-relationship.

They may not marry those not of their own religion, unless the Bishop, for reasons he thinks sufficiently serious, grants a dispensation from the normal law to enable the mixed-marriage to take place.

Thirdly, no Catholic can contract a valid marriage except in the presence of an authorized Catholic priest and two witnesses. And the Catholic ceremony must be the only ceremony to take place.

The Church must know which of her members have contracted marriage, and which have not. When any of her members contracts a marriage, she must have a record of the fact, and the necessary documents to prove it. Again, she has the obligation to see that Christian conditions are observed in the reception of this Holy Sacrament of Matrimony. And since marriage is a Sacrament of their religion, it is only at the hands of their own Church that Catholics may receive this, as the other Sacraments also.

These laws are binding upon all Catholics. The Church does not make laws in these matters for non-Catholics. If two non-Catholics marry, either in their own Church or in the Registry Office, the Catholic Church recognizes their marriage as quite valid.

But a Catholic, whether marrying a Catholic or a non-Catholic, is obliged in conscience to observe the laws of the Catholic religion.

A non-Catholic, brought up to view things differently from Catholics, may find it difficult to understand the reason for such strict laws. But, if he wishes to marry a Catholic, knowing that such law exist, he should be the first to insist that the marriage takes place according to the requirements of the Catholic Church.

He himself wishes to contract a true and valid marriage both in the sight of God and of his fellow men. And he surely wants his wife to feel bound in conscience to him as he to her. Apart from the sense of duty to him, he wants her to be happy and contented within the marriage he offers her.

Knowing, therefore, that she will not feel that she is indeed entering upon a true and valid marriage unless she marries according to the rites of the Catholic religion, he will wisely insist that the marriage must take place according to those rites.

It is not against his principles to be married in such a way. It is against her principles to be married in any other way. Wisdom itself dictates that marriage to a Catholic should take place according to Catholic rites.

Other conditions applying to marriage we shall see when dealing with the Sacrament of Matrimony itself. Here we have considered merely the Precept of the Church obliging Catholics to observe the laws of their religion relating to the celebration of marriage.

Such, then, are the Six Precepts of the Church, regulating the practical religious duties of Catholics. The knowledge of these duties by the non-Catholic party to a mixed-marriage cannot but be a great help towards mutual understanding and happiness in such a marriage.

INSTRUCTION FOUR

The Sacraments

In our previous talks we have considered what might be called the Catholic way of living. Now let us turn to Catholic ways of worship.

Man is not a disembodied spirit. He consists of a body and a soul. A religion adapted to his twofold nature will therefore be both spiritual, yet manifest in visible rites and ceremonies.

In the Incarnation itself the invisible and eternal Son of God, by means of His visible humanity, put Himself within the reach of the sense-limitations of man. And before leaving this world He established a visible Church with a visible priesthood and visible means for our sanctification. He instituted the Sacraments as visible rites both to signify and to give grace to men.

Seven Sacraments

Christ instituted seven Sacraments. In the natural order, individual life goes through a cycle of a) birth, b) growth, c) nourishment, d) reaction against illnesses, and e) termination by death. But man is not only an individual. He is a social being, living in f) domestic society or the family, and in a g) social order under civic authority.

These same seven features are provided for by the seven Sacraments, in the spiritual and supernatural life Christ came to give.

1. BAPTISM pours the very life of grace into the soul.
2. CONFIRMATION strengthens that life as growth brings its added responsibilities.
3. THE EUCHARIST is the regular nourishment of that life.
4. PENANCE (or CONFESSION) destroys the moral disease of sin.
5. EXTREME UNCTION (or LAST ANOINTING or SACRAMENT of the SICK) consoles and gives courage when death takes us from this world.
6. MATRIMONY sanctifies marital relationships, blending the love of man and wife with Christ's Own perfect love.
7. HOLY ORDERS gives the priesthood of Christ, that He may continue His work in the Church as an ordered society uniting His members with Him and with one another.

So the seven Sacraments embrace the whole of life. And these seven have existed from the very beginning of the Christian religion.

1) Baptism

Baptism is the first of the Sacraments. It cleanses us from original sin, makes us Christians, children of God, and heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven.

When our first parents fell into sin they forfeited both for themselves and for their children throughout the ages the grace of God.

All human beings, therefore, apart from Christ and His Mother Mary, have inherited a deprivation of Divine Grace. In other words, they are born in a state of original sin, children of a guilty race.

Now Christ our Saviour came to repair the work of our first parents, and to restore the life of grace to our souls.

This life is given us in our baptismal re-birth, and it is quite distinct from the merely natural life obtained by birth from our earthly parents.

Baptism is, therefore, necessary for the very salvation of our souls. Christ said clearly: "Unless one be born again of water and the holy Ghost, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God"—Jn. 3: 5.

2) Confirmation

Confirmation is a Sacrament by which we receive a special communication of the Holy Ghost to make us strong and perfect Christians, loyal in all things to Jesus Christ.

Speaking of those already baptized, Scripture tells us that the Apostles then "laid their hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost."—Acts 8: 17.

3a) The Holy Eucharist

The Holy Eucharist is a Sacrament which contains the Body and Blood, with the Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine.

That Jesus left Himself really present in such a way is one of the most clearly revealed doctrines in Sacred Scripture.

Twelve months before He died He promised in the most explicit terms that He would make the gift of Himself under the form of bread. "The bread that I will give," He said, "is My flesh for the life of the world." When the Jews objected He insisted that He meant what He said. "Amen, amen, I say to you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you shall not have life in you."—Jn. 6: 52-54.

When actually instituting this Sacrament at the Last Supper He said, "This is My body . . . This is My blood."—Matt. 26: 26-28.

And St. Paul declares that "Whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord."—I. Cor. 11: 27.

The Catholic Church has ever held and taught, therefore, just what the Bible says. And for this reason, whenever they enter the Church, Catholics genuflect, or kneel towards the tabernacle on the Altar where the Blessed Sacrament

is reserved. For they know that they are entering into the very Presence of Christ.

3b) The Sacrifice of the Mass

In the very first Book of the Old Testament (Genesis 14: 8) we read that Abraham met Melchisedech, a Priest of the Most High God, who offered sacrifice in bread and wine.

Half way through the Old Testament we meet with David's prediction of Christ, "The Lord has sworn, and He will not repent: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech."—Ps. 109 (110): 4.

At the end of the Old Testament the last of the prophets, Malachy, tells us that the priesthood of the Jews is to be abolished in favour of a new priesthood and sacrifice. "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of Hosts: and I will not receive a gift of your hand. For from the rising of the sun even to the going down My name is great among the gentiles; and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation; for My name is great among the gentiles, says the Lord of Hosts."—Mal. 1: 10-11.

Jesus Christ, therefore, is our High Priest, according to the order of Melchisedech. Together with the sacrifice of Himself on the Cross, He must offer a sacrifice in bread and wine, a sacrifice to be offered in every place continuously among the gentiles to whom He turned after the rejection of the Jews.

The night before He offered Himself in the one perfect all-sufficient Sacrifice of the Cross, therefore, Jesus gave Himself in the Blessed Sacrament in order to have that Sacrifice continued in the Church; and He declared that His priests were to do just what He had done, telling them that as often as they should do so they would show forth the death of the Lord until His Second Coming in majesty and glory to judge the world.—I Cor. 11: 24-26.

On the Cross, then, He offered His perfect humanity for us in sacrifice. In the Mass we present that same offering, making it our own, only under the veils of the Holy Eucharist.

3c) Holy Communion

By an extravagance of love, Jesus, having offered Himself for us in the Sacrifice of the Mass, offers Himself to us in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

So the Holy Eucharist is both Sacrifice and Sacrament. There a Gift is offered to God in the name of men, and that Gift is Christ as our Victim on the Altar. Then a Gift is offered to men in the name of God, and that Gift is again Christ—in Holy Communion.

For the reception of Holy Communion Catholics know that they must be in a state of grace, i.e., free from the guilt of mortal sin since their last good confession; and also that, in a spirit of reverence for Our Lord, they must be fasting from any food or drink from the previous midnight. (The fast is now only one hour from food or drink, and water is permitted at any time.)

4) The Sacrament of Penance

Since Jesus Christ is our only Saviour and principal Mediator, there can be no forgiveness of sins except through His death on the Cross.

But we have already seen that original sin is destroyed by the Sacrament of Baptism. Through Baptism, therefore, the redeeming work of Christ is applied to souls.

Yet if Baptism is necessary to destroy the original sin we did not personally commit, how much more necessary will be a Sacrament for sins we do actually commit after Baptism!

Christ therefore provided another Sacrament for the forgiveness of actual sins—the Sacrament of Penance or Confession.

By this Sacrament sins are forgiven by a duly authorized Catholic priest.

God alone, of course, can forgive sin. But God can certainly delegate His power to selected men who would act in His name. And this He did.

The New Testament tells us that Christ breathed upon His Apostles and said: "Receive, you all, the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."—Jn. 20: 23.

St. Paul, therefore, said clearly, "God, Who has reconciled us to Himself by Christ, has given to us the ministry of

reconciliation.”—II Cor. 5: 19.

We must remember that a Christian is not merely an isolated individual. He is a member of the Church. And whenever he sins he not only offends God, he harms his own soul and does injury to the Church of which he is a member.

All three, therefore, enter into his reconciliation. He humbles himself by contrition; confesses his sins to a priest as a representative of the Church; and through that priest is granted absolution by God.

Many Protestant writers today regret the loss of the Confessional. They point to its perfect adaptation to human psychology; how it keeps men aware of their responsibility to God; how it secures the reparation of wrongs; and the force it is for social good. But for Catholics, of course, the fact that Christ instituted this Sacrament leaves no choice but to accept and make use of it.

Every priest who hears a confession is bound by the Seal of Confession. Under no circumstances can he reveal or make any use of knowledge he obtains in the confessional. And every Catholic knows that what he says in Confession in order to obtain forgiveness of his sins will at once be dismissed from his mind by the priest as if it had never been said.

The conditions for every good confession, of course, are that the penitent is truly sorry for his sins; that he is determined to try to avoid such sins in the future; and that he is prepared to make any necessary reparation of harm that he may have done to others.

5) Extreme Unction (The Sacrament of the Sick)

Extreme Unction is the Sacrament which, through anointing with oil and prayers offered by the priest, gives health and strength to the souls, and sometimes to the body, when in danger of death from sickness.

That Extreme Unction is of divine institution follows from the words of St. James: “Is any man sick among you? Let him call in the priests of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord shall raise him up; and, if he be in sins, they shall be forgiven him.”—James 5: 14-15.

6) Holy Orders

Holy Orders is the Sacrament by which bishops, priests, and other ministers of the Church are ordained, receiving the power and grace to perform their sacred duties.

God has always made use of human agencies for the purposes of religion. He established a special priesthood in the Old Law. And the Gospels show that Christ established a new priesthood for the Christian religion.

He chose some men rather than others—the twelve Apostles.—Lk. 6: 13. He gave them His own priestly mission. “As the Father has sent Me,” He said, “I also send you.”—Jn. 20: 21.

They were to teach all nations.—Matt. 28: 19. They were to do so with His authority. “He who hears you, hears Me.”—Lk. 10: 16.

They were to baptize their converts.—Matt. 28:19. They were to forgive sins.—Jn. 20: 23. They were to offer sacrifice. “Do this in commemoration of Me,” Christ said to them at the Last Supper, adding, “As often as you do it you will show the death of the Lord until He come.”—I Cor. 11: 26.

By these special powers given to specially chosen men Christ created a new priesthood to continue His work till the end of time.

Catholics entertain the greatest respect for this priesthood of Christ and regard all who have received it by ordination with the deepest reverence.

They address a priest as “Father” because a priest does all for the spiritual life of the soul that ordinary parents do for the natural life of their children.

It is the priest who gives the spiritual life of grace to souls at the baptismal font; and he can say with St. Paul, “In Christ Jesus I have begotten you.”—I Cor. 4: 15. It is the priest who teaches and advises those brought forth to life in Christ by their baptismal re-birth. He forgives their sins, nourishes them with the bread of life in Holy Communion; and he is with them when they go from this world at death, soothing their last hours, and preparing them for their

journey from this world to God.

For all these reasons, the office of those called to the priesthood is held in the deepest respect by Catholics.

7) Marriage

Now there is but one Sacrament more, that of Matrimony; but as this Sacrament particularly concerns yourself, we shall reserve it for our next talk when we shall be able to deal with it as fully as the subject requires.

INSTRUCTION FIVE

The Sacrament of Matrimony

God Himself established marriage, that human beings might co-operate with Him in the creation of children, and take His place as visible agents of His paternal Love.

The very word matrimony is built up from two Latin words, “matris” and “munus,” meaning the duty of motherhood.

And the union between husband and wife is in order that the wife may have the duties and the privileges of a mother in her own household, she and her husband bringing up the children God sends them to love and serve Him.

Sin, however, has only too often resulted in the degradation of marriage from the high level intended by God. Disordered passion frequently usurps the place of genuine love, and selfishness undermines the sense of duty.

Christ, therefore, determined to purify marriage. He condemned its degradation, lifted the natural contract to the lofty dignity of a Christian Sacrament and attached to it those graces which would counteract the tendencies of fallen human nature.

Christian Marriage

Marriage, according to the teaching of the Catholic Church, is a Christian Sacrament in the reception of which a man and a woman, who are lawfully free to do so, enter into a life-long union as husband and wife, for the sake of children, companionship and mutual edification in the service of God.

Let us consider each element in that description of Christian marriage.

1. A Christian Sacrament

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul sets before us the union between Christ and His Church as the model of what the union between husband and wife should be. And he concludes by saying that marriage “is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church.”—Eph. 5: 32.

As a Sacrament, Christian marriage sanctifies the love of husband and wife for each other, by blending it with the very Love of Christ for them both. It gives them the grace to bear with the trials of their state, for no one can escape all temporal anxieties, difficulties and sufferings. And it inspires both husband and wife to educate their children in thoroughly Christian ideals.

To receive this Sacrament worthily, God’s law requires that both parties must be in a state of grace; and Catholics are taught that their marriage should always be preceded by confession and Holy Communion.

2. Lawfully Free

In our consideration of the Commandments of the Church we saw that, since marriage is a Christian Sacrament, it is subject to the laws of the Church. We saw, too, that no Catholic can contract a valid marriage except in the presence of an authorized Catholic priest and two witnesses.

But attention must also be paid to the impediments to marriage. Catholics are forbidden to marry relatives within the third degree of blood-relationship; a divorced person whose previous partner is still living; or a person who is not a Catholic. Since it concerns yourself, we shall come back to this last case in a few moments.

3. A Life-long Union

Death alone dissolves the bond of Christian marriage. No human power can do so. Christ said definitely, “What

God has joined together, let no man put asunder.”—Matt. 19: 6.

The Christian religion excludes divorce and remarriage. Marriage is contracted until death comes to one or other of the parties.

This absolute prohibition of divorce and re-marriage prevents thoughtless marriages and easy separations. It protects women, so unequal to man in the contract by reason of her maternal duties and need of support. It safeguards the welfare of the children who need and have a right to the care of their own proper parents. And it benefits society itself by the stability of family life.

State laws permitting divorce and re-marriage are here in conflict with the teaching of Christ, Who said, “Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, commits adultery.”—Mk. 10:11. And Catholics have to hold that no reasons of expediency can justify such a violation of the law of God.

4. Husband and Wife

Speaking of marriage, Christ said, “They shall be two in one flesh. Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh.”—Mk. 10: 8.

The wife’s relinquishing of her own name to take that of her husband is intended to express the merging of their lives. And each party grants to the other the right to those bodily functions ordained to the pro-creation of children, provided the marital act is fulfilled in a normal and natural way and not degraded by contraceptive abuses.

In the exercise of these rights, however, happiness in marriage depends to a very great extent upon gentleness, the manner of approach, and mutual consideration. Without reverence for so intimate a union and unselfish love of each other, the psychological reactions can be most harmful, particularly to the wife.

5. For the Sake of Children

The primary purpose of marriage is the pro-creation of children. God has implanted in human beings two great appetites, the one for food to preserve individual life; the other for sex-relations to preserve the life of the race. The pleasure attached to the indulgence of these appetites is secondary to their purpose.

So, in the Old Testament, Tobias prayed before his marriage, “O Lord, You know that not for fleshly lust do I take Sara to wife, but only for the love of posterity in which Your name may be blest.”—Tob. 8: 9.

Note 1—Contraceptive birth-control is, therefore, gravely sinful. Husband and wife have the right to marital relations, provided they take no measures to prevent God’s natural laws from attaining their end.

If, however, nature itself makes the conception of a child impossible at the time such relations are contemplated, husband and wife are quite free to make use of their privileges. But in all such relations they must be prepared to accept the child, should conception result.

Both the natural moral law and God’s positive laws demand this. Contraceptive birth-control is not wrong merely because the Catholic Church forbids it. The Church forbids it because it is wrong. She simply has not the power to say that it is not sinful. Gen. 38:10, tells us that Onan was guilty of contraceptive birth-control, and adds, “therefore the Lord slew him because he did a detestable thing.”

If married people wish to limit the number of their children, the only lawful way is by self-restraint, abstaining from marital relations by mutual consent, either until another child is welcome, or at least during those times when conception is likely to occur. Such continence is possible with the grace of God, and prudent avoidance of provocation.

This law may seem irksome; but there is no state in life which is one of unmitigated pleasure and self-indulgence. And certainly no earthly benefits are sufficient compensation for the loss of God’s grace. One who sincerely loves, wills the good of the other; and such a one would rather forego a personal satisfaction than inflict the evil of serious sin on the soul of the one loved.

Note 2—There is scarcely need to add that, once a child has been conceived, it has the full right to life proper to any other human being. Abortion is murder; and the Catholic Church forbids this crime under pain of excommunication. Any action with the intention of terminating pregnancy is mortally sinful.

Note 3—Such children as God sends must be brought up in the love and service of God.

Parents are obliged to provide for their children's bodily needs; give them a truly Catholic education, sending them to Catholic schools; teach them their religion, and see that they fulfil their duties of piety and prayer; and they are obliged always to set their children a good example of Christian virtue in every way.

6. Mutual Companionship and Edification

Husband and wife should adapt themselves to each other in a spirit of self-sacrifice, bearing with each other's faults, faithful in their respective duties, and rivals as to which will best serve God.

As marriage gives to each of the parties an absolutely exclusive right to the other's love, any alienation of affection is gravely sinful. Neither husband nor wife is free in conscience to bestow attention upon, or accept attentions from, any third party. Mutual fidelity is a serious obligation before God, binding those who have entered upon the sacred contract of matrimony.

Such, then, is Christian marriage as a Sacrament of the Catholic religion. As a state in life, marriage has both its consolations and its difficulties; but if it be undertaken by the parties with genuine love for one another blended with truly religious motives, success, happiness and the blessing of God may be lawfully expected.

But this reference to religious motives leads to the question of mixed marriages.

Mixed Marriages

The Catholic Church forbids mixed marriages for many and wise reasons, which have but to be stated to be approved by every right-thinking person.

1. Marriage is a Sacrament, and the Church would naturally prefer that both parties desiring to receive it at her hands should be Catholics, prepared for this great grace in the Catholic way, by confession and Holy Communion

2. For their own sakes, husband and wife should be one in all things. A chasm between them on the vital subject of religion, to say the least, does not make for perfect sympathy, unity and happiness.

3. The inability of the non-Catholic to appreciate Catholic moral principles relating to marriage can easily give rise to a conflict of conscience in regard to marital duties, with consequent distress above all to the Catholic party.

4. Always there is the danger that the neglect of all Catholic religious duties by the non-Catholic will lead the Catholic party and the children, also, to indifference towards religion, or even to driftage from it altogether. The ideal is certainly that father, mother, and children should all be fervent in the practice of the same religious duties.

However, for good reasons, a dispensation may be obtained for a mixed marriage, provided certain conditions are observed which are intended, as far as possible, to lessen the obvious disadvantages of such a marriage.

Conditions for a Mixed Marriage

The Church does not feel free in conscience to grant a dispensation for a mixed marriage unless the non-Catholic party has had the Catholic religion sufficiently explained to him to enable him to understand the religious obligations of the Catholic party, and unless the following promises are given in writing:

Promises to be Signed Before the Marriage

A. To be signed by both parties :

We, the undersigned, hereby, each of us, solemnly promise and engage that all the children, of both sexes, who may be born of our marriage shall be baptized in the Catholic Church, and shall be carefully brought up in the knowledge and practice of the Catholic religion.

B. To be signed by the non-Catholic party:

I, the undersigned, do hereby solemnly promise and engage that I will not interfere with the religious belief of my future ;

and that I will allow full and perfect liberty to fulfil all duties as a member of the Catholic religion.

If these promises are required in writing, it is due merely to the great sense of responsibility of the Church in this

matter. All serious contracts demand permanent records. The very law of the land demands both signatures for the marriage itself. And these promises are as important as the marriage itself. And if one intends to carry out any important provisions in a serious contract, he should not mind putting his signature to them, even as to the contract itself.

The promise that all the children will be Catholics may, at first sight, appear to be unfair. In fact, it is scarcely possible for a non-Catholic to understand it from the non-Catholic point of view. The only way to appreciate the position is to try to see it as the Catholic is bound to do. For the Catholic cannot hold that one religion is as good as another. He or she believes that the Catholic religion is indeed the one true religion.

With such a conviction, no Catholic can say, "I'll have the true religion, but my children won't"; or, "God will be worshipped by me in the way He commands, but not by my children." God Himself could not authorize that, and the Catholic Church has no power to dispense Catholics from the obligation of bringing up all their children as Catholics. She can but declare that obligation to the parties concerned, and urge its fulfilment.

Celebration of Mixed Marriages

The normal law of the Catholic Church declares that mixed marriages may not take place in the Church, but must be celebrated elsewhere, as in the vestry or sacristy, or in the presbytery. For, even though the Church grants a dispensation, the fact remains that she disapproves of them, a disapproval she wishes Catholics never to forget.

The Church cannot be expected to treat mixed marriages as the normal rule, or to make as much of them as in the case where both parties are her own. No lack of courtesy is intended towards the non-Catholic party by this restriction of privileges, any more than a lack of courtesy is intended towards a non-member of a club who is granted limited privileges only, when brought as a guest by one enjoying full membership.

Each Bishop is empowered to dispense from this restriction in the celebration of mixed marriages within his own diocese, should he think conditions warrant such a dispensation. But, unless the Bishop dispenses from it, the normal law of the Church must be observed. The marriage itself, of course, is not affected by the place of its celebration. A mixed marriage, celebrated before an authorized Catholic priest and two witnesses, is as true and valid a marriage in the eyes of the Catholic Church, and of everybody else, as a marriage between two Catholics.

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Such, then, is Christian marriage; and with this we conclude our review of Catholic doctrine.

In the end, nothing is so dear to the heart of a true Catholic as his or her religion. In so far as the Faith is respected, and the Catholic party is true to it, God's blessing can be expected upon a marriage, and happiness within. And surely it is with the desire of that blessing and that happiness that you enter upon your own marriage.

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