

Why I Am Catholic

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

Through the Catholic Church, Christ offers second chances, while also holding us accountable to Him and His people. The Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession) is available through the Church and reminds us that our sins don't solely impact our relationship with God. The priest is the mediator representing both Christ and the community. We must acknowledge how our sins negatively affect everyone. We are reconciled to Christ and the community and are given new life through God's grace, mercy, and saving power. The same goes with the Sacrament of Marriage and Annulments. When a marriage ends, it affects more than the husband and wife. It affects their relationship with Christ and everyone. The community suffers when marriages don't last. Societies struggle to believe in marriage. Before they enter another marriage, individuals need to understand what did not happen with their previous marriage. If maturity was an issue, we want to ensure they now have the necessary maturity and understanding. That doesn't always come with age and experience! If one person was the primary cause of divorce, we want to ensure they have changed and "get" what marriage is intended to be. Narcissism and pride can prevent this.

A number of people in our country have been married three times or more! These are referred to as "serial marriages." Actress Elizabeth Taylor married eight times, including being married to three different men in three different years in the late 1950s. Mickey Rooney also married eight times, including three different women in a four-year period in the late 1960s. They never stopped to analyze why their marriages failed or to acknowledge how they were affecting others. Today many people don't believe there is a right or wrong and don't believe there should be any consequences or penalties for bad behavior. When we are self-centered or self-absorbed, we cannot see how we are hurting others. Or that we are called to responsibility and accountability.

Christ is the model of a life of sacrifice, service, and dedication to others. He gave many people second chances. Others chose to stay in their blindness and saw no need for repentance and second chances. They preferred to blame others and to criticize Jesus for the good He did. Second chances require that we look inside, that we do serious soul searching. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, our Act of Contrition must promise in these or similar words: "I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to confess my sins, to do penance, and *to amend my life.*" We acknowledge that we need to do things differently and will cooperate with God's grace in striving to change.

Second chances require that we admit we need God, that we did something wrong, we have learned, and we have already started changing and will continue to change. It sometimes requires the help of others so we can see the past clearly and become more accountable. Our prayers, actions, and fasting (our penances) are signs we have changed and allow us to reach out to those we have hurt in loving ways. Second chances also mean we forgive ourselves.

I know many couples who are in joyful and strong second marriages. Most freely admit the mistakes they made in their first marriages and readily explain how they are different and thus their second marriage is different. They also admit they would not have gotten there on their own; and that forgiveness, reconciliation, self-knowledge, faith and healing are essential to the journey of life.

Footnote

If two people make a baby together, it does not automatically mean they should get married. They may not be called to marriage. They may barely know each other. It may not be what is best for them and their child. I know of one couple where out of 20 categories, their highest score of compatibility was eight percent. Most of their scores were zeroes. They were young, immature, and had very different values, expectations, etc. All they had in common was a child on the way. The priest advised they talk about how best to raise the child and to even consider giving the child up for adoption. But not get married. In the United States, for couples that marry young, where one or both are under the age of 21, there is more than a 90 percent divorce rate. Every so often, a couple has genuine, mature love, not merely infatuation or a "feeling of love." If so, we offer extra marriage preparation, marriage counseling, and recommend a longer process. Part of marriage is the procreation of children. But that should never be the only reason for marriage.