

Sunday September 28, 2003 **Question of the Week** from Bulletin.

## **HOW DOES ANNULMENT DIFFER FROM DIVORCE?**

Divorce tears apart what God has bound together. Annulment frees from what never really was a true marriage.

By the word of Jesus, there can never be a divorce in the eyes of God alive in His Church. The very nature of marriage makes it permanent and exclusive. The two are mystically one flesh.

There may sometimes be valid reasons for a civil divorce, which God sees as a separate living arrangement, but neither partner can validly marry another so long as the spouse is alive. Civil divorce cannot break the bond of a true marriage.

Civily divorced Catholics are still members of the Church. They CAN receive Holy Communion so long as they do not re-marry another and are otherwise in the state of grace.

Those who do marry another (without annulment) and live together as husband and wife CANNOT receive communion, but are still members of the Church. They should continue going to Sunday Mass, participate in parish events and bring up their children as Catholics. Many parishes have support groups for divorced Catholics.

Annulment is another thing entirely. After proper investigation the Church can declare that the conditions for a true bond of marriage never existed. People with Church annulments are single before God, and free to marry. Any children of an annulled union ARE legitimate because legitimacy is a legal concern.

For a marriage to be valid and binding a number of conditions must be met. We'll list a few.

1. Both parties must be mentally and emotionally capable of entering into a marriage covenant.
2. They both must intend the marriage to be permanent and exclusive. If either has reservations about this the bond is invalid. If either has no intention of being ever faithful, even if they agree, it is not a marriage. If they hold open the choice of divorce if things don't work out, it is not a marriage.
3. They both must enter marriage freely without any coercion. If either party was pressured into marriage there may be grounds for annulment.
4. True marriage must be open to children. If either party enters marriage intending never, ever to have children, it is invalid.
5. Sexual union must consummate the marriage.

When evidence can be shown to proper Church officials that any criteria for a valid marriage was missing from the beginning, an annulment is possible and, presuming a civil divorce, both parties are free to marry another in the Catholic Church if they so desire.