

855 Divine love, which is the summit of the virtuous life, is also the force that accompanies our divinization. In his love for humankind, God became one of us, and through our love for God we grow toward divinization. In divinization the human mind becomes illumined and enraptured by divine light. The human person becomes a partaker of divine loves<sup>530</sup> and their entire being is transfigured: the person becomes a god by grace.

### III. THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY AS A NEW CREATION (THE FOURTH, FIFTH, SIXTH, AND NINTH COMMANDMENTS)

Preserve their marriages in peace and concord;  
nourish the infants, guard the young; strengthen the aged;  
comfort the fainthearted; gather the scattered.  
'Anaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great)

#### A. Christian Marriage

##### 1. The Family—a Domestic Church

856 In the unity and love of the first married couple the Holy Fathers see an image of the Church. The marital union of a man and woman is ecclesial by its very nature, just as the nature of the Church is reflected in the unity of the married couple. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul teaches us that the mystical union between Christ and the Church is the archetype of the marital bond: "This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32). Marriage is a "type of the Church,"<sup>531</sup> the place of the presence and action of Christ, and a sign of new life. Saint John Chrysostom calls a marriage a little Church, which walks before the face of God both day and night.<sup>532</sup>

857 The Lord our God blesses marital love and endows it with a spirit of sacrifice, and with fruitfulness. It unites two people—a man and a woman—into a single whole that no one can break apart: "Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate" (Mt 19:6). Marital unity is realized through mutual self-giving to the point of self-sacrifice: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25).

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<sup>530</sup> See MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Centuries on Charity*, 1, 27: PG 90, 965.

<sup>531</sup> JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Colossians*, Homily 12, 5: PG 62, 587.

<sup>532</sup> See JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Ephesians*, Homily 20: PG 62, 143.

858 the Holy Spirit—"Treasury of Blessings and Bestower of Life"—grants marriage the gifts needed for a devout life in peace, truth, harmony, and love. Marriage serves the Church by building up the Body of Christ in a community of faith, love, and mutual sanctification. The community of marriage becomes a "domestic church" through the action of the Holy Spirit. In the prayers of the Order of Crowning, the priest addresses God with the petition "Lord our God, crown them with glory and honour."<sup>533</sup>

## **2. Sexuality and Christian Marriage**

859 Sexuality is a gift from God to be a man or a woman, a gift that we receive at the moment of our creation. Therefore, we are called to accept this gift from God and enfold it in our lives.

860 Sexuality embraces all the natural dimensions of human existence: it marks not only the body, which is the visible sign of one's gender, but also a person's soul and spirit. In the Book of Genesis, it is written that God created humankind as male and female (see Gn 1:27); therefore, one's sex (being male or female) is a gift from God, and not a matter of human choice. Each person is called to accept the Creator's plan for his or her life as expressed in one's sex.

861 Human sexuality can be understood only in the light of the Christian understanding of love as a communion of persons. Such communion is realized in love as the self-giving of one person to another. This love is granted to a person by the Holy Spirit, who opens that person to another individual.

862 In marital life, a man and a woman open themselves to God through mutual love, which becomes the foundation of their indissoluble union, fidelity, and fruitfulness. In the virginal state of consecrated life, sexuality is transfigured in the Holy Spirit in order to serve God and one's neighbour in love for the sake of the heavenly kingdom (see Mt 19:12).

863 Any selfish exploitation of another person as a means for obtaining sexual pleasure contradicts God's gift of love, deforms the essence of sexuality, and deeply wounds the person. It opposes the sixth and ninth commandments. Therefore, sexual activity outside the Mystery of Matrimony, marital infidelity, the destruction of marital fruitfulness through abortion or contraception, polygamy and polyandry, homosexual acts, and autoeroticism—all of these demean human dignity and are grave sins.

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<sup>533</sup> Trebnyk, Rite of Crowning, Exclamation at the crowning of the couple.