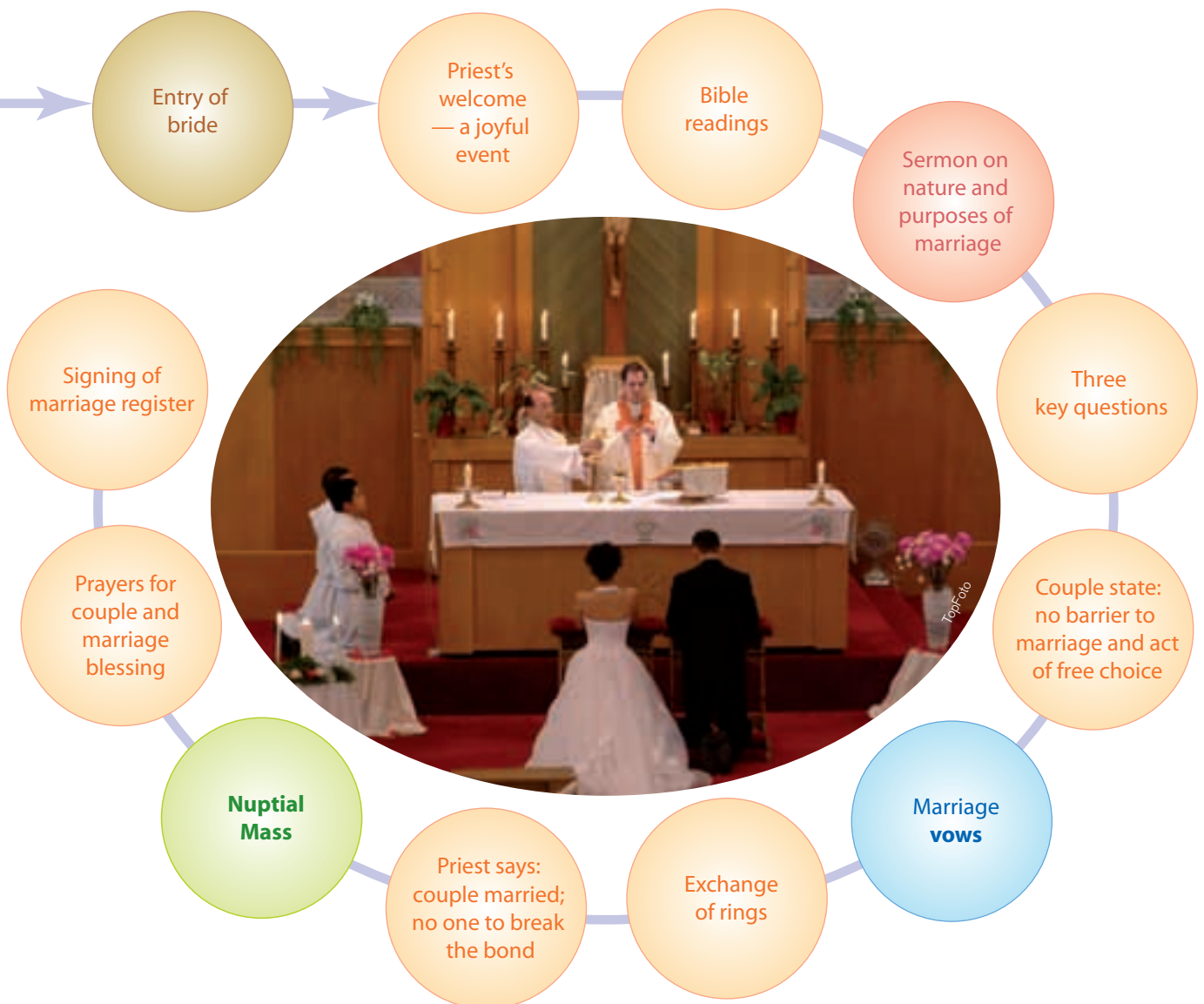


Topic 2

Christian marriage

The rite of marriage



What is marriage?

Marriage is a **sacramental covenant**, i.e. a sacred bond between the couple, made by God with the couple. The ring is a visible sign of this and other signs in the ceremony are:

- It takes place in a church.
- The couple make solemn vows.
- There is a Nuptial Mass.

The three key questions

- Will the couple give themselves freely and unreservedly to one another?
- Will they love and honour one another until death separates them?
- Will they accept children lovingly as a gift from God, giving them a Christian upbringing?

The vows

The couple promise to love and care for one another for the rest of their lives.

The nature of marriage

Mixed marriages

Marriages between people of different denominations or different faiths are allowed, but need the permission of the diocesan authorities. There is always a time of preparation with the priest before the marriage and, in the case of mixed marriages, this preparation will be even more necessary.



A sign of lifelong love and faithfulness — marriage is **permanent** and **exclusive**

Sex within marriage

Sexual intercourse expresses most intimately the couple's love for one another. It sets a seal on the marriage. It is meant to be **unitive** (an act in which the two become physically as well as spiritually one) and **procreative** (open to the possibility of conceiving a child). Use of contraception is therefore a sin.

Roman Catholic views on sexuality

- It is a gift from God, to be enjoyed responsibly (within marriage).
- All forms of sex outside marriage are sinful. **Pre-marital sex** trivialises what is a sacred gift, and **adultery** is an act of betrayal and breaks the sixth commandment.
- **Chastity** is a virtue that all unmarried Roman Catholics should practise.
- Some are called to **celibacy** as a way of showing their total devotion to God.

Other Christian views on sexuality

Protestant churches also teach that sexual relationships belong within marriage, and are particularly opposed to adultery. But some Christians argue that times have changed and that sexual relationships between two people who are in a loving relationship, though not married, are not sinful. They are, however, opposed to **casual sex**, which devalues God's gift.

The Silver Ring Thing

This is a movement that began in the USA and has spread to Europe. Boys and girls make a promise of sexual purity until they marry. As a sign of that promise, they wear a silver ring.



TopFoto

This silver ring is worn by teenagers as a sign of their promise to remain sexually pure

Responsible parenthood

This means being prepared to accept with love any children as a gift from God, but natural family planning is an acceptable way of spacing them out. It also means giving children love and security. Parents should provide a Christian upbringing by the example they set in the home, regular prayer, etc. and by encouraging them to attend church and to receive all the sacraments that are open to them.



Fotolia

Christians see children as a gift from God

Adoption and fostering

Responsible care of children is a key duty of the Roman Catholic Church. Giving vulnerable children love and protection is a reflection of the example set by Jesus.



Tell these women to take their children away, Jesus. You're too important and too busy to be bothered with a bunch of kids.

Leave them alone. God's kingdom belongs to them. You will have to become like children if you want to enter it. Let them come to me so that I can give them a blessing.

There are many Roman Catholic **adoption** and **fostering** agencies. Adoption means that couples become the legal parents of children whose birth parents cannot or choose not to look after them. Fostering may be permanent or temporary, long term or short term. Responsibility for children is shared with the social services.

Why marriages fail

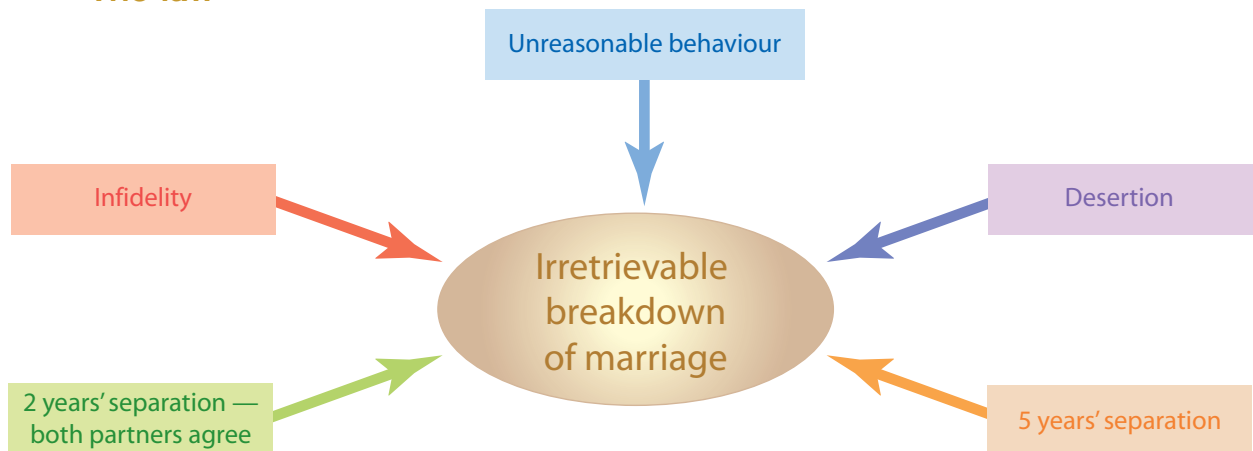


Support for failing marriages

- Roman Catholic support agencies, e.g. Marriage Care, Accord
- marriage counsellors
- advice from the parish priest
- reading the Bible
- prayer
- receiving the sacraments, particularly the **Eucharist** and **Reconciliation**
- family and friends

Divorce, remarriage and annulment

The law



Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage

Jesus taught that marriage was intended by God to be lifelong, and that the law permitting divorce was a concession to human weakness. In marriage the two became one. They were united by God, and humans should not interfere with this.

Jesus' teaching about remarriage is recorded in two Gospels. According to Mark, Jesus said that remarriage after divorce was tantamount to adultery. According to Matthew, however, Jesus accepted remarriage after divorce if one partner had been unfaithful.



Roman Catholic teaching on divorce and remarriage

The Church believes that Jesus was laying down a rule for his followers to obey, and that vows made in the name of God cannot be dissolved. Divorce is a 'grave offence' (Catechism of the Catholic Church) though the Church gives support to divorced people.

Remarriage after divorce makes matters even worse, and those who remarry after divorce may not receive the Eucharist. They are, however, encouraged to attend Mass, as in other ways they often keep the faith and want to bring up their children as Christians.

Roman Catholic teaching on annulment

On rare occasions, the Church may grant an annulment, for example, if it can be shown that one of the partners was forced into the marriage, suffered from mental problems at the time, never intended to keep the vows or was not baptised at the time of the marriage. An annulment is a declaration that a true marriage never took place. This means that the partners are free to 'remarry'.

Protestant teaching on divorce and remarriage

Attitudes vary in the Church of England. Some priests take the Roman Catholic view. Others will not allow remarriage in church on the grounds that the vows cannot be made twice, but they offer a service of Marriage Blessing after a civil marriage ceremony. Yet other priests adopt the attitude of the other Protestant churches. They believe that marriage is intended to be lifelong, but that people are human and make mistakes. They think Jesus' teaching was an ideal rather than a law, and they point out that he was always willing to give people a second chance and a fresh start. So they will allow the remarriage in church of people who have been divorced.



Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles had a civil ceremony followed by a marriage blessing in St George's Chapel, Windsor



Case study

Jenny and Dave

- Aged 28 and 32
- Married for 2 years
- Two children
- Jenny — Anglican
- Dave — Roman Catholic

We agreed to raise our children as Catholics, so they come to Mass with me. But we respect my wife's different tradition and we go with her to special services, such as the Christingle.

I still go to my church most Sundays, but go to Mass with Dave and the children once a month. I encourage them to learn more about their faith and to become active members of their church. Our marriage and family life is built on love, trust and respect.



Key words

adoption
adultery
annulment
casual sex
celibacy
chastity

divorce
Eucharist
exclusive
fostering
Nuptial Mass
permanent

pre-marital sex
procreative
Reconciliation
sacramental covenant
unitive
vows



Test yourself

1 True or false?

Mass at a wedding is known as a Nuptial Mass.

TRUE



FALSE



Mixed marriages are not allowed in the Roman Catholic Church.



All Christians should practise celibacy.



Adultery is forbidden in the Ten Commandments.



Chastity is a virtue.

The American sexual purity movement is called the Golden Ring Thing.

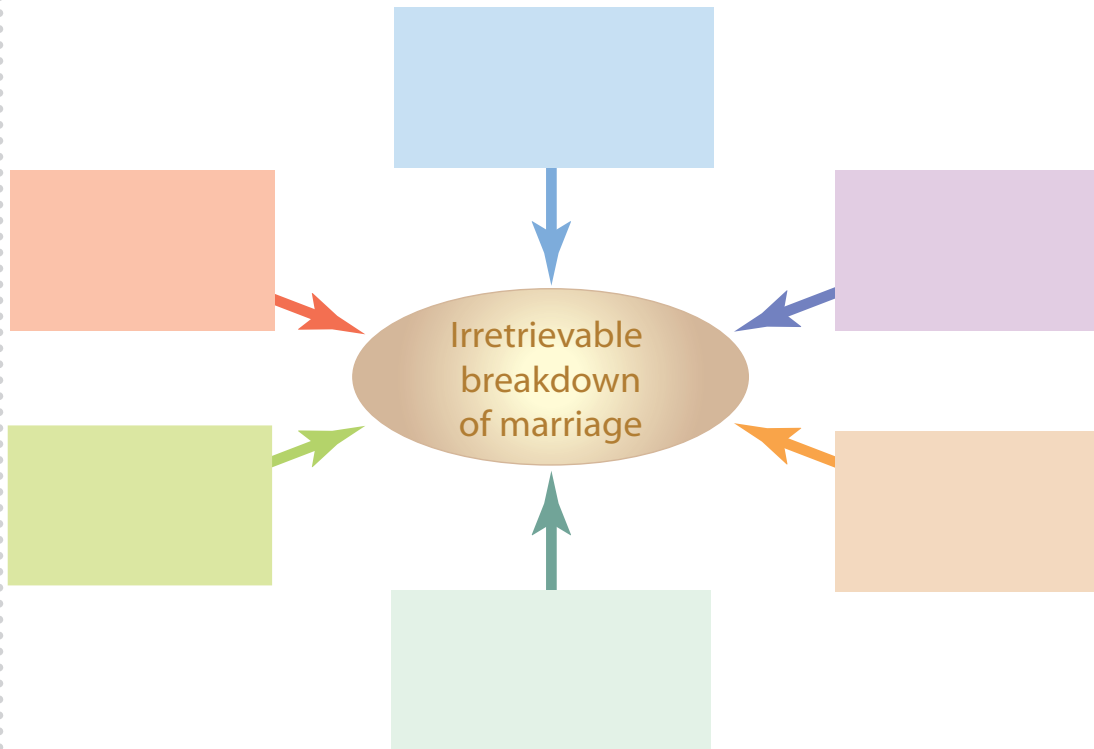
Jesus believed that marriage is intended to be for life.

Remarriage after divorce is never allowed by the Roman Catholic Church.

Remarriage after divorce is never allowed by the Church of England.

An annulment is a statement that a true marriage never took place.

- 2 Fill in the chart with six reasons why marriages sometimes break down.



Examination question

- a Describe what happens at a Roman Catholic wedding ceremony.** (6 marks)
- b 'Remarriage in church after a divorce should never be allowed.' What do you think? Explain your opinion.** (3 marks)

Exam tip

Before answering a question, always think about the command (trigger) word. This is the word, usually at the start of a question, that tells you what you have to do. If it says 'describe', you do not need to give any explanation. You would not lose marks for doing so, but you would not gain any, so you would penalise yourself by losing valuable time.