

# RITE OF MARRIAGE: INTRODUCTION

## IMPORTANCE AND DIGNITY OF THE SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

1. Married Christians, in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, signify and share in the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his Church;<sup>1</sup> they help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children; and they have their own special gift among the people of God.<sup>2</sup>
2. Marriage arises in the covenant of marriage, or irrevocable consent, which each partner freely bestows on and accepts from the other. This intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on each of them and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them. Christ the Lord raised this union to the dignity of a sacrament so that it might more clearly recall and more easily reflect his own unbreakable union with his Church.<sup>3</sup>
3. Christian couples, therefore, nourish and develop their marriage by undivided affection, which wells up from the fountain of divine love, while, in a merging of human and divine love, they remain faithful in body and in mind, in good times as in bad.<sup>4</sup>
4. By their very nature, the institution of matrimony and wedded love are ordained for the procreation and education of children and find in them their ultimate crown. Therefore, married Christians, while not considering the other purposes of marriage of less account, should be steadfast and ready to cooperate with the love of the Creator and Saviour, who through them will constantly enrich and enlarge his own family.<sup>5</sup>
5. A priest should bear in mind these principles of faith, both in his instructions to those about to be married and when giving the homily during the marriage ceremony. He should relate his instructions to the texts of the sacred readings.<sup>6</sup>

The bridal couple should be given a review of the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. This may include instruction on the teachings about marriage and the family, on the rites used in the celebration of the sacrament itself, and on the prayers and readings. In this way the bridegroom and the bride will receive far greater benefit from the celebration.

6. In the celebration of marriage (which normally should be within the Mass), certain elements should be stressed, especially the liturgy of the word, which shows the importance of Christian marriage in the history of salvation and the duties and responsibility of the couple in caring for the holiness of their children. Also of supreme importance are the consent of the contracting parties, which the priest asks and receives; the special nuptial blessing for the bride and for the marriage covenant; and finally, the reception of holy communion by the groom and the bride, and by all present, by which their love is nourished and all are lifted up into communion with our Lord and with one another.<sup>7</sup>
7. Priests should first of all strengthen and nourish the faith of those about to be married, for the sacrament of matrimony presupposes and demands faith.<sup>8</sup>

## CHOICE OF RITE

8. In a marriage between a Catholic and a baptised person who is not Catholic, the regulations which appear below in the rite of marriage outside Mass (nos. 39–54) shall be observed. If suitable, and if the Ordinary of the place gives permission, the rite for celebrating marriage within Mass (nos. 19–38) may be used, except that, according to the general law, communion is not given to the non-Catholic.

In a marriage between a Catholic and one who is not baptised, the rite which appears in nos. 55–6 is to be followed.

9. Furthermore, priests should show special consideration to those who take part in liturgical celebrations or hear the gospel only on the occasion of a wedding, either because they are not Catholics, or because they are Catholics who rarely, if ever, take part in the eucharist or seem to have abandoned the practice of their faith. Priests are ministers of Christ's gospel to everyone.
10. In the celebration of matrimony, apart from the liturgical laws providing for due honours to civil authorities, no special honours are to be paid to any private persons or classes of person, whether in the ceremonies or by external display.<sup>9</sup>
11. Whenever marriage is celebrated during Mass, white vestments are worn and the wedding Mass is used. If the marriage is celebrated on a Sunday or solemnity, the Mass of the day is used with the nuptial blessing and, where appropriate, the special final blessing.

The liturgy of the word is extremely helpful in emphasising the meaning of the sacrament and the obligations of marriage. When the wedding Mass may not be used, one of the readings in nos. 67–105 should be chosen, except from Holy Thursday to Easter and on the feasts of Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, and other holidays of obligation. On the Sundays of the Christmas season and throughout the year, in Masses which are not parish Masses, the wedding Mass may be used without change.

When a marriage is celebrated during Advent or Lent or other days of penance, the parish priest should advise the couple to take into consideration the special nature of these times.

## **PREPARATION OF LOCAL RITUALS**

12. In addition to the faculty spoken of below in no. 17 for regions where the Roman Ritual for matrimony is used, particular rituals shall be prepared, suitable for the customs and needs of individual areas, according to the principle of art. 63b and 77 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. These are to be reviewed by the Apostolic See. In making adaptations, the following points must be remembered:
13. The formulas of the Roman Ritual may be adapted or, as the case may be, filled out (including the questions before the consent and the actual words of the consent).  
When the Roman Ritual has several optional formulas, local rituals may add other formulas of the same type.
14. Within the rite of the sacrament of matrimony, the arrangement of its parts may be varied. If it seems more suitable, even the questions before the consent may be omitted as long as the priest asks and receives the consent of the contracting parties.
15. After the exchange of rings, the crowning or veiling of the bride may take place according to local custom.

In any region where the joining of hands or the blessing or exchange of rings does not fit in with the practice of the people, the conference of bishops may allow these rites to be omitted or other rites substituted.

16. As for the marriage customs of nations that are now receiving the gospel for the first time, whatever is good and is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error should be

sympathetically considered and, if possible, preserved intact. Sometimes the Church admits such things into the liturgy itself, as long as they harmonise with its true and authentic spirit.<sup>10</sup>

## **RIGHT TO PREPARE A COMPLETELY NEW RITE**

17. Each conference of bishops may draw up its own marriage rite suited to the usages of the place and people and approved by the Apostolic See. The rite must always conform to the law that the priest assisting at such marriages must ask for and receive the consent of the contracting parties,<sup>11</sup> and the nuptial blessing should always be given.<sup>12</sup>
18. Among peoples where the marriage ceremonies customarily take place in the home, sometimes over a period of several days, these customs should be adapted to the Christian spirit and to the liturgy. In such cases the conference of bishops, according to the pastoral needs of the people, may allow the sacramental rite to be celebrated in the home.

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### ENDNOTES

1 Ephesians 5:32

2 Lumen Gentium (LG) 11.

3 Gaudium et Spes (GS) 48.

4 GS 48, 49.

5 GS 48, 50.

6 Sacrosanctum Concilium (SC) 52; Inter Oecumenici 54.

7 Apostolicam Actuositatem (AA) 3; LG 12.

8 SC 59.

9 SC 32.

10 SC 37.

11 SC 77

12 SC 78