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**Jesus Caritas**  
Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted

## Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery

### Part Two

In my previous article, we began our consideration of the Sixth Commandment, focusing on the goodness of our sexuality and the importance of living it according to God's plan. This time, I wish to focus on the blessings that spring from faithfulness in marriage, the sad consequences that follow the sin of adultery, and the call of every Christian married couple to Evangelization.

### A Legacy of Fidelity

A friend shared with me once his account of experiencing a beautiful moment with his grandmother shortly before her death. What had begun as a small cancer had spread to most of the internal organs and death was close. Upon seeing his grandmother in this state, seemingly unconscious with pain medication, he was struck by the tremendous debt of gratitude he owed her for her faithful marriage to his grandfather, who had died a few years prior.

Theirs had been a marriage that had persevered faithfully through poverty in the Great Depression, bouts with illness, losses of several children, and, no doubt, the many trivialities and temptations that gnaw at a marriage over the years. This was a marriage that had experienced every aspect of "better or worse, richer or poorer,

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sickness and health.”

My friend leaned down and whispered, “Thank you, Grandma, for the legacy of love you have left us by your faithful marriage to Grandpa. It is a great gift to us!” She had evidently heard him, because her eyes briefly opened and a quiet smile appeared. Shortly thereafter she passed away.

Such is the legacy of love left for later generations by faithful and loving marriages. The consequences of a faithful and well-lived vocation to marriage are incalculable, for generations of the families involved and for the couple themselves. My friend received from his grandparents the knowledge that his marriage, too, could thrive and stay faithful even through great difficulty. This elderly woman, in one of her last breathing moments, received the consolation expressed by the Psalmist, “**...because of my integrity you sustain me and let me stand before you forever** (Psalm 41:13).” This is the achievable and blessed reality protected by the Sixth Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery.

How desperately the Church and the world today need the example of marriage lived out faithfully! Moral theologian William E. May chose an appropriate image when he titled his helpful book in defense of this sacrament: “Marriage: the Rock on Which the Family is Built.” Marriage must be rock-like for the sake of so many precious realities that depend on marriage: the stability of the family and larger communities, the safety and psychological well-being of children, the inculcation of personal virtue to the next generation, and many more.

### **The Opposite Legacy of Adultery**

Our Sacred Scriptures are condemnatory toward the sin of adultery because the legacy of adultery brings a very different and bitter fruit than the legacy of faithfulness. This legacy is one of profound injustice.

There are many injustices prevalent in our broken world, but no injustice is more personal in nature than adultery. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church points out (#2381), “*He who commits adultery fails in his commitment. He does injury to the sign of the covenant which the marriage bond is, transgresses the rights of the other spouse, and undermines the institution of marriage by breaking the*

*contract on which it is based. He compromises the good of human generation and the welfare of children who need their parents' stable union."*

Everyone suffers from adultery, children in a particular way. The suffering of children, often unacknowledged in society today but very real nonetheless, unveils the false claim that "no one is getting hurt by infidelity." It exposes the lie that "no-fault divorce" statutes constitute good law for society. In many cases, current divorce laws actually reward irresponsible behavior. They provide a convenient cover-up to the great injustice of divorce suffered by the innocent parties and the harm it is doing to our children.

This harm is clearly pointed out in the Catechism (#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.*"

Our attitude towards divorced persons, including those at fault for bringing about the divorce, must be that of Christ. Even those who are responsible for divorce or adultery remain our brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is our duty to make it clear that the Church does not abandon them. We embrace them with our prayers and assure them that God's mercy is stronger than sin and brokenness. While the Church, faithful to the teaching of Jesus about divorce, does not admit to Eucharistic communion divorced persons who have remarried, neither does she excommunicate them from her midst. As baptized persons, the divorced still share in the Church's life and prayer. Some marriages, which end in a civil divorce, were never valid marriages from the start. The Church assists persons in such cases through a judicial process of annulment.

### **The Mission of Marriage: A Marital New Evangelization!**

What is God asking, in the New Evangelization, of those disciples whom He calls to the vocation of marriage? What is the mission in Christ's Name that flows from the loving, hard work of marriage and the family — lived faithfully according to the Sixth Commandment and the Gospel of Life? Pope Benedict XVI (Cardinal Ratzinger at the time)

spoke to catechists during the Jubilee Year 2000 about the key to evangelization in our time:

*"To evangelize means: to show this path – to teach the art of living. At the beginning of his public life Jesus says: I have come to evangelize the poor (Lk. 4:18); this means: I have the response to your fundamental question; I will show you the path of life, the path toward happiness – rather: I am that path. The deepest poverty is the inability of joy, the tediousness of a life considered absurd and contradictory. This poverty is widespread today, in very different forms in the materially rich as well as the poor countries. The inability of joy presupposes and produces the inability to love, produces jealousy, avarice – all defects that devastate the life of individuals and of the world.*

*This is why we are in need of a new evangelization – if the art of living remains an unknown, nothing else works. But this art is not the object of a science – this art can only be communicated by [one] who has life – he who is the Gospel personified"*

*The mission of Christian married couples is obviously much more than merely to avoid adultery. The call is to be open to the fullness of the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, especially to live the conjugal relationship fully, chastely and fruitfully – to be that rock upon which children, the parish, the neighborhood and many others can stand in good times and in bad.*

*So often this form of the New Evangelization is a hidden one. Kimberly Hahn in her insightful book on marriage, "Life-Giving Love," writes (p. 143), "God knows what he is doing in calling us to this incredible task of changing the world one diaper at a time."*

Fidelity in marriage can look so ordinary and routine. But even the smallest deeds build something wonderful when they are filled with love. Like an underground stream, hidden from view, the deeds of love wrought by a faithful and sacrificial marital relationship bring about rich fruits in God's Kingdom. The children and grandchildren of such married couples, one day, will discover from where they have been fed. Most assuredly, God will know.

Fidelity in marriage, with God's grace, is possible. It is also an

obligation in justice for those who make wedding vows. From this devotion to the marital commitment, all of us in the Body of Christ receive an often quiet but irreplaceable reminder of the ever-faithful love of God.

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