

**This gospel passage has influenced our Catholic teaching about divorce and remarriage. We believe marriage is sacred. The commitment between a man and a woman is a sacrament of the commitment Christ makes to the Church. Just as Christ cannot break his sacred commitment with us, so a sacred marriage cannot be broken. However, in some cases, things come to light after the wedding. In some situations it is not safe or healthy for two people to stay together; their marriage is not sacred; it does not represent the love of Christ for the Church. Divorce happens.**

**A Catholic who divorces may still come to communion. This is often misunderstood. Divorce does not change a person's status as a Catholic. However, remarriage is another matter. A person who marries outside the Catholic Church is asked not to come to communion. If a Catholic is divorced or interested in a divorced person, and wishes to retain communion privileges, he or she opens an annulment case on the failed marriage. When annulments are granted, Catholics are free to enter a new marriage in the Church.**

**I wish we had another word for annulment. Many people think it means the first marriage never existed and that children are illegitimate. Neither statement is true. A Church annulment says that the marriage was not a sacrament; it did not reflect the love of Christ for the Church; one of the signs is that it was not permanent. An annulment affirms what the partners already realize: they should not be held to their commitment because they never built a completely sacred relationship. An annulment says absolutely nothing about children, and it has no status whatsoever in the State of Missouri. When I witness a wedding here, I act as a minister of the Church and as a representative of the State. When a couple divorces, they end the contract the State honored; if they wish to end the agreement made in the Church, we call that an annulment because it does not technically "end the agreement;" it announces that the sacrament didn't happen – not that the marriage didn't happen.**

**Canon law requires Catholics to be married in a Catholic ceremony before a Catholic priest or deacon and in a Catholic Church. Dispensations from these requirements can be granted before a wedding, but without the dispensations, our Church does not recognize the new marriage. We do recognize the marriages of other believers, however they take place. So a divorced non-Catholic needs an annulment from the Catholic Church to marry a Catholic.**

**In this parish several members help me with annulments; we usually have a few of them in the works at any one time. We are anxious to help anyone who seeks to have their marriage recognized by the Church, especially when the marriage they are in feels right, feels sacred, feels permanent, feels committed – and should have the blessing of the Church.**

**Divorce is awful. Jesus didn't like it. The Church doesn't like it. Families don't like it. Kids don't like it. Sometimes people make difficult choices. The Catholic Church does not reject the divorced; we minister to the divorced. We think that's what Jesus wanted us to do.**