

# Marriage: Myths and Realities

Marriage is becoming one of the most hotly-debated issues of our time. Many people instinctively sense or understand that marriage is a faithful, loving and life-giving union between a man and a woman, but are unsure how to reconcile this truth with the growing push for same-sex marriage. In the following dialogue, we will look at some of the most common arguments that are raised in favour of homosexual 'marriage' - and how we might respond to these arguments in truth and love.

**Myth:** *Marriage is whatever two people who care deeply about one another want it to mean.*

**Reality:** Marriage is a natural institution whereby a man and a woman give themselves to each other for life in a sexual relationship that is open to procreation – a union which is publicly recognised, honoured and supported because of its unique capacity to generate new human life and to meet children's deepest needs for the love and attachment of both their father and their mother.

**Myth:** *Children are an 'optional extra' for marriage and marriage is not connected with having children.*

**Reality:** When a married couple cannot have children, for reasons of age or infertility, they are still truly married because their lovemaking is *designed* to give life, even if it cannot give life at a particular point in time, or ever. Their sexual union is procreative by its nature, because husband and wife unite in an act that is naturally designed for the creation of a new human being – giving it a special reverence and significance.

**Myth:** *Married sex is about any sort of sexual intimacy. It does not have to involve 'marital' acts and procreative type sex.*

**Reality:** Sexual intercourse that is open to life is essential for marriage because marriage is not just a caring relationship between two people, but *a union of love and life*. In marriage a man and a woman pledge to love each other for life and to lovingly welcome and raise any children of their union. Sadly, through the normalisation of casual sex, contraception, homosexual acts, condoms, abortion and IVF, our culture has denigrated and obscured the life-giving aspect of marriage and sexual intercourse. In spite of this however, people still, deep down, know that the sexual act is about *life* – that it bonds a man and a woman together in a profound way because of the child they may conceive. People still sense the immensity and grandeur of the sexual act, its implicit promise of life-



long love and commitment – “I will be here for you for always” – and this is why there is so much pain and heartache when sexual relationships break down or when a marriage is violated by adultery.

**Myth:** *Marriage is a basic human right and therefore any two people should be allowed to marry whomever they want*

**Reality:** “The right to marry and found a family” is written in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948). International human rights law has always understood and affirmed the enduring and unchanging truth that marriage is a life-giving union of a man and a woman. The United Nations Human Rights Committee, which monitors international human rights treaties, has stated that the right to marry “implies, in principle, the possibility to procreate”. The right to marry and found a family *is* a basic human right, but this right has an objective meaning and content – forming an open-to-life union with a person of the opposite sex.

**Myth:** *If we don't allow same sex attracted persons to marry then we do not respect their inherent human dignity.*

**Reality:** Each and every human being, whatever their sexual orientation, is infinitely loved by God and worthy of love. We are made for deep, authentic, chaste love. Sexual love, as the Catholic Church teaches, demands a “total and definitive gift” of persons to one another. To love someone sexually means being able to accept them completely, including their fertility. Sexual acts that are closed to life, including masturbation, anal sex and contracepted heterosexual intercourse, cannot be truly loving. They reject the deepest part of a person's sexuality – their capacity to give life, to be a father or a mother. True sexual intimacy requires the union of two different, but complementary, persons – a man and a woman – with an inherent orientation to life.

**Myth:** *If homosexual persons are sexually attracted to one another then allowing them to marry is simply showing respect for their natural inclinations.*

**Reality:** No one can deny that many homosexual people sincerely care about their same-sex partners. But, as hard and painful as it is for those who suffer from same-sex attraction, real love demands chastity – the integration of sexual desires into unselfish love for the other person. This means abstaining from sex that is not marital and open to life. Unfulfilled sexual desires can be a painful cross to carry. But a chaste life brings us true inner peace and joy, because we are living in harmony with the way our bodies have been designed and we are treating the person we love as a *gift* – loving him or her for their own sake, and not just for the sexual pleasure they can give us.

**Myth:** *Sexual intimacy is the cornerstone of real friendship.*

**Reality:** The human drive for sexual intimacy is strong, but we have an even deeper need to be *loved* for who we truly are. Sadly, the world is constantly telling us that sexual intimacy is the only kind of intimacy worth having – that you *must* be in a sexual relationship to be happy or you will be doomed to a miserable life with nobody to love you. The real life experience of unmarried people around the world can testify that this is simply false! Millions of unmarried people around the world live happy, satisfying lives – loving others and being deeply loved in return – without having sex. Our need for love is much greater than our need for sex.

**Myth:** *Allowing homosexual marriage won't weaken the institution of marriage as a whole. Two men getting married won't threaten me or my marriage.*

**Reality:** “Expanding” the meaning of marriage in this way constitutes a rejection of what is unique and beautiful about the gift of a woman and the gift of a man. Men and women are created with a purpose and a specific and loving design, and we are called to strive towards fulfilling this as much as we can. Allowing two men or two women to ‘marry’ would involve a fundamental change in our understanding of marriage, from a life-giving and sexually complementary union to a personal, romantic relationship with no true communion or connection to procreation. It will entrench, in a public way, the separation of sex from babies and marriage from children. It will move marriage from a children-centred institution to an adult-centred one. It will trivialise the meaning and dignity of motherhood and fatherhood and declare that having both a father and a mother is an unnecessary duplication. This will deeply affect children and young

people’s aspirations for their own marriage. Their understanding of marriage would also shift to being about one’s self-fulfillment, rather than about self-giving.

Legal attempts to change the definition of marriage may confuse people’s understanding of marriage. But the natural law informs us that marriage can only be between a man and a woman. Society has no power to alter this reality. “Marriages” of a man and a man or a woman and a woman can never be marital unions.

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**Myth:** *Marriage has not always been defined as the union of one man and one woman. How do you explain polygamy?*

**Reality:** At different times and in different cultures, the practice of polygamy (one man having several wives) has been allowed, but not all of the individuals involved became spouses of each other. A man always married a woman. A man might have several wives, but his wives would not be married to each other. The two people getting married would always be a man and a woman – always forming a union that was open to life. At no point have two men or two women ever been considered able to marry each other.

With the coming of Christianity, our understanding of marriage as a lifelong union of love between one man and one woman, to the exclusion of all others, has grown and deepened. Christ did not replace the natural understanding of marriage as a procreative union, but he raised it to its fullness as a sacramental union of life and love, restoring marriage to what it was “from the beginning” (Matthew 19:4-9).



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