

Regaining the Idea of Permanence

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Last November, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral letter on marriage titled "Love and Life in the Divine Plan" (<http://usccb.org/laity/loveandlife/>).

The letter contains valuable insights for married and engaged couples as well as those involved in marriage preparation.

In this fifth of six parts, Christian Meert, co-director of the diocesan Office of Marriage and Family Life, examines the bishops' pastoral letter and how it relates to practical realities of married life.]

There are certain concepts that have become increasingly elusive to younger generations in society. One such concept is the idea of permanence.

Our parents and grandparents could hold the same job their whole lives. Younger generations, however, can expect to hold seven different jobs before the age of 30.

FOR YOUR MARRIAGE



With Christian Meert

Despite the fact that the world is changing so quickly, however, permanence is still vital in marriage, for the sake of both spouses and children.

In their pastoral letter "Love and Life in the Divine Plan," the U.S. bishops wrote:

"The church has taught through the ages that marriage is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. This union, once validly entered and consummated, gives rise to a bond that cannot be dissolved by the will of the spouses. Marriage thus created is a faithful, privileged sphere of intimacy between the spouses that lasts

until death."

To put it another way, marriage is a covenant, and a covenant by definition is permanent. Marriage models both the covenant God made with his people Israel and Christ's everlasting covenant with us and the church. Because couples choose to be married in front of God, and with Christ, the bond is sealed by God himself and can never be dissolved.

In our society, we expect good service and good products, as well we should. If something is not working, we return it to the store and get a new one. If it is broken, we usually don't

bother to fix because it is easier to replace it. If the service at a restaurant is not good, we simply don't leave a tip and vow not to go back. We don't fight; we let the sellers and service providers realize they did something wrong. The customers just walk away, and business owners bear the consequences.

We cannot enter into marriage with this mentality, however. A spouse is not a product that can be exchanged or upgraded. As Pope John Paul II once said, "The person is to be loved, not to be used."

It's the same thing when we become parents. Even if we disagree or fight with our children, we remain their parents forever, and we will always love them.

Another concept that seems to have fallen by the wayside in today's society is giving one's word.

It is hard for couples to realize that the words of consent

they exchange during the sacrament of matrimony will bind them for life. We live in a world where the given word has very little value. However, God never takes back a promise.

Even civil divorce does not dissolve the spiritual bond of marriage, nor does it free the spouses to marry other people. As Jesus said in Mk 10, 10-12:

"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, he commits adultery against her; and if the wife divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

Marriage requires daily work. The spouses need to fight for their marriage together, not against each other. They also need to pray together, pray for each other and remain grounded in the sacraments. Together, with God and his graces, they will overcome the inevitable difficulties of life and win the good race.