

ks. Adam Skreczko

*Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie*

DOI: 10.15290/std.2016.02.12

## MARRIAGE AS A WAY TO HOLINESS

### MAŁŻEŃSTWO DROGĄ DO ŚWIĘTOŚCI

Istotą świętości jest miłość Boga i bliźniego. Uświęcenie dokonuje się więc na płaszczyźnie wertykalnej i horyzontalnej i obejmuje wszystkich chrześcijan. To właśnie w perspektywie powołania wszystkich chrześcijan do świętości można mówić o drodze do świętości małżonków chrześcijańskich, pytając, jakie jest ich miejsce w powołaniu powszechnym oraz jak w ich szczególnym powołaniu mają się stać świętymi. Łaska sakramentu małżeństwa daje nową moc małżonkom dla przekazywania wiary, dla uświęcania i przemiany współczesnego społeczeństwa wedle zamysłu Bożego. Zasadnicza problematyka artykułu została ujęta w trzech punktach: źródła świętości małżeństwa, sposób rozumienia świętości małżeńskiej, współczesne rozumienie świętości małżeńskiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** małżeństwo, sakrament, rodzina, świętość, Kościół.

It is very difficult for modern man to think of marriage as a sacred reality or the way to holiness. And yet, every true marriage, even this of pagan couple, is somehow sacred. Bronisław Malinowski an ethnographer, in his work entitled: "Magic, science, religion" notes that among all peoples marriage apart from the birth of man and his death is one of those special moments in life that has a social dimension and is surrounded by rites of a religious nature. Thus the sacredness of marriage is available experience of many people. This does not happen, at least for now in our Atlantic civilization, as some call it, and that's because a few people allowed this civilization to be reduced to a single dimension, which in the religious language is called a worldly dimension. In this civilization, a man allows so easy to be flatten, does not develop his spiritual life, settles at the impressions, renounces freedom. Judging by the

ever-growing amount of divorces it happens – and probably often does – that even marriage is not the result of a conscious choice, binding for life. Modern man allows to be trapped by convention, trapped in a gray life. And that's why is difficult for this man to understand that this gray life is a or may be a place of encounter with God.

All Christians are called to holiness. The essence of holiness is love of God and the other one. The sanctification of the man is done on two levels; vertical and horizontal, the first is a permanent communication with God. But you cannot achieve full excellence without establishing a community of people – and this is the second dimension of our sanctification. Spouses should bother about their personal holiness, but they also have the responsibility for the salvation of the spouse. This obligation derives from the marriage vow. By the grace of the sacrament of marriage they get new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan. The grace of the sacrament transforms human love of the spouses and makes it a sign and a living image of the mystery of Christ and the Church. This means that true love, by which the spouses mutually engage one another and give themselves like Christ and the Church, presents a concrete and visible way, by which they reveal and realize the profound reality of their sacramental relationship "in the Lord".

For a long time lay people living in marriage and family were conceived as a passive part of the Church, not having their own place in the community of the People of God and not having, as we speak today, the possibilities of expression of their style of Christian life. Only in the perspective of the vocation of all Christians to holiness some began to talk about the path to holiness of Christian spouses, asking, what is their place in the universal vocation and how they become saints in their particular vocation<sup>1</sup>.

### Sources of the sanctity of marriage

Let us first question from where flows the sanctity of Christian marriage? There are threefold source of that holiness.

---

<sup>1</sup> Vaticanum Secundum, „Lumen gentium” *Dogmatic constitution on the church*, chapter V: *The universal call to holiness in the Church*. A. Sarmiento, *Powołanie do świętości i małżeństwo*, [in:] J. Misiurek, W. Słomka (ed.), *Małżeństwo – przymierze miłości*, Lublin 1995, p. 71-83.

### **The first source of the sanctity of marriage – the establishment of God**

It is the object of our faith, that marriage was established by God. It is not the result of some event or the result of the evolution of the blind power of nature. The Creator has established it wisely and providentially in order to make people realize his plan of love. Marriage is not a purely human institution, but over the centuries it could be a subject for various changes in different cultures<sup>2</sup>. The establishment of God is therefore the primary source of the sanctity of marriage. The establishment of a marriage must be regarded as a reality distinct from the act of creation of man and not related to the constitution of the human person.

The source of life of the holy spouses, families, is the sacrament of marriage. This sacrament gives supernatural spiritual unity, which ennobles the natural relationship of husband and wife and their relationship turns into a divine institution. This grace is able to snatch the spouses of the deep-rooted selfishness and call to the generous service for their children, nation, society and Church<sup>3</sup>.

### **The second source of the sanctity of marriage – participation in the laws of God.**

The second source of the sanctity of marriage is the mystery of man, which includes marriage. Man is really a great mystery. St. Paul says about marriage: "This mystery has great significance, but I am applying it to Christ and the Church." (Eph 5: 32). Spouses are aware of belonging to each other. Husband says about his wife, my wife and wife says about her husband, my husband<sup>4</sup>.

The question is: Where does this awareness belong to each other? Can a man give another person the right to himself? If so, on what basis? Though, there are statements: my husband, my wife which are the sign of husband's certain privileges to his wife and vice versa. Marriage is formed as a result of mutual gift and accept it. Where does the right to the gift of himself come from? The man does not have the power, so that he could give himself to someone. If he cannot cut a hand, how can he give himself to someone? The

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Skreczko, *Kultura życia rodzinnego i małżeńskiego we współczesnym kontekście społecznym*, [in:] Rada Naukowa Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, *Kościół w życiu publicznym. Teologia polska i europejska wobec nowych wyzwań*, v. 2, Lublin 2004, p. 293-305.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Scola, *Il Mistero nuziale. Matrimonio-Famiglia*, Roma 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. L. Negri, *Il Matrimonio*, Casale Monferrato 2003.

human person does not have such power. No one can claim the right to the person (cf. Eph 1:2-14).

The statement that the Creator instituted marriage, means that he allows in this way a man and a woman to participate in their right to human persons and at the same time to participate in His supreme right to initiate human life. God the Father gives us in his Son right to Himself. The Psalmist confesses: I belong to you (Ps 119:94 – in Latin translation: I am yours ...) And God for centuries declares: I am the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 5: 8). God gives us the right for each other, he really is our God, God for us, God with us.

In this light the mystery of marriage reveals all its depth. People belonging to each other – possible only in marriage – is the image of mutual belonging of God and man. We touch the mystery of the sanctity of marriage because of the sanctity of a person. Namely, indeed God instituted marriage, ie: he gives a human being the rights, which are entitled to him alone. The Lord Jesus says, “They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide” (Mt 19:6).

### **A third source of the sanctity of marriage – tasks**

The third reality of marriage sanctity is the sanctity of tasks.

The first task, flows from the nature of their mutual relationship. Husband and wife are a community of people: a profound communion of life and love (Gen 2:23). Marriage is one. Spouses create this unity despite all the difficulties that may arise in their lives. What’s more, the foundation of this unity is the vows that they will love each other. Strange reality of love, which was founded with the divine source of love ... and turns into love of God. The Lord Jesus gives the commandment of love, a new commandment to love one another as He loved them (cf. Jn 13, 34 and 15, 12). Loving husband to his wife and the wife to the husband can exist only as much as their own imaginations. In this perspective, you only need to see the reality of sex and sex life. How much the reality of the body, that is the reality of sex, should become a spiritual reality and go beyond the temporal order?

Sexuality is intimately linked with the ability to give life. How very necessary it is for a man to understand the mystery of the beginning of the relationship of human life with the mystery of what spouses links and respect the mystery of the beginning. But to this life, with this life that parents give a child, God creates an immortal soul. The task of giving life is thus also a source of the sanctity of marriage, unites all the spouses in a special way with God the Creator. Misery of man today is the scarcity, if not disappearance, of reverence

for the mystery of sexuality, and therefore for the mystery of life, human and ultimately to God.

There is also one more task for marriage, and which is also a sacred task. It is the work of raising a child. Parents are children's first messengers, the first witnesses of faith (Gen 2:16-17). Parents give children life not just to make them alive, but because that they will be saved. Upbringing leads on this way to salvation<sup>5</sup>.

### Methods for understanding the sanctity of marriage

In general, it can be assumed, that there are three ways of Christian living the events of everyday, and also three kinds of Christian reflection on everyday life. The first one is an escape from everyday life, the goal then becomes holiness **in spite of** everyday life. The second is the sacralization of everyday life; the aim is then holiness **in** everyday life. The third approach is the acceptance of everyday life; the goal becomes a sanctification **through** everyday life, which is full of grace. These distinctions can be helpful to reflect on the problem of the sanctity of marriage.

The first of these ways of the Christian thinking and living assumed that the daily (and more broadly earthly things) are bad. The conclusion was that you need to run away from them – the further, the better. Everyday was only an obstacle in the Christian life and in no way could become a path to holiness<sup>6</sup>.

The second style also assumes that everyday life belongs to the realm of the *profane*, and therefore requires a transfiguration, a kind of connection to the *sacred*. Representatives of this way of thinking is no longer believed that everyday life is and must remain evil, they did not want to escape from everyday life, they wanted make it so holy. Under the slogan “the sanctification of daily life” they wrote, however, and spoke mainly about prayer and mortification, only casually mention the secular duties.

The third spirituality – the acceptance of everyday life and finding in it the same dimension of spiritual depth – is based on overcoming the division of the *sacred-profane*. The world is no longer divided (or even torn) between what is sacred and what is profane. Everything can be sacred. Furthermore, everything

<sup>5</sup> „Children and indeed everyone gathered around the family hearth will find a readier path to human maturity, salvation and holiness. Graced with the dignity and office of fatherhood and motherhood, parents will energetically acquit themselves of a duty which devolves primarily on them, namely education and especially religious education”. Vaticanum Secundum, „Gaudium et spes” *Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world*, no. 48.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. Kłys, *Małżeństwo drogą do świętości*, [in:] F. Adamski (ed.), *Miłość. Małżeństwo. Rodzina*, Kraków 1981, p. 139-182.

that makes a believer, should be sacred – precisely because of the fact that he (or she) does it. Therefore it is said here about the mysticism of everyday life<sup>7</sup>.

This typology also allows you to describe three models of the marriage feature on the path to holiness. Firstly, it would be the sanctity of marriage in spite of the marriage. The examples are blessed and the saints who treat their marriage as a burden, and found their true spiritual joy when – whether during the spouse's lifetime or after his death – can indulge in practices of penance and prayer. The ideal became resignation in marriage with sexual intercourse, which was regarded as something unworthy for people devoted to God. St. Catherine of Siena clearly expressed such a model of holiness, who – in response to the request of a lawyer from the Florence to direct his inner life – also reduced her consent to two conditions: he would first have to abandon his marriage and his career.

Second, we can talk about the sanctity of married life. It is essential to indicate in particular those who knowingly accept the marriage at all costs – also patiently enduring unbearable spouses – trying to live in it “like God”. They were sanctified through various spiritual practices. Resistance of spouses made, however, that the way to holiness here was not marriage as such, but a way of living it by one of the couple. The grace of the sacrament of marriage gave power to the heroic fidelity to spouse. Intercourse was the fulfillment of, more or less unpleasant marital obligation.

The third way of experiencing marriage on the way of faith springs from a deep awareness of the great grace of this sacrament that the ministers are after all the spouses. Marriage vow is here at the same time a profession of faith in the grace of Christ, which will enable to endure in fidelity for the good and the bad. The sacrament of marriage is the mystery of the covenant, in which a married couple is included to reconstitute it in everyday life. The entire married life becomes permeated with dimension of holiness, and not just its selected parts. There is no better test than the sanctity of everyday life with the closest person. Nothing more exposes yet human weakness and faults. Everything that does a believer should be sacred, especially when they do it together – bound by sacramental marriage. The special role here is a physical proximity of spouses. The sacrament of marriage makes the spouses intercourse also a sign of their holiness. God's grace makes reciprocal gift of the body a sign of sacred conjugal love.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. F. Adamski, *Duchowość życia małżeńskiego-rodzinnego*, [in:] F. Adamski (ed.), *Miłość. Małżeństwo. Rodzina*, Kraków 1981, p. 183-199.

### Today's understanding of the sanctity of marriage

The salvation of man consists of: sanctification of him by God (everyday holiness) and cooperation of man (moral holiness). Spouses receive help from God for salvation, but it does not exempt them from caring for their own sanctification, holiness as bestowed by God, as a down payment demands from every baptized sanctity of life, that moral sanctity, to which the Holy Spirit encourages and helps.

Everyday holiness is rooted in the sacrament of Baptism and Confirmation (as sacrament), and then in the sacrament of marriage.

Moral holiness consists of two elements: negative one and positive one, where the first requires a from a Christian duty to fight evil and to avoid sin, and the second "following Christ." Internal and supernatural conformity to Christ is a Christian norm of his way of being and action, and should therefore care of Christ feelings and penetrate the whole deeds with this similarity. As a consequence, there arises the deepest and most personal communion of life with Christ, which consists of reconstructing within himself a spirituality and discipleship of Jesus' actions<sup>8</sup>.

Marriage derives holiness from the relationship of Christ with the Church, because it participates in this union. Marriage "yes" and his self-sacrifice of Christ on the cross unite in celebration. Since the sacrifice of Christ is made in the Holy Spirit, He is also the soul of Christian marriage. As the Father and the Son, Christ and the Church, so man and woman in their love are united with the Holy Spirit, and through him to the Church of Christ and the life of the Trinity. Therefore, love and marriage is holy. Marriage is sanctified by sacrament and the spouses grow into the marriage of Christ and the Church, this is why they should together, through them and near them more and more embody their being "in Christ and in the Church" (Eph 5:32). For this purpose, they receive multiplication of the grace of the state, which makes their human, good and meaningful actions as sacred and saving .

Spouses have the duty to promote everything that develops, fulfills and unites their love and overcome anything that inhibits or destroys it<sup>9</sup>. Besides, each of them is obliged to confirm a partner in his masculinity or femininity, and this is because today there is sometimes a lack of acceptance of gender, especially in women. Spouses should educate each other in their diversity and

<sup>8</sup> Cf. C. Colombo, *Spiritualità della vita familiare*, [in:] T. Goffi (ed.), *Enciclopedia del matrimonio*, Brescia 1968, p. 683-770.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. B. Hudziak, *Współczesne zagrożenia duchowości rodziny*, [in:] T. B. Kulik (ed.), *Współczesne zagrożenia zdrowia rodziny*, Stalowa Wola 2002, p. 73-86.

thus help them in finding their specificity. It will be a starting point in creating harmony in their marriage, and thus the spirituality of their community.

Holiness comes from God, who instituted marriage to be the cause of blessings and have an effect on the sanctity of the Christian family, and the rebirth of man is the work of the Holy Spirit, who activates and sanctifies the family as well as knows what today most need the Church.

God sanctified marriage and the family by the fact that the Son of God assumed a human body and became a child in marriage.

The Christian family built on the Christ sacrament of marriage, draws from this source strength and help and the grace of the sacrament of marriage increases, enhances and strengthens sanctifying grace. These supernatural forces flowing from the sacrament are needed to faithfully fulfill the obligations of marriage and family. By this grace spouses can achieve holiness in their state, and by supernatural communication and love imagines a close connection of Christ with Church.

Holy Family of Nazareth is posed as an ideal of every human family<sup>10</sup>. In addition to Jesus as a role model and help on the path to holiness, Christian spouses have the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. Christ, the Holy One of God (cf. Acts 3:14), he not only was the source of the sanctification of Mary and Joseph, but remaining in the Church is an inexhaustible source of sanctification of all human generations: "It is by him that you exist in Christ Jesus, who for us was made wisdom from God, and saving justice and holiness and redemption." (1 Cor 1:30)<sup>11</sup>.

The relationship between Mary and Jesus, and between Joseph and Jesus emphasizes the aspect of the humanity of Christ, as God's tool effectively serving for sanctification of man. Thus, if the humanity of Christ is an effective tool in the Divine order of sanctification, that those who were with him in daily contact, what is more, in a communion of life, the first became partakers of His nature, and so the same holiness of God. This "mystery of daily contact» Mary and Joseph with Jesus was "full of grace".

Since the source of holiness of the first Christian family – Mary and Joseph, was the presence of Christ, as an effective source of sanctification to families today is the sacramental presence of Christ. Through the sacraments of the Church of Christ is present in families, which constitute an inexhaustible source of sanctification. With sanctifying grace of family in a real participation

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Bajda, *Święta Rodzina – wiecznie aktualnym wzorem dla chrześcijańskich rodzin*, Warszawa 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. A. Skreczko, *Józef i Maryja wzorem świętości małżeńskiej*, „Salvatoris Mater” 5(2003) no 1, p. 125-138.



in the holiness of Christ, and at the same time grace is the presence of Jesus in their lives.

Perfection of Christian spouses or “satisfying oneself” in a marriage depends on the development of the grace of the sacrament of marriage, by participating in the prophetic mission of the Church.

The Christian family participates in the prophetic mission of Christ and the Church by adopting and proclaiming the Word of God. This requires from Christian spouses and parents above all the obedience of faith, ie. the compatibility between faith and life. Faith, which operates as the virtue of love, is called to grow and embody through the events, problems and difficulties in the daily affairs of life, through which God comes to spouses, revealing and presenting them to the specific requirements relating to their participation in the love of Christ to Church.

In the Church, the family also meets the priestly function, because by baptism belongs to the People of God through the sacrament of marriage is constantly nourished by Christ the Lord and through him summoned and committed to a dialogue with God through the sacramental life, the sacrifice of life and prayer. The priestly task of the family meets in intimate communion with the whole Church, through the daily realities of married life and family: in this way the Christian family is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world. Spouses learn how to submit a daily spiritual sacrifice through personal and common prayer, participation in the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation.

Another feature of family is completing the royal function. It is a service to the people in accordance with what Jesus did and commanded his disciples to do. Inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, family lives according to hospitality, respect and service to everyone in his or her dignity as a person and child of God. It should be so especially inside and for the good of marriage and the family, through a daily effort to promote a truly personal community, initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love.

## Conclusion

For a long time lay people living in marriage and family were conceived as a passive part of the Church, not having their own place in the community of the People of God and not having, as we speak today, the possibilities of expression of the style of Christian life. Only in the perspective of the vocation of all Christians to holiness began to talk about the path to holiness of Christian spouses, asking, what is their place in the universal vocation and how can they become saints in their particular vocation. The Christian family

built on sacramental marriage should be the first school of love and holiness, the first school of all human and Christian virtues.

**Key words:** marriage, sacrament, family, holiness, Church.

### **Bibliography:**

1. Adamski F., *Duchowość życia małżeńsko-rodzinnego*, [in:] F. Adamski (ed.), *Miłość. Małżeństwo. Rodzina*, Kraków 1981, p. 183-199.
2. Bajda J., *Święta Rodzina – wiecznie aktualnym wzorem dla chrześcijańskich rodzin*, Warszawa 2000.
3. Colombo C., *Spiritualità della vita familiare*, [in:] T. Goffi (ed.), *Enciclopedia del matrimonio*, Brescia 1968, p. 683-770.
4. Hudziak B., *Współczesne zagrożenia duchowości rodziny*, [in:] T. B. Kulik (ed.), *Współczesne zagrożenia zdrowia rodziny*, Stalowa Wola 2002 p. 73-86.
5. Kłys J., *Małżeństwo drogą do świętości*, [in:] F. Adamski (ed.), *Miłość. Małżeństwo. Rodzina*, Kraków 1981, p. 139-182.
6. Negri L., *Il Matrimonio*, Casale Monferrato 2003.
7. Sarmiento A., *Powołanie do świętości i małżeństwa*, [in:] J. Misiurek, W. Słomka (ed.), *Małżeństwo – przymierze miłości*, Lublin 1995, p. 71-83.
8. Scola A., *Il Mistero nuziale. Matrimonio-Famiglia*, Roma 2000.
9. Skreczko A., *Józef i Maryja wzorem świętości małżeńskiej*, „*Salvatoris Mater*” 5(2003) no 1, p. 125-138.
10. Skreczko A., *Kultura życia rodzinnego i małżeńskiego we współczesnym kontekście społecznym*, [in:] Rada Naukowa Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, *Kościół w życiu publicznym. Teologia polska i europejska wobec nowych wyzwań*, v. 2, Lublin 2004, s. 293-305.
11. Vaticanum Secundum, “Lumen gentium” *Dogmatic constitution on the church*, chapter V: *The universal call to holiness in the Church*.
12. Vaticanum Secundum, “Gaudium et spes” *Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world*.