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Gibson on Divorced & Remarried

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Distinctly Catholic

My colleague David Gibson, writing at the WaPo "On Faith" blog, is more or less correct when he outlined three approaches to the issue of divorced and remarried Catholics: following the procedure of the Orthodox churches, acknowledging the importance of the "internal forum," and speeding up the annulment process. A couple of caveats, however. In the Orthodox tradition, as in the Roman, you are only married once. The Orthodox will bless a second union, in a service that is deeply penitential, and admit those in the second union to communion. But, the Orthodox do not "marry" a second time. Why is this important? Because it would take a pretty tortured exegesis of the words "What God has joined, let no man put asunder" to permit second marriages. I also want to call attention to one fact that Gibson rightly notes, the high number of annulments coming from the US compared to other churches. I think this is a sign of hope: No one would put themselves through the annulment process unless it was very important to them to remain within the Church as a full communicant. As for the issue some conservatives raise, that the annulment process risks becoming like a quicky divorce, I beg to differ. I find it amazing that anyone raised in the U.S. in the past fifty or so years is even capable of understanding what the Church intends by the sacrament of matrimony. The cultural signals young people receive could scarcely be more antagonistic. I knew a priest who told me that he almost always puts a note in the file when he presided at a marriage, indicating his reservations about the validity of the sacrament: "Who knows if they grasp what is meant by forever in our fast-paced culture," he said. And that was before iPhones.

These are weighty and important issues. It is a very good sign, the kind of sign that reminds us Pope Francis has been a pastor for many years, that next year's Synod on the Family will focus on the state of the case, and only then proceed to suggestions for improvement.

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