



Remarriage and Holy Communion

Q. Is Rome ever going to change Church teaching on marriage?

A. No.

Q. Can Rome encourage change in some of the ways divorce, remarriage, and annulment teachings are delivered and how to truly minister to people?

A. Yes! But not at the expense of unchangeable truth and what is ultimately best for any person (greater holiness).

Too many myths and misunderstandings are being perpetuated in this area of our faith. Rather than offer a quick “cheat sheet” on who and who can’t receive Holy Communion, it’s important (and responsible) to understand the beauty of Church teachings . . . which will not change because they come from the words of Christ.

The laws are not about open-ended inclusivity or general tolerance but about calling everyone to the highest ways of living for their own holiness and happiness. That’s real love. So please read these first:

Receiving Communion is not just about you

Receiving Holy Communion (the real and true Person of Christ) has two dimensions: it's an intimate, personal act between you and the Person of Christ and is also a public act of being in communion with the rest of his Body. *The two are never meant to be separated.*

Receiving Holy Communion is reserved for those IN Communion

The outward act of receiving the Eucharist is a visible, public sign of the invisible union of your mind, will, and heart with Christ and his Church and all that she proposes for your belief.

Even though you may not fully understand and perhaps not yet agree with some of her teachings, you choose in an act of the will to submit to her authority and accept her teachings as true.

That's why those who are not yet received into the Catholic Church—and are thus not in full communion—are also asked to refrain from the act of receiving Communion. It would be both an interior and exterior contradiction.

Receiving Communion has responsibilities

Receiving Holy Communion is a right for baptized Catholics (and a great privilege)—but it comes with responsibilities.

It's not about going up to “get” (take) something; it's about opening to receive Christ himself. No one should approach the Lord in a state of serious sin (deliberate and willful disobedience) that would offend and grieve him!

No one in serious sin should approach for Communion

If one is in a state of grave sin—living in a way that is seriously not in keeping with God's laws—one should not receive Communion.

This applies to all, married or not.

Again, one doesn't demand that God give of himself in Communion when that person reserves part of himself that he will not surrender to the Lord through his Church. Behind every good law is love.

The Church is there to protect you and others

“The Church (His Bride) is given the authority to bind and loose from Christ himself. She’s the keeper of the keys! (Matt 18:18)

To protect the truth, to uphold the dignity of the sacrament, and to avoid scandal (confusion, misinformation, wrong teaching) to the rest of the Body, The Church has made the best way clear and lives up to her faithfulness to Christ to keep us safe.

Marriage bonds are considered valid until proved otherwise

All marriages between one man and one woman who exchanged consent (I do) are presumed to be valid including between the baptized (sacramental marriage) or un-baptized (natural marriage) until proved otherwise.

This is usually done by a competent church authority (tribunal/Bishop) but sometimes by the Pope.

The Church does not determine if a marriage is valid because it's already assumed valid until proved otherwise. She only determines—after thorough investigation—that a marriage bond was invalid (the true bond never formed when the couple said I DO).

Civil marriages are valid; life, and love, and kids and mortgages are certainly “valid”. But the findings of the Church around marriage have nothing to do with the civil law and are about another dimension of marriage.

Sacramental Marriage is permanent

A valid and consummated sacramental marriage cannot be dissolved by anyone because it images—and is irrevocably tied into—the permanent marriage of Christ and his Church.

That’s what sacraments do: they mystically but truly tie us into and allow us to draw on the powerful graces of Christ’s marriage to his Bride.

Even Non-Catholic Marriages can be valid and sacramental

All validly baptized Christians (Catholic or not) are part of the one Body, one Spirit, one Church. Therefore two baptized Christians can enter into and draw on the graces of a sacrament.

That means the Church assumes two Protestants who exchanged vows have contracted a valid sacramental marriage. That's why divorced Protestants who wish to marry in the Catholic Church need to go through the annulment process.

The marriage bond was formed—or not—at the wedding

Some argue that a lengthy marriage must always be “valid” in the eyes of the Church. But even if you’ve been civilly married for 20 years and have three children, the Church may discover (with proof) that what was assumed to be present at your wedding was not.

Some significant part of what makes a marriage bond was defective or missing—in you or the other person or both. This is not a reflection of who was good or bad, and is not a judgment against persons, but an assessment of truth. It's a complex issue that is worthy of deeper understanding and not just an emotional or quick dismissal.

If you're civilly divorced and not remarried

Civil divorce itself does not preclude anyone from the Sacrament. You may have been divorced against your will or believe divorce was necessary and/or morally justifiable. *Serious, unconfessed sin is what keeps us from Our Lord in the Sacrament.* Once you repent, go to confession, and make any necessary amends, you are free to return to the Sacraments.

You can choose to go through the annulment process (seeking a Decree of Nullity), or you can remain faithful to your vows regardless of how your spouse lives.

Both choices warrant careful consideration, solid research, and consultation with a wise and holy priest or spiritual advisor.

If your spouse petitions for a Decree of Nullity and receives one—despite your desires—you are no longer considered married in the eyes of the Church even though you wish to be or feel that you must live as married.

Some in this situation never remarry and choose to beautifully offer their lives in reparation for the past and for the good of the former spouse.

Who should not receive Communion (see Canon Law 912-921)

Anyone in the state of serious sin or not in full communion with Christ and his Church who has not yet been to confession. (Except, if one is truly repentant and unable to get to confession but makes a perfect Act of Contrition. After receiving, he/she should get to the Sacrament of Reconciliation as soon as possible.)

If one publicly and obstinately persists in grave sin (living in adultery, promoting abortion, et al) Canon Law (915) requires that person not approach for Communion until he/she is reconciled to God in his heart and through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This includes those who are living in “irregular” marriages (no annulment for prior marriages, or Catholics who didn’t marry in the Catholic manner) not considered valid by the Church.

That means anyone with any serious sin should seek the truth, desire to do good, decide to turn away from that sin completely with God's grace, make any changes in their life necessary to do so, and make a good confession. Abundant mercy and forgiveness are always yours!

Even when a person, out of ignorance, is not culpable (guilty) of mortal sin or even venial there is still a wrong to be righted: an act or situation that has pulled the persons(s) away from the fullness of what God wants for them. That situation may also adversely affect others and can cause confusion and scandal to the rest of the Body.

If you (or anyone) has grave, unconfessed sin—or has no intention of changing—why would you approach Our Lord in Holy Communion in a state that would offend and grieve him?

The Sacrament of Confession—also an intimate encounter with him—prepares one to receive him worthily.

What to do if you've civilly remarried without an annulment

- Find a wise and holy priest or spiritual advisor to help you prepare to regularize your situation.
- Don't take the counsel of someone—clergy or not—who encourages you to ignore Church teachings. They are there for your greatest good and ultimate happiness (holiness).
- Recognize that despite the love you may have for each other—and even many years and several children—justice demands, and the rest of the family of God deserves, that you clear up your situation. It's not just "you and Jesus".
- Know that because you're not living in full Communion with Christ and his Church, you may not (yet) receive Communion, but you still have God's love, mercy, and are part of the family!
- Respect the Church and the Body of Christ by submitting lovingly to Church teachings.
- Do not take it upon yourself or demand the Eucharist. Remember you can enjoy and benefit from spiritual communion with Christ every day.
- Consider living as "brother and sister" while you seek Decree(s) of Nullity. This will allow you to receive Reconciliation and Eucharist while still living together. This is not impossible, and many have chosen this path that builds deeper love and trust between couples. Carrying a cross together builds a strong bond!
- Realize that marital relations are also a privilege; they are also a right that comes with equal responsibilities.
- Pray for and practice the virtues of obedience, humility, patience, long-suffering, faith, hope, and love. The graces are worth it!

Find your *former* marriage situation here to see where you stand:

Catholic + Catholic married in the Church
Catholic + Baptized Non Catholic married in the Church
Catholic + Un-baptized married in the Church (with dispensation from Bishop)

- Your marriage is presumed valid until proved otherwise (annulment).
- If you do not remarry and are free from serious sin, you (the Catholic party) may freely receive the Sacraments (Reconciliation and Communion).
- If you remarry civilly, you have (knowingly or unknowingly) placed yourself outside full “Communion” with the Church and therefore may not approach for Communion or receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation until you can rectify the situation. The Church should help you!
- If you’ve remarried civilly—and want to begin the annulment process for prior marriage(s) for both parties—you may live “as brother and sister” (no marital acts) until your current civil marriage can be **convalidated**.
- Convalidation is not a mere “blessing” of the current marriage. Once the impediments are out of the way, the union is then raised to the level of a sacrament!
- During this waiting time you (the Catholic party) may then freely receive the Sacraments. Many who have chosen this path have expressed surprise at the power, beauty and graces that flow from such intentional living.

Baptized non-Cath + Baptized Non-Cath – not married in the Catholic Church

- As viewed by the Catholic Church your marriage is presumed valid (and sacramental) by reason of your valid Christian baptism.
- If you want to subsequently marry in the Catholic Church, you must obtain a Decree of Nullity.
- If you don’t remarry, and want to become Catholic, you may receive the Sacraments after full initiation into the Church.

Baptized Non Cath + Un-baptized – not married in the Catholic Church
Un-baptized + Un-baptized – Not married in the Catholic Church

- As viewed by the Catholic Church your marriage is presumed valid but not sacramental (natural marriage) as one or both of you was never baptized.

- If you wish to marry in the Catholic Church, you must normally obtain a Decree of Nullity.
- There are certain cases where your non-sacramental but valid marriage can be dissolved by the Pope if you were subsequently baptized or are planning to or have married a Catholic.
- Only consummated, sacramental marriages can never be dissolved (two validly baptized Christians).

Thanks be to God that Church law (which springs from God's love) is not going to change because Christ guaranteed (with his life!) that the gates of hell will not prevail against the truth that he gave her and that she safeguards. However, how the church processes the laws and ministers pastorally can change—and often should.