

**But from the beginning of creation, *God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.***"

From this and other Scriptures the Catholic Church teaches us that the Sacrament of Marriage is an indissoluble union, contracted by mutual consent, between one man and one woman, in a lawful manner, by which they are obliged to live together all the days of their life.

It seems kind of appropriate that a married Deacon give the homily today but the truth is, even after 34 years, Judy and I are still learning to be married and to live that Sacrament. This much I do know:

The fact that two free human beings,  
very different, raised in different homes can  
choose each other a thousand times over,  
can choose not to be one without the other,  
daily choosing to live in a remarkable mutual dependence...  
is so amazing, that it has to be God's doing.

This is the reason why a rupture of this union between man and woman bound in matrimony, is not possible in a Sacramental marriage. It is of God.

Now, let me be clear ... I understand that 'stuff' happens. And some of it can be very ugly.

But working to save your marriage is always a noble and heroic effort, even if it fails in the eyes of others.

There are situations where a breaking of this "civil" bond of marriage is unpreventable. There are some reasons why a "civil" divorce MIGHT even be prudent given certain circumstances.

Because marriage is Sacramental , a second marriage following a civil divorce may be valid in the eyes of the law, but the Church understands that one is still, in Sacrament, bound to their original spouse and you simply cannot be married to two people at once.

If this describes your current state, talk to Father as it may be possible to make it right in a very caring and loving way.

And to those of you who are divorced or separated ... please know that the Church not only welcomes you, we are not complete without you.

The Church is not untouched by divorce. The divorce rate among Catholics is no better than the divorce rate of any other group, hovering at 48 – 52%.

That means that everyone here today has been affected by divorce in one way or another.

The question must be asked, In spite of all the marriage prep classes, are people who seek marriage truly discerning it as a vocation?

The preparation certainly has that as its goal, however most couples who present themselves for the classes have pretty much made up their mind that they will be married.

Still, we can certainly do better. Every week, we pray for those who are not only discerning the Priesthood, diaconate or religious life, but also for those who are discerning the single or married life. But we don't touch on how to go about doing that. It's like expecting you to be a speed skater, but never showing you how to tie on the skates.

I would like to briefly touch on some basic aspects of discerning the single or married life. This means that I will not be speaking directly to most of you, but as parents, mentors and friends it might be worth keeping tuned in.

Our vocation, simply put, is the calling God gives us which is the best fit for our lives in service to Him and to others.

Fireman, Farmer, Teacher, Rancher or candle-maker are *not* vocations ... these are your job or career. Jobs change – vocations are for the most part permanent, which is why discernment is so important.

Here are three steps that I believe will help in discerning your vocation:

**First step: Prayer.** If you are not praying, you are not discerning.

- Drop the shopping list and engage God in active conversation. Tell Him what you want and take time in the *silence* of your heart to listen and reflect.
- BE PATIENT! Prayer isn't Google. God answers when He is ready and you will hear Him when you are ready.
- Receive the sacraments frequently. Closeness to Christ is key to any discernment. We cannot know His will for us if we refuse to be close to Him.

**Second Step: Spiritual Direction:** Spiritual direction is a vastly important aspect to discernment. It helps you get out of your head and find guidance from someone who was in your shoes and chose to place God first in their life. It is an opportunity for prayer and discussion with someone who knows the teachings of the Church, is familiar with the spiritual life, and familiar with your situation.

**Third Step: Formation.**

Live the life you're discerning! That doesn't mean cohabitating or making babies! It means we should.

Learn, understand, and live the **virtues** of the life you are discerning and prayerfully apply them to your life, today. What does that mean? Here's another short list:

- No matter what you are discerning, chastity is a must. Every vocation calls us to it, Purity of mind, body, and spirit. Dating or single or married, this is your calling. Having troubles with it? We all do, but Mother Mary has our backs so ask for her help.
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- Formation in Discerning the **Single life**: I'll admit it, I wish I had specific **formation** tips but I don't. Part of the difficulty here is that being single may also be transitional. Everyone starts out single but they do not necessarily stay single.

But an important aspect to vocational discernment is finding the thing which gives you both peace and contentment. If being single does not do that for you, well then, maybe you need to discern in another direction.

#### 4. Formation in Discerning **Married life:**

- Start living an unselfish life for others; you'll be living that life for your spouse and kids when you are married.
  - Date ... that should be obvious.
    - If you don't feel compelled to date, that might be your first sign you may not be called to marriage.
    - Seek Christ in your partner and don't settle for less.
    - Know the values you want in a spouse and date those who meet them.
    - Never date just for the purpose of having a significant other and never date someone who pressures you to compromise your dignity!
1. Remember the importance of chastity. Stay pure until the vows are said. If you are a virgin, stay that way! If you aren't, recommit yourself to purity. Do not give in.

Discerning your vocation isn't easy and you will take more than a few trips on the struggle bus and the doubt train. But take heart! God *is* calling you to serve Him in a vocation, and if you follow these steps the calling will become a little more audible.

To those living their vocations, hang in there. Discouragement is sometimes a part of the package. Pray earnestly, find friends that are encouraging to your vocation and to all of us, no matter what state of life we are in ... take comfort in knowing that Jesus really does love us.