

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony

Points to ponder in the revised order of Christian marriage

By: PAUL TURNER

The revised Order of Celebrating Matrimony invites Catholic parishes to review procedures for weddings — the habits they have developed and the enhancements they could make. Planners might consider these points.

The procession

For many guests, the wedding is all about the procession. The couple have invited close family and friends, given them formal wear, and arranged their sequence in a stately procession to open their wedding.

The Catholic wedding ceremony after the Second Vatican Council envisioned the presiding priest or deacon would meet the wedding party at the door of the church to help them transition into the sacred world. The bride and the groom enter after the priest, signifying that they confer this sacrament.

This procession failed to develop because of the superstition that the couple should not see each other that day until the groom had already entered the church.

Few couples know that they may process together, arm in arm. When they hear this, some find that the proposed design fits their experience: The father of the bride is not giving her to the groom; the couple is entering this union willfully. If marriage preparation included an explanation of this option, more couples might choose it.

The music

Many couples expect musicians to perform popular selections or play the recordings that provided the soundtrack for their engagement. The revised ceremony says that music should be “appropriate” and express “the faith of the Church” (OCM #30). This guideline should help parishes establish criteria for weddings.

Congregational singing promotes guests to witness and participate in the liturgy. Many people do not expect

to sing when they go to a wedding, but the Catholic liturgy hopes they will. Progress will be slow, but good marriage preparation reminds couples of the role of liturgical music in the Catholic Church.

The presider’s introduction

Presiders will see a script for introducing the wedding. It appears “in these or similar words” in two versions — one addressed to the couple and the other to the assembly.

Many presiders already offer a word of welcome. The new script will help them review the points they usually say. Are they essential? Do they fit the style of the proposed introductions? Can they be improved?

The readings

Certain readings now carry an asterisk to form a subset from which one reading must be drawn at a wedding Mass. Among the many passages that appear in the Lectionary, only some sound specific to marriage. When selecting readings, couples need to choose one with an asterisk. They may also encounter the biblical roots of their future life.

The consent

As the couple exchange their consent, many presiders feed them their lines phrase by phrase. This has helped couples say the correct words, but “repeat after me” never appeared as one of the options for the consent, even in the first edition of the Rite of Marriage. The post-conciliar ceremony emphasizes the role of the couple and decentralizes the role of the priest. In the former rite, after the consent, the priest declared, “I join you,” as though he were conferring the sacrament. Those words were removed from the ceremony. However, the priest has remained front and center, often facing the congregation and reciting the complete formulas of the bride and groom, the ministers of the sacrament, with their backs to the congregation.

Alternatively, the couple may read the words directly from the book or from a prepared card. In this way, the congregation hears their voices without the intervening presider. If the presider stands between the couple and the congregation at this time, the couple will naturally turn toward everyone. If the groom wears a microphone, the assembly will better hear his and the bride’s voices as they exchange their consent.

The universal prayer

The ritual book includes samples of the universal prayer. Weddings and other masses normally include these prayers. The new samples for weddings provide compositional suggestions.

Many parishes have no one to compose their own universal prayer, whether for Sundays, daily masses, funerals or weddings. Yet someone could personalize any of these celebrations. Instead of copying petitions, downloading them, or subscribing to a service, a writer may compose the universal prayer as a local expression. Few parishes have taken the opportunity.

For weddings, it requires extra work. But someone skilled at writing prayers could profitably spend time with the couple, learn about their hopes and dreams, and incorporate these into a unique series of intercessions.

There is more, of course, that one could evaluate. But, the above list is a good place to start. Now that English-speaking congregations have a revised Order of Celebrating Matrimony, how could your parish revise its typical celebration in order to express more deeply the love and hopes of a couple and of the church?

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