



## If annulment is denied

You took your time, read the books, prayed for wisdom, talked with a wise and holy priest or spiritual director, believed you had legitimate grounds, and filed for a Decree of Nullity (annulment). But you did not get it.

Now what?

### **Filing for appeal**

Many times the evidence submitted by the parties and witnesses was not sufficient (usually far too vague) for the judges to declare with moral certitude that there was an invalid bond on the day you said, "I do".

If you did not have an advocate assigned to your case (someone to explain in depth and walk you through your testimony and other areas) you may want to find/hire someone who is "expert", not just a helpful person.

Talk to the tribunal. Revisit the grounds and your testimony. Consider other grounds or new witnesses. It is complex because the human person and marriage are complex and worthy of great protection. Don't go into this alone or with uncertainty and unanswered questions. Parties deserve (and have the responsibility to seek) full explanations.

### **Filing a new case on different grounds**

This is a possibility that requires you to contact and work closely with an expert. Not all parish staff are sufficiently experienced to help you in this. Call the tribunal. Be both persistent and patient.

### **When appeal fails or is not possible**

This can be a great and heavy cross to bear. Even though privately you believe you have grounds for nullity, marriage is never just personal. It has a public dimension as well and the Church has the right and duty to protect it. You're still bound by your marriage vows until death in this case and cannot date or marry or even think about new relationships. This isn't difficult to understand—you're still married in the eyes of the Church and to do so would be adultery.

This can and does infuriate many people--mostly due misunderstanding and unrealistic expectations. Justice may or may not have been served and regardless there can be a very difficult intellectual and emotional struggle to accept the situation.

### **Accept the cross**

You can appeal but even if or when all doors close, this can be a heavy cross that Christ promises to carry with you. He is real, he is here with you, and he loves you. Powerful redeeming graces can come from this suffering. You can choose to remain faithful to the person--and to the Church--and that's an important difference and a beautiful choice.

### **Considering your choices**

#### *Some people leave the Church*

While the pain, confusion, and anger is understandable, it's never wise to abandon Jesus in his Sacraments. This is another painful and sinful "divorce" and—as understandable as it is—it's rooted in fear and pride.

He will never abandon YOU. He is close to the broken-hearted and will walk with you through this. The Holy Spirit will pour out abundant graces on you if you ask, open to receive, and cooperate with him.

#### *Some stay in the Church but remarry civilly*

This choice—often out of ignorance—is nonetheless sinful and sets the parties outside the fullness of communion with the rest of the Body of Christ. By reason of their baptism they are still beloved "family members" but need to refrain from the Sacraments as they try to get their situation remedied.

Because they're in an invalid second (attempt at) marriage, they must understand the appropriateness of "living as brother and sister". If they

cannot, they must refrain from receiving the Sacraments else they receive illicitly. This sounds harsh and technical to some but those who take this high road (living as brother and sister) report many graces, deeper trust in each other, and greater authentic love.

### *Some live as single until the death of the spouse*

All the choices will bring difficulty and suffering because divorce is painful; its ripple effects reach far and wide. Some will eventually be reconciled to living as single, but others will struggle for a long time with deep desires for romantic love and a new marriage.

These desires are inherently good because they point to the desire of God for his Bride and hers for him. When these desires cannot be realized in a healthy and holy way, God can help you turn them from torture to redemption. Life is hard; holiness is not possible without God's loving mercy and help. Making the RIGHT "painful" choice is meant to also bring peace, freedom from guilt, joy, and holiness. And, after the grief process, even happiness.

### **What Some Have Said**

" I never thought I could do the right thing. It didn't seem natural and was soo-o-o hard. But God was with me and my desire for him increased daily. I think when our desire for him grows, our desires for other good things (and not so good) shrink down and are less difficult."

"I made a mistake thinking I was different. But deep down I knew we needed to live as brother and sister. When we both surrendered our hearts to him, he flooded us with graces. It was amazing."

"After not getting my annulment, I left the Church. I was so angry. I was bitter. But I begged God to heal me. I admit because of my fears and need to be in control, it took time, but I came home. I'll never leave again."

### **What Now?**

If you find yourself in this situation, consider these:

- Don't leave the Church!
- Don't rush into dating or remarriage.
- If you fall into sin, get back up, confess, and open wider to receive God's tender mercies and graces. Keep going.

- Find a wise, holy, and experienced Catholic advisor.
- Get into counseling or coaching with someone who will tell you the Truth.
- Focus on the good in your life and enjoy what you have.
- If you have children, spend your energies on guiding them to holiness.
- Forgive those who have hurt, abandoned, or ignored you.
- Seek forgiveness from your spouse or anyone you have failed (even if they failed you).
- Get rid of all bitterness. It blocks God's love and graces.
- Deepen your sacramental life.
- Learn more about Church teaching from reliable sources.
- Foster healthy same-sex friendships.
- Have healthy fun! Stay rested.
- Draw close to God in your daily thoughts.
- Spend quiet time with him. Talk and listen. Listen and talk. Just rest in his presence.
- Keep your eyes on eternity as well as the here-and-now.
- Volunteer—when ready—to help other divorced people in your parish.

None of us will ever achieve perfect happiness here. We were made for much, much more, and that is the good news of our faith. Let the pain or injustice of your divorce bring you closer to God and deeper into your Catholic faith.

You will not regret it.

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