

**What benefits or what grace are present in a sacramental marriage vs. a civil union?
How do we grow in those graces or have them flourish in our marriage?**

First, let us remember two things: all valid marriages between two Christians are considered sacramental; and, for the marriage of a Catholic Christian to be considered valid, it must follow the requirements set down in canon law. (See Q&A from 6-10-07.) A Catholic married in a civil ceremony is not considered to be validly married in the eyes of the Church; it is definitely not a sacramental union.

During a wedding ceremony in the church, the couple receives special graces as the spouses exchange their consent and confer the sacrament of Matrimony upon each other. According to the Catechism, “The sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life.” (CCC #1661) It also says: “Christ dwells with them, gives them the strength to take up their crosses and so follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another’s burdens, to ‘be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ,’ and to love one another with supernatural, tender, and fruitful love.” (CCC #1642)

“Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us.” (CCC #2003) To ensure that grace continues to be present in our marriage, we strive to have the Holy Spirit present in our marriage. We need to keep our marriages close to God; we need to attend mass on Sunday, pray together as a family, but most of all we need to love God and be obedient to Him. Jesus says: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. (Jn. 14:15-17) If we are disobedient, for example if we do not follow the Church’s teachings against contraception, the Father will not send the Holy Spirit to be with us in our marriage and it will not flourish.

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