



Your

Catholic Coach

Be transformed! Rom 12:1-2

staying faithful to vows

Sometimes it takes a while after divorce to know whether you will petition for an annulment or choose to stay committed to your marriage vows. You may choose not to seek annulment for many reasons, but before you make this important decision, remember to:

Educate yourself

Don't just think "my marriage is valid" and refuse to be open to learning more. This could come back to hurt you should your spouse seek (and receive) an annulment. Educating yourself in the principles and practices will give you added confidence in your choice to defend your marriage bond.

Work with the Church

This important decision should include an honest and in-depth conversation and personal scrutiny with a wise and holy priest or other experienced person (either of whom is obedient to the Church) who understands how the Church views marriage.

Trust that the Church is a loving Mother. Oh yes, she may have some "family members" who are currently less than holy, but for over 2,000 years she has been given the wisdom, authority, trust, and power of Christ, her Spouse—for the good of her children.

In this process, one should also independently seek understanding via a reliable source of Church teachings, being cautious not to be swayed by a seemingly "official" resource (or person) that is in error.

Understand your civil marriage, family life, and children are all “valid”

Some people believe that if they took their vows seriously, were married a long time, had several children, that their marriage must be “valid” according to the Church.

They are right in that the Church upholds their marriage bond as valid until or unless proved otherwise. Their shared life together was (is) real and their intent, hopes, and dreams are valid. They had many good or necessary valid bonds (social, civil, sexual, romantic, legal, financial, parental, and more.) Perhaps, though, something serious impeded a valid *marriage* bond from forming from the start.

Sometimes it may be difficult to even THINK that there may be an issue of “invalidity.” Even assuming validity, the potential problem may lie in the other spouse eventually seeking annulment.

The Church will look at a different dimension of the relationship than just the civil or shared life. Competent judges look to see what was going on in the minds and hearts of BOTH parties on the day of the wedding, and if there was a “defect of consent” of one or both parties.

The defect may be some obvious or not-so-obvious impediment in the way of an invisible marriage bond (not just mental, emotional, parental, sexual, financial, or civil bond) being formed. If there is enough credible testimony to invalidity, then an annulment will be granted (but it can be appealed). If not, the marriage bond must and will be upheld as valid. *That is good news!*

Remember no one is judging you

Marriage has both a public and private dimension. But the private is so personal and intimate that it can feel extremely violating to have outside parties inspect your life and make judgments—especially after the rejection of divorce.

But that is exactly what you do when you submit yourself to a physician after a horrendous accident. There has been a terrible injury and you want a thorough inspection and full range of tests to know how to move forward in the healthiest way. The doctors don’t judge who was at fault or condemn you if you need surgery ... and neither do the Church officials who are simply trying to get to the truth for everyone’s good.

Trust that the Church knows about marriage

Perhaps you did not want a divorce. If your former spouse applies for an annulment and receives an affirmative decision, that can be a terrible sorrow and emotional struggle for you: the spouse who may have given his or her all does not want to believe the marriage was invalid.

But the Church tribunal, who doesn't take these matters lightly, and who upholds the marriage as valid until proved otherwise, has more general knowledge about marriage validity than the average lay person. Trust her. If you don't understand, keep asking questions until you get satisfactory answers. Get a good advocate to help you.

Try to reconcile your emotions with truth

Be prepared for what you feel and what is true perhaps being two different things. You may feel that you want to remain true to your vows, and if there is no annulment, you SHOULD. But if the Church has declared the marriage bond invalid, and appeals have failed, it may be an emotional struggle to accept that. Still, the choice is yours and you are free to remain faithful to the vows you took.

What if you believe that the tribunal made a mistake?

You can appeal but even if or when all doors close, this can be a heavy cross that Christ promises to carry with you. If you will avoid bitterness, 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.

Many believe that they married for life and do not want to marry again. Regardless of an annulment or not, or remarrying or not, this road can be extremely difficult for each person. If your spouse remarried, and you choose to stay unmarried and faithful either to the marriage or to that person, it can seem (or even be) unjust, lonely, and deeply painful. This is an opportunity to still be a "gift of self" and offer your sufferings for the good of your former spouse regardless of the situation.

Seek forgiveness from your (former) spouse

It is easy to see the faults and failings of the other person (especially if you were abandoned!) but it is essential that you frequent the sacraments (especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist) and ask God to reveal your own failures.

After a good confession, and in a way that is appropriate, you can seek forgiveness from your (former) spouse—even if they did great harm, and continue to do so, to you or your family. Then give that person the time and space for the Holy Spirit to work in their heart.

Forgive the person in your will, whether they ask for forgiveness or not, and whether you feel like it or not.

Pray for your spouse

Right after the divorce that's not really what you may feel like doing—but make an act of the will to do so.

In the beginning your prayers may be to get them to change, to apologize, to convert, or to return. That's normal—but none of these may ever happen.

So ask for the grace to make your prayers more about seeing the bigger, eternal picture and first changing your heart. If you don't have an annulment, the graces of the marriage bond are still valid and no one on earth can pray for your spouse with more intercessory power than you can! If there was an annulment, you are still in a powerful position to beg for and obtain great graces for the other person.

Desire the best

Remember that as your mind and heart begin to align more with Christ's, you will realize more than anything you want salvation for the other person. You begin to want what is best for them, and the best is, of course, heaven. Married or civilly divorced, this should always be the greatest desire you have for a spouse . . . or for anyone you love. Make an offering of your life for the sake of your spouse. Offer your life to Christ, through his Blessed Mother, and ask that graces be poured down on your whole family after a civil divorce. You can continue to be a gift to the other person, just as you hoped on your wedding day, by rising above the circumstances and making the decision to love on a higher level.

Stay open to freedom and joy

You may not be, or feel, free to remarry but with prayer and patience you can become free of anger, bitterness, depression, and hurt so that your love constantly grows and becomes more powerful!

Divorce is rupture of God's perfect will for us, and even though he permits evils to happen, he promises to bring greater good from them—in his way and time.

Trust him more.
Let him love you more.
Desire him more.

The good news is there is healing and great joy for all through the most intimate marriage of the soul to God where he gives you his love, mercy, and the gift of himself in the sacraments.

Seek support

There are several communities around the world of those who are living separately from civilly divorced spouses and are remaining faithful to their wedding vows.

Avoid any where there is a bitterness toward the spouse who abandoned the home and even toward the Church annulment process. You may want to learn more from Catholics who belong to *Solitude Myriam*, a group trying to remain faithful not just to marriage but to Christ through his Church.

Do you need help with:

- Processing your emotions?
- Wondering about the future?
- Helping the kids?
- Dealing with an ex?
- Dating right this time?

Get the wise, experienced, support of a Catholic Coach!

rose@rosesweet.com