

ARE YOU THINKING YOUR MARRIAGE IS AT AN END?

Where do we go when we feel we are facing failure in our marriage?

Jesus said that he did not come for the righteous, the strong, or the successful; he came for the sinful, weak, broken, poor, oppressed, and those in need of healing. This means we can always find new hope in Christ. The profound experience of our own failure can become for us a moment of grace, if it leads us to appreciate how desperately we are in need of the saving and healing mercy of Christ, especially as it comes to us through the sacraments. The simple truth is that *everyone* has failed God through sin. We are all in need of his loving mercy and help. Sometimes an experience of profound difficulty can open us up to better give ourselves to God completely. Perhaps this is what it means to be "*poor in spirit*" when we recognize how profoundly we *need* a Savior. Jesus loves and consoles us in the midst of any experience of failure.

"I feel like this relationship is killing me!"

Prudence is needed here to distinguish between spousal abuse and the sacrifice of maintaining a healthy marriage. Every healthy marriage will have times when it feels as though you can't go on because the sacrifice required is too great. This in no way condones an *abusive* relationship and one should seek wise and holy counsel if uncertain. There are times when it may be necessary to separate if the relationship becomes abusive, but one should try to seek counsel from a priest first.

On the cross, Jesus demonstrated how spouses are to love each other, even in the face of rejection: "*Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*" Ephesians 5:25. And, "*Let the wife see that she respects her husband*" Ephesians 5: 31-33.

Jesus shows us the redemptive power of crucified love! "*Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.*" Ephesians 5:1

"*Love bears all things... Love never ends*" 1 Corinthians 13:7-8. "*Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*" Matthew 16:25

Dealing with the temptation to give up, or start over with someone else:

Marriage is about being faithful "for better or worse." It is not something you start over on when things become difficult. Also, life usually gets harder, not easier, after a divorce, especially for any children that are involved. Consider the intensity of God's Word: "*I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel... So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.*" Malachi 2:16

Divorce hurts children and destroys families

Parents have an obligation to care for the wellbeing of their children. The divorce of parents devastates children and will affect them for the rest of their lives. Their hearts and lives will forever be torn in two different directions. It ruptures their self-esteem, security and wellbeing.

The unity of the marriage bond is permanent and indissoluble (for better or worse, till death):

"*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" Eph. 5:31

"*They are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.*" Matthew 19:6

What about annulments? An annulment is not a "Catholic divorce." Rather, is a declaration that something essential for a valid marriage was missing from the beginning. A process is involved to make this determination and a Catholic is not free to marry until a declaration of nullity is received. You should talk to a priest or contact the Diocesan Marriage Tribunal directly (859-392-1520) for more information.

What about separation?

Separation can be helpful in some situations; especially as a time to allow heated emotions to "cool down" and to gain perspective. It may help one to avoid making an impulsive decision in the heat of the moment that may be regretted for the rest of one's life.

Divorce and remarriage (without an annulment) is adultery:

Sometimes a civil divorce is necessary; especially, in cases of physical, emotional, or financial abuse. But, even if one receives a civil divorce, they are *not* free to remarry (unless they receive a declaration of nullity by the Church). Prior to an annulment, the marriage bond is presumed valid by the Church and one is not free to date.

"*Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery*" Luke 16:18. "*If she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery*" Mark 10:12.

Jesus affirmed this teaching, even when the Apostles themselves found it hard to accept: "*The disciples said to him, 'If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry.'* But he said to them, '*Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.*'" Matthew 19:10-11

With God's help, there is hope even for a marriage that seems impossible:

"And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.'" Mark 10:26-27

HERE IS WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Talk to your pastor or a trusted priest outside of confession. Your priest should be the *first* person, not the last, to know that your marriage is struggling. He stands on behalf of all the healing graces given by Christ to his Church.

Retrouvaille and Marriage Encounter are programs that have helped weak or failed marriages begin the healing process.

Make a good examination of conscience and go to confession. Do not deprive yourself of the healing, restorative grace of this sacrament! In addition, if you have committed grave sin, you make things worse for yourself by taking Holy Communion when you are not in a state of grace.

Meet with a Catholic Charities counselor. Call (859) 581-8974 and ask for intake. They offer a sliding fee scale, based on your ability to pay. Sometimes you can get a faster appointment by getting a referral from your pastor.

New Beginnings is a faith-based, support ministry for separated, divorced, or widowed men and women (859-392-1533).

Unless we follow God's plan for our lives, all our efforts will be in vain

"Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain." Psalm 127:1

Surviving through a damaged or failed marriage requires repeated forgiveness:

"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'" Matthew 18 21-22

Jesus tells a parable, which compares our debt to God with the debt that others owe to us:

As God has forgiven us, so must we forgive others. (Please read and reflect upon: Matthew 18:23-35.)

Jesus tells us not to judge others, whether they be an estranged or ex-spouse, or one struggling in a failed marriage:

"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. 'Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.'" Luke 6: 36-37

"For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." Matthew 7:1-2

"Do not grumble..., against one another, that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the doors." James 5:9

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church on Divorce

2382 The Lord Jesus insisted on the original intention of the Creator who willed that marriage be indissoluble. He abrogates the accommodations that had slipped into the old Law. Between the baptized, "a ratified and consummated marriage cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death."

2383 The *separation* of spouses while maintaining the marriage bond can be legitimate in certain cases provided for by canon law. If civil divorce remains the only possible way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offense.

2384 *Divorce* is a grave offense against the natural law. It claims to break the contract, to which the spouses freely consented, to live with each other till death. Divorce does injury to the covenant of salvation, of which sacramental marriage is the sign. Contracting a new union, even if it is recognized by civil law, adds to the gravity of the rupture: the remarried spouse is then in a situation of public and permanent adultery: "If a husband, separated from his wife, approaches another woman, he is an adulterer because he makes that woman commit adultery, and the woman who lives with him is an adulteress, because she has drawn another's husband to herself."

2385 Divorce is immoral also because it introduces disorder into the family and into society. This disorder brings grave harm to the deserted spouse, to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them, and because of its contagious effect which makes it truly a plague on society.

2386 It can happen that one of the spouses is the innocent victim of a divorce decreed by civil law; this spouse therefore has not contravened the moral law. There is a considerable difference between a spouse who has sincerely tried to be faithful to the sacrament of marriage and is unjustly abandoned, and one who through his own grave fault destroys a canonically valid marriage.