

“YEAR OF THE EUCHARIST”—DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE, COHABITATION & COMMUNION

BY FR. STEVE LAPE PAGE ONE

Over the years, I’ve been asked by a number of people this question: “As a divorced person, can I receive Communion?” The quick answer is yes, but so long as there has been no remarriage without an annulment. I’ve met many people in my various parish assignments who have avoided receiving Communion for lots of years because they mistakenly believed that they were not allowed to do so because they were divorced, even though they never remarried. The problem becomes when a Catholic divorc-



es and then remarries outside of the Catholic Church (whether it’s civilly or in another Christian denominational ceremony). The Church has always held that a marriage is valid between 2 people till death do they part unless proven otherwise. Jesus Himself held marriage to such a sacred, permanent bond, saying: “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and the one who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.” (Luke 16:18). Jesus’ teaching on this is also found in Matthew 19:9 and Mark 10:11. Thus, if a Catholic has married validly in the Church, then divorces, the Catholic would first have to have that marriage proven to be & declared invalid by a diocesan tribunal before having the freedom to validly marry again in the Church.

That’s where the annulment process comes in. The annulment process is part of the “binding & loosing” power that Jesus gave Church authority, as

represented by the original Apostles, especially Peter, who received these words from our Lord: “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Mt 16:19) The annulment process concerns not so much what happened in the marriage, but focusing on what problems may have been present in the relationship before the couple exchanged their vows in the wedding ceremony at church which would prevent the marriage from being the permanent, loving, sacramental bond that God intended from the beginning of time. Examples of some of those problems that could suggest invalidity include: drug & alcohol addiction, dysfunctional family background, psychological issues, immature judgment of what the serious nature of marriage involves, and control issues, just to name a few. In having sponsored a number of annulment petitioners during my years as a priest, I know that it can bring healing, closure and new hope to those who seek it.

Recent popes, bishops & various documents from the Church hierarchy have repeatedly emphasized that those who are marriages outside the church or non-marital, sexually active, “living together” arrangements (also known as cohabitation) should refrain from receiving Communion. As the Church has consistently taught over the centuries, sexual intimacy is allowed only within the context of a valid marriage that is open to the possibility of life (with no artificial contraception involved). When one receives Communion, it’s an act which is meant to convey



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sist in the healing of their wounds from such unsuccessful relationships, it's also important for Catholics to make every effort to follow the teachings of the Church to help ensure a brighter, happier & peaceful future in their faith journey.

that the recipients are living in obedience to Christ's teachings in His Church. To receive otherwise amounts to hypocrisy and sacrilege. Receiving Communion is intended to not only convey a desire to follow Christ in all things, but to actually be living up to His high standards of Christian behavior, even if it means suffering and sacrifice on our part. Certainly, Christ calls all of His disciples to live lives of chastity (meaning, for validly married couples, refraining from extramarital sexual activity, and for non-married people, meaning refraining from all sexual activity.) It can be a struggle at times to live this way, but “with God, all things are possible.” (Mt 19:26) We have the gift of the Sacraments, especially Reconciliation, to help us with God's grace.

I have sensed how painful it is for so many who have gone through divorces, since I've spoken to countless individuals over the years who've endured such hardships. It's a death experience that can involve much sadness, confusion, grief, anger & bitterness, among many other feelings. In many cases, someone in a divorce situation may not be at fault, due to the other spouse's abandoning the marriage and family or due to abusive behavior from the other. It's important for ministers in the Church to be good listeners, full of compassion, understanding, and support to those who struggle in the aftermath of a divorce. To as-

