



SHOULD I ATTEND?

A SERVICE OF CATHOLICS UNITED FOR THE FAITH

ISSUE

Does the Catholic Church require Catholics not to attend weddings that the Church does not approve? If he can attend, is it permissible for a Catholic to be in the wedding party?

RESPONSE

The Catholic Church does not explicitly prohibit Catholics from attending. However, there are certain moral principles that must be considered before a Catholic decides what to do. Most important, Catholics must avoid any actions that encourage others to sin or cause scandal.

DISCUSSION

In today's society, many couples live together before marriage. Divorce and remarriage is common. Many Catholics marry outside the Church. Couples in these situations commit fornication and adultery. Because of the sinfulness of their behaviors, Christians should prayerfully consider invitations to attend their weddings. The way in which one responds to these invitations must witness to the truths given by Christ. Our actions must encourage and promote the salvation of all.

MORAL PRINCIPLES

Everything we do must encourage and provide for our salvation and the salvation of others. We must be in the world, but not of the world (Jn. 17:15-20). By our participation in the lives of others, we must be salt of the earth and witness to the truths of Christ and His Church (Mt. 5:13-16). When we provide for our salvation and the salvation of others, we fulfill the Two Great Commandments: to love God with our whole heart, mind and soul, and to love our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God (Mt. 22:40). However, we must take care not to become "flat salt." As our Lord says:

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out

and trodden under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father Who is in heaven (Mt. 5:13-13-16).

The example given by Christ is noteworthy. He did not hesitate to associate Himself with sinners (Phil. 2:4-8). Though God, He took our human nature upon Himself, becoming like us in all ways except sin. He brought us truth in a way that we can easily understand. In this same way, we must not hesitate to associate ourselves with fellow sinners. However, we must take care to avoid sin and scandal.

If we allow or participate in the sin of another, we share that sin and its consequences. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Catechism) teaches:

1868. Sin is a personal act. Moreover, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them:

- by participating directly and voluntarily in them;
- by ordering, advising, praising, or approving them;
- by not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so;
- by protecting evil-doers (emphasis in original).

2284. Scandal is an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbor's tempter. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death. Scandal is a grave offense if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave offense.

2287. Anyone who uses the power at his disposal in such a way that it leads others to do wrong becomes guilty of scandal and responsible for the evil that he has directly or indirectly encouraged. "Temptations to sin are sure to come; but woe to him by whom they come!" (Lk. 17:1)

Fornication and adultery are mortal sins. Those who persist in these sins endanger their salvation. They violate the Sixth Commandment (Catechism, nos. 2331-2400). Living together before marriage is fornication (Catechism, no. 2353). Subsequent marriage of the couple does not blot out the sins they already committed. Nor does the wedding itself change their attitudes or habits toward chastity and purity. Divorce and remarriage is an act of adultery, regardless of whether the person is Catholic or not (Mk. 10:10-12; Catechism, no. 2384). For a Catholic who marries outside the Church, the Church does not recognize the marriage. The union is considered adulterous (Code of Canon Law, canon 1108). No one should promote fornication or adultery.

WHAT TO DO?

If a Catholic is asked to attend the wedding of a couple whose marriage is not recognized by the Catholic Church, or whose life together does not promote purity and chastity, he should ask himself: "What message will I send by my attendance? Will attending the wedding encourage or hinder the salvation of others? What will not attending accomplish? If I go, will others consider my presence to be affirming of the sin? Will I lead others to scandal? How can I best witness to the truth?" A Catholic should not affirm anyone who would be committing fornication or adultery. Nor should he give the appearance to others that he was affirming the acts. Such appearance can cause scandal. If his actions affirm or encourage the sin, he participates in the sin.

There is a recognized concern that if a person refuses to attend the wedding, a rift in friendship could occur. This division could hinder any witness to the truth. This concern is especially serious if the wedding involves a close friend or family member. However, this concern alone cannot hinder our witness (Lk. 12:51-53), but it can guide our actions (Mt. 10:16) so we fulfill our obligation to bring others to Christ. It could be that not attending would destroy any possible chance to witness the truth to the persons involved, especially if no reason is given for not attending. It could also be that not attending, and giving reasons for the absence, will help the couple choose the way of Christ. If a Catholic chooses to attend, he will want to make certain that no one considers his presence an affirmation of the sin.

Jesus saw the Woman at the well and the Samaritans of her town as ripe for the harvest. Had He not spent two days with them, they would not have received the words of Life. While with the Samaritans, Jesus encouraged His Apostles to open their eyes and see the opportunity to spread the truth (Jn. 4:1-42). We too must see the opportunities for reaping the harvest of faith, and not quench the burning embers among the lukewarm (Is. 42:3-4).

The same principles apply whether one is a member of the wedding party, attending the wedding or simply attending the reception. However, participating in the wedding party is more visible and is often recognized to represent affirmation of the union. It would be very difficult for a member of the wedding party to attend without affirming the situation or at least giving the impression to others that he has done so. At the reception, chat about the couple and their life together will arise. This may be more difficult for some people to handle without affirming the couple's situation or bringing scandal to others. If one plans to attend the reception, he should consider what he will say about the couple's situation when the merriment begins and everyone is talking about how wonderful it is. Morally speaking, there are many factors to consider before we judge a situation as scandalous. Some situations allow for scandal more readily than others. Before we can witness to the truth, people have to be open to what we have to say. In the same way, before our actions cause scandal, people have to consider our actions worthy of notice. What is important to remember is that we must prayerfully consider the situation, our response and the probable reaction of others to our response.

CONCLUSION

Anyone invited to the wedding of a couple whose marriage does not promote the truth should prayerfully consider his actions. Using the teachings explained in the Catechism, he should ask himself: "How can I avoid participating in their sin yet encourage their salvation? How can I avoid scandal yet encourage the salvation of others?" Anyone in this situation should discuss the matter with a spiritual director or in the confessional before making the decision. Whatever one's decisions in these matters, a Catholic should strive to give a clear and charitable witness to the Faith. The Catholic Church does not say whether we must or must not attend. Christ does say we must witness to the truth

in a charitable manner. If loved ones or friends go through with the wedding, a Catholic should look for opportunities to keep contact and witness to the

truth. Above all, our decisions and actions must promote the salvation of souls. In the salvation of souls, the Two Great Commandments are fulfilled.

RELATED FAITH FACTS

The Annulment Process

Divorce and Remarriage: The Church's Perspective

What Makes a Marriage: Consent, Consummation and the Special Case of the Holy Family

Going God's Way: The Church's Teaching on Moral Conscience

The Biblical Reality of Mortal Sin

FURTHER READING

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