

## Matrimony

Thank you very much for your warm welcome. The slides that you will see on the screen the next few days are all available on my web site, [paulturner.org](http://paulturner.org). They will be there this week, but then they will disappear. If you want to steal them or copy them, what you must do, do quickly. The talks will go up next week and remain there. It is always a great honor for me to spend time with brother priests. Congratulations in advance to the jubilarians this week. I am catching up with you; I lapped my 38th anniversary as a diocesan priest last month.

I'm also grateful to be back with you when there is no snow in the forecast. I was in your archdiocese for initiation workshops back in 2007 and even in 2000. But in January 2011 I spent a couple of days with you to review the forthcoming changes in the Roman Missal. I planned to go to Dayton the next day for parish staff formation on the same topic, but a winter storm blew in and threw all our plans asunder. The same storm was moving through Kansas City. When Karen Kane told me we were postponing the Dayton workshop a week, she commanded me, "Fly home tonight." But if I did that, I'd have to drive 50 miles from the Kansas City airport through the same storm. Since I had to connect through Houston anyway, I spent the night at a hotel there, which gave time for crews to clear the roads in Kansas City, and I got home safely the next day. The following week I was giving similar talks in Florida, so instead of flying home after those, I detoured to Dayton to finish my commitment to all of you. This trip feels like vacation by comparison.

The Roman Missal rollout was controversial, and remains so. It doesn't matter on which side of the aisle you stand, nobody is saying, "Gee, what a beautiful new translation we have." It has its strengths and weaknesses, as we all know. So, it's a relief to speak to you about a topic we all hold dear, the sacramental ministry of priests. Few men are attracted to the priesthood because they yearn to manage budgets, supervise staff, repair deteriorating buildings, or conduct multimillion dollar capital campaigns. We do all these things, but what usually attracted us to the ministry is what we probably still find most rewarding: celebrating mass, preaching the gospel, praying with the sick, celebrating baptisms, reconciling sinners, and comforting the bereaved. In those moments the priest stands between heaven and earth, the trustworthy rock upon which people place their hopes, the source of encouragement when they face transitions, and the steady font of prayer to sustain them through joy and sorrow.

Priests generally find satisfaction in pastoral ministry, yet many of us feel overworked, frustrated, and unable to be at our best due to the pressures of the job. The culture around us does not often harmonize with Catholic spirituality: Some other Christian churches draw large congregations for praise, music and preaching. Yet many individual Christians have abandoned church and - if they pray - prefer to do so in private. Still, many of those who have drifted away from their Catholic roots return when there's a need: a wedding, a funeral, a national tragedy, or a nagging nostalgia for the ghost of Christmas past.

Nevertheless, we hold this great treasure, the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. They have inspired our personal faith, and they remain the main points of connection between ourselves and the people to whom we minister.

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Some people wonder if the sacraments still have the power to connect, if traditional liturgy can maintain any footing in a changing culture. I am quite optimistic about this. Our celebration of sacraments does connect with individuals, and this partly explains the endurance of our traditions.

By way of introduction, let me take an example from funerals, which by nature of the design of these days, we will not investigate deeply. I'm struck by the prevailing trend of mourners arranging their own speakers at the family funeral in remembrance of the deceased. One factor contributing to the increased requests for eulogies is that the church service is the main public event at which the greatest number of mourners will gather. The church provides not only a liturgical service, but a live social network as well. At the time of death, people want to gather in person. The church provides a venue where this can happen. Electronic social media have drawn people together emotionally and temporally, but they cannot do so geographically. Geography is practically meaningless in social media, except to provide more varied photos. At the time of death, there are few places where mourners in the presence of listeners can speak publicly about their love for the deceased. Those who attend the funeral will not reconvene at city hall or the public square. They may go to someone's home or gather at a bar, but the numbers will be smaller, and the venue will lack eternal resonance. Mourners may respond to expressions of condolence whether they come in the mail, email, social media or text, but in person they cannot address a group of people all at once in any other location except the church where the funeral is taking place. In this age many relationships are sustained electronically in tandem with the fracture of distance. Consequently, physical presence with one another has become all the more powerful. This dynamic has made it appealing, even expected, that someone who really knew the deceased person will address the community, even if that person has limited skills in public speaking. Mourners do not want to squander the convergence of moment, place and community.

I know that these eulogies get out of hand, but this example illustrates that the liturgy offers something that people still want. Just like live sporting events, live concerts and live theater, people seek out venues where they participate in a common ritual. Professional sports are played before a live audience. You may recall, however, that two years ago because of civil unrest in Baltimore, a White Sox - Orioles game was closed to the public. A few scouts and photographers were allowed inside, but no fans. The experience was totally weird, and it started no trend. No club sets aside one day of its magical summer as "fans not welcome day" in hopes of recreating the experience. Baseball fans are not just observers; they are participants in the larger drama of the game.

So overall, I remain optimistic that our sacramental liturgies will continue to speak to people because they offer what people naturally want: ritual, community, and sacred space.

To anchor these talks, I will review the sections of the rituals that address the responsibilities of priests. Each of our liturgical books carries an introduction that virtually nobody ever reads. Usually the contents line up this way: The Importance and Dignity of the Sacrament, Duties and Ministries, Celebration and

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Adaptations to be Prepared by the Conferences of Bishops. These introductions debuted in 1969 with the first English-language *Rite of Marriage*; after that, the introductions fell into a set design. When the second edition of the wedding rite came out, the revisers took the design that was working well with introductions to the other liturgical books and completely rewrote the one for the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. That's one reason why the introduction to the second edition is longer than the first.

One section of these introductions deals with duties and ministries. There you find references to the different ranks of ministers and indeed to the whole people of God. This section is always inspired by the vision of the church in *Lumen gentium*, which treats first the People of God, and then works its way through the hierarchy. Consequently, this section of the liturgical books begins with the responsibilities of the people of God, and then speaks about bishops, priests, deacons, and whoever else may be involved. Perhaps you've heard specialists in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults quote paragraph 9, which says that "the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized." Yes, the RCIA does say that, but so do all of the other liturgical books. All the baptized have some responsibilities for each of the sacraments. So do priests, and those are the sections that I'll cite for you during our time together. We'll look at how the post-Vatican II liturgical books first described the ministry of priests, and then see how they inspire us in the midst of the challenges we face today.

Your planning committee suggested we start with weddings because you have had workshops on *Amoris laetitia*, and on the revised *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. My hope is to use those days as a doorway into this theme.

Let me cite for you what the Introduction to the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* says about the ministry of the bishop and priests:

Paragraph 13: "It is for the Bishop... to regulate the celebration and pastoral care of the Sacrament throughout the diocese by organizing assistance for the Christian faithful so that the state of Marriage may be preserved in a Christian spirit and advance in perfection."

It is for the bishop to preserve marriage and advance it in perfection. So clearly if any marriage fails, it's the bishop's fault! Actually, he's not alone. Paragraph 14: "Pastors of souls must take care that in their own community this assistance is provided especially:

"1) by preaching, by catechesis adapted to children, young people, and adults, and through means of social communication, so that the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian Marriage and about the role of Christian spouses and parents."

We do this especially by providing sacramental catechesis about marriage in Catholic schools, schools of religion, and youth ministry. This paragraph is nearly a direct quote from canon 1063, so the expression "social communication" predates any knowledge of Facebook and Twitter. Now it looks prescient and supplies ideas for new methods of catechesis adapted for social groups.

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**“2) [Pastors provide assistance] by personal preparation for entering Marriage, so that those to be married are disposed to the holiness and duties of their new state.”**

Before we scoff at the idea of couples developing a sense of holiness in their new state, let us recall that they have enough interest in religion to make a church wedding part of their lives. They have other options, and many of them are pursuing other options, as we all know. It's a fair presumption that any couple coming to us for marriage has an interest in the spiritual life, just as you and I do.

**“3) [Pastors provide assistance] by a fruitful liturgical celebration of Marriage, so that it becomes clear that the spouses signify and participate in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church.”**

There are challenges in making the liturgical celebration fruitful, and this is why many of us have many rules and regulations governing weddings. Candles, runners, flowers, children, dress, sand, bird seed and soap bubbles - none of which I remember studying in seminary - all fill space in parish wedding policies. I discovered early on that I was a different person at wedding rehearsals than I wanted to be at weddings. I was debating details at the last minute, losing authority, creating animosity, and generally stepping outside my area of expertise. Finally I asked someone else to lead the wedding rehearsal. This saved my spiritual life! I go over the dos and don'ts with one or two laypeople who perform this ministry. They do a better job than I ever will at rehearsals. And it saves me having to perform the role of warrior by night and priest by day. When there's a Saturday wedding, I take Friday night off. I show up the next day refreshed and ready to celebrate.

**“4) [Pastors provide assistance] by help offered to those who are married, so that, faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead a holier and fuller family life.”**

This paragraph envisions that we will continue to see this couple and strengthen them in their union. However, we may never see them again. It would be ideal if they became parishioners so that I could continue working with them, but not many of them do. I have more success in the hispanic community where many couples have lived in the parish for quite a few years, and are now deciding on marriage. In their case I can continue to offer support and encouragement.

Paragraph 16 states this about priests: **“Led by the love of Christ, pastors are to welcome engaged couples and, above all, to foster and nourish their faith: for the Sacrament of Matrimony presupposes and demands faith.”**

I've heard many a priest say, **“I'd rather do a funeral than a wedding.”** I find this scandalous. Couples are preparing to celebrate a sacrament. We owe them the best of our ministry. In my years as a priest, I've done many weddings. A few of the couples have become close friends. Every time I welcome an engaged couple to my office, I think about the friends I've made, and I tell myself, **“Who knows? Maybe this couple will be another one of those.”** Paragraph 16 says that we are to welcome engaged couples, and we are to be led by the love of Christ.

Paragraph 20 holds up another ideal: **“In conducting the preparation, pastors, taking into account prevailing attitudes toward Marriage and the family, should**

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endeavor to evangelize the couple's authentic and mutual love in the light of faith. Even the requirements of law for contracting a valid and licit Marriage can serve to promote a living faith and fruitful love between the couple, ordered toward establishing a Christian family."

This paragraph is new to the second edition of the marriage rite. It steps back from cultural attitudes and civil law and strives to evangelize among these pillars. The couple are well aware of threats to fidelity and permanence; they know what society expects and how it rewards them. Amid all this, we help them find Christ.

Paragraph 21 gives the bad news: "But if every effort fails, and an engaged couple openly and expressly demonstrate that they reject what the Church intends when the Marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls is not permitted to celebrate the Sacrament. Though reluctant, he must take note of the situation and convince those involved that, in these circumstances, it is not the Church, but they themselves, who prevent the celebration they are asking for."

Many times we have a strong hunch that a couple is not going to make it. This is a tough call. Idealistically, we hope that through marriage preparation a weak couple would put their own ceremony on hold. But sometimes they don't. Sometimes we go forward. Sometimes we pray extra hard for them.

Getting practical, paragraph 23 says, "It is appropriate that the same Priest who prepares the engaged couple should, during the celebration of the Sacrament itself, give the Homily, receive the spouses' consent, and celebrate the Mass."

They must think we have six or eight priests in every parish. Underneath this, though, is a path for the ministry to the engaged: preparation, presiding, preaching, and receiving the couple's consent. All that helps solidify our relationship with them.

Priests are busy. We cannot spend more time with engaged couples without taking time away from other matters. I rely on two married couples for marriage preparation - one offering presentations in English and the other in Spanish. When they give me good or bad news about a couple, I listen. Priests also have a slight handicap in that only a few of us are or have been married. This spring at a friend's wedding in a Disciples of Christ church, I was struck by the minister's Charge to the Bride and Groom, which emanated from her deep understanding of the path of this couple's engagement. The minister had visited them at great length and knew how to pull out from them the spiritual mileposts on the journey that brought them to this day. She approached marriage preparation and homily preparation from a perspective I could never have.

Still, we priests bring other gifts. We bring the fruit of our own prayerful meditation on the call of God in our lives, and on the values that marriage brings the community at large. Sometimes a priest's voice sounds downright oracular because we come at the wedding from the experience of a life somewhat removed.

The wedding homily is more important than we may realize. To save time, many of us preach the same homily to every couple, cleverly switching out their names. But the homily is a moment in which a wedding can come alive, evangelizing the people in attendance as they hear good news proclaimed in this particular couple on this particular day. I post my wedding homilies on my web site, along with

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homilies for funerals and Sundays. I don't know if anyone who attended the wedding ever goes looking for them, but they're there hoping to inspire, challenge and invite.

This same couple, incidentally, put a notice in the program at the very top, reaching out to all their friends who came that day: "Welcome to our Unplugged Wedding! We invite you to be fully present with us on this special day by turning off your cell phones and cameras. We will be more than happy to share our wedding photos with you. Thank you!" The minister called everyone's attention to that notice at the beginning of the ceremony, and incredibly, people obeyed. Counter-cultural.

The wedding procession continues to baffle me. Nothing in our culture supports the notion that a father gives his daughter away to a different and younger male to care for her, yet that is precisely what is ritualized throughout our country in wedding after wedding, and not just in Catholic churches. The study group of liturgical theologians who prepared the revised Catholic rite after the Second Vatican Council imagined a procession in which the couple entered the church together after the priest. It brilliantly articulates that the church's minister is the official witness, and the bride and groom give the sacrament to each other by their consent. The vision is still there in the second edition of the rite in Latin and in the Spanish translation in the United States, but the English translation now states that the couple enters "in the customary way." That is not a translation; that is a white flag of surrender. We had an opportunity to help people think about this again, but it's been squandered.

Once I was preparing the wedding for a friend marrying a woman from an evangelical tradition. She wanted me to ask at the end of the procession, "Who gives this woman?" And she wanted her father to answer, "Her mother and I." I told my friend I would find it offensive to ask such a question. No one is giving this woman. She has to make this decision of her own free will. We went back and forth a little because the bride really wanted me to do this. He was caught between the woman he loved and his priest friend. Finally in exasperation he asked me on the phone one night, "Is there any question you can ask to which her father can answer, 'Her mother and I'?" I said, "Sure. 'Who's paying for this wedding?'"

Anyway, instead of bringing greater unity between church and culture, the new rubrics governing the procession pretty much say "Whatever" and move on.

We all get requests for special rituals during the ceremony, and we all have stories to tell. I want to protect the integrity of the liturgy, but if what the couple is requesting is not opposed to the liturgy, I may let them go ahead. I think too many priests have too many rules about weddings, and we quickly become the party of No. Some priests seem to think that anything the couple wants that's different, they can't have. Well, it depends on the request. "Can we have someone ring the tower bells after the wedding mass?" Sure. "Can we have the *lazo* at our 25th wedding anniversary?" "Well, the *lazo* applies to the wedding; it really doesn't have a function at the anniversary." "But we never got a *lazo* at our wedding." "Oh. Well, then OK." But music - I hold the fort on sacred music at a wedding - even as a prelude to the ceremony; readings - these really need to be from the bible. But some other ideas maybe don't matter so much.

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Weddings are special days. I try to make them happy occasions. I want the couple to have a good experience of Christ and the Church, and to feel that we really do share their joy and their hopes as they step forward into a new life together. I want all their guests to meet Christ, to find love, and to create memories. All that is implied in the part of the book that no one ever reads, the introduction to the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.