

Welcoming the 2nd Edition of the Order of Celebrating Matrimony in the Diocese of Allentown

General Background

If you plan on attending a Catholic Wedding in the United States in 2017, you are in store for a few subtle, but meaningful changes to the text of the Ritual. The implementation of the 2nd Edition of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* takes effect on 30 December 2016, the Feast of the Holy Family. The new ritual's journey to the Diocese of Allentown has been a lengthy one. In 1991, St. John Paul II approved the 2nd Latin typical edition for the Universal Church. Nearly twenty-five years later, the Church in the United States has an approved English version of the 2nd edition for use in the Sacred Liturgy. This new text offers the faithful a translation that better reflects the rich theology of the Sacrament that “the matrimonial covenant derives its force and strength from creation, but for the Christian faithful it is also raised up to a higher dignity, since it is numbered among the Sacraments of the new covenant.”¹

Marriage vs. Matrimony?

By simply looking at the outside of the Ritual book, one will notice the change from the old edition: “The Rite of Marriage” to the new translation: “The Order of Celebrating Matrimony.” This literal translation from the Latin “*matrimonium*” not only more authentically corresponds with the typical edition but the term Matrimony emphasizes the sacred nature of the Sacrament in which the couple give themselves over to each other.

Mass or Ceremony?

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony, 2nd edition includes three separate rites: 1.) Within Mass, 2.) Without Mass (commonly referred to as a ceremony), and 3.) Matrimony between a Catholic and a Non-Christian.

In regards to which option is to be selected, the pastor along with the couple should decide which is pastorally appropriate for the occasion governed by the norms of the Catholic Church. The Celebration of Matrimony between two Catholics is best celebrated within the context of Mass. Every effort should be made by the pastor and the couple to ensure that the Eucharist is celebrated for two Catholics.

The Marriage of a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic is usually celebrated with the context of a Ceremony (without Mass).² This option is generally chosen as a sign of respect for the non-Catholic spouse and their family who are not able to receive Holy Communion within Mass. However, if the situation warrants, the option of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass, may be used.

¹ *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 1.

² *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 36.

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony, 2nd edition includes a special rite for Matrimony between a Catholic and a Non-Christian. The marriage of a Catholic and a Non-Christian does not allow for the option of a Mass, but rather includes a ceremony that is appropriate for the occasion.³

The ministry of a reader within the Celebration of Matrimony serves a key role in proclaiming the living Word of God. Within the context of a Mass, the readings are to be proclaimed by a Catholic; however, for a just cause, only the Bishop may grant permission of a member of another ecclesial community to serve as reader.⁴ If the Marriage takes place without Mass, a non-Catholic is permitted to serve as reader.

Welcoming Words

The new translation offers the celebrant the opportunity to address the couple and all those gathered at the beginning of the celebration in these welcoming words:

*We have come rejoicing into the house of the Lord for this celebration, dear brothers and sisters, and now we stand with N. and N. on the day they intend to form a home of their own. For them this is a moment of unique importance. So let us support them with our affection, with our friendship, and with our prayer as their brothers and sisters. Let us listen attentively with them to the word that God speaks to us today. Then, with holy Church, let us humbly pray to God the Father, through Christ our Lord, for this couple, his servants, that he lovingly accept them, bless them, and make them always one.*⁵

It is also important to note that because of the celebratory nature of the liturgy, if the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* takes place within Mass, the *Gloria in excelsis* is sung or recited and the Penitential Act is omitted.

Receive this Ring!

Following the homily, the bride and groom along with their witnesses take their place for the Celebration of Matrimony. There are a number of minor changes to the Address to the Bride and Groom, the Questions before the Consent, the Consent, and the Reception of the Consent. Following the Reception of the Consent, a new acclamation to praise God is offered by the priest: “Let us bless the Lord” to which all respond: “Thanks be to God.”

Another notable change in the new translation occurs during the Blessing and Giving of Rings. No longer does the bride and groom say “Take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity” but now they each say: “Receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity.” The change is subtle yet important in conveying the self-giving nature of the Sacrament of Matrimony. This self-giving love is one that is both offered and received mutually.

³ *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 118.

⁴ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 133.

⁵ *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 52.

Cultural Considerations

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 2nd edition includes two optional cultural practices that have their roots in the Hispanic and Filipino customs: The Blessing and Giving of the Arras and the Blessing and Placing of the Lazo. The Arras are typically thirteen ceremonial coins that are first blessed by the priest. Following the blessing, the groom hands the coins to his new wife as he pledges to care for her and the home they will build together. The bride receives the coins and then offers them back to her new husband promising the same. The Lazo is a cord or rosary that is placed over the couple's shoulders, often by the godparents, as a sign of their unity. The couple is blessed while wearing the Lazo reminding them of the indissoluble bond they have entered.⁶ These cultural practices are now an option for all couples in the United States of America.

Commercial Custom

The practice of the Unity Candle or even Unity Sand in secular culture has found its way into Catholic liturgy within the last 20-30 years. The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 2nd edition does not explicitly mention this popular element in the ritual itself. The question of whether this popular element is permitted in the liturgy must be addressed both thoughtfully and locally. The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* provides rich symbols that are a part of the tradition of the Church and therefore it would be desirable not to distract or dilute from those which already exist. Therefore, the custom of the Unity Candle/Unity Sand within the liturgy is not permitted in the Diocese of Allentown. The Diocese encourages any couple who still desires the use of the Unity Candle on their wedding day to incorporate this secular custom as part of the Grace before Meals at the Reception.

Conclusion

Pope Francis in his recent instruction *Amoris Laetitia* offered these words of reflection:

“Short-term preparations for marriage tend to be concentrated on invitations, clothes, the party and any number of other details that tend to drain not only the budget but energy and joy as well. The spouses come to the wedding ceremony exhausted, rather than focused and ready for the great step that they are about to take... Here let me say a word to fiancés. Have the courage to be different. Don't let yourselves get swallowed up by a society of consumption and empty appearances. What is important is the love you share, strengthened and sanctified by grace. You are capable of opting for a more modest and simple celebration in which love takes precedence over everything else. Pastoral workers and the entire community can help make this priority the norm rather than the exception.”⁷

The *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 2nd edition offers the Diocese of Allentown an opportunity for priests, deacons, religious, and the entire faithful to recommit and reawaken our focus on the sacred nature of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

⁶ *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 71b.

⁷ *Amoris Laetitia*, 212.

May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God who joined together our first parents in paradise, strengthen and bless in Christ the consent you have declared before the Church so that what God joins together, no one may put asunder.⁸

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⁸ *Order of Celebrating Matrimony, 64.*