

Matrimony

In the Light of Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Liturgical Documents

Lit 86

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INTRODUCTION

The work of a priest is in some way comparable to that of a general advocate. In order to be able to defend cases of politicians, business people, doctors or clergy, the lawyer needs to some extent, besides acquiring the requisite knowledge in law, to be familiar with the world of these different areas. Similarly a priest in the modern world is prepared to serve the needs of men and women in different fields, peasants as well as politicians, traders as well as teachers. Now, while lawyers may specialise so that one finds legal representatives specifically for copyright law or computer technology, priests do not generally do so, with the exception perhaps of a few areas such as prison and military chaplains or those trained to form other priests. Adequate seminary training therefore, aims at producing priests who are “all rounded”, and who can feel comfortable in the different sectors of the ever-changing society. In working towards this end, seminary authorities have introduced, among other things affiliation to universities, local or foreign. This has in turn led to overloading of the seminary syllabus, to the bewilderment of students who have to cover so much more, as well as traditional seminary staff who must compress so much academic material within the given time, while at the same time giving enough room to the necessary spiritual and moral formation of the seminarians. The result is that in spite of the seven years of post-college training – a period which is longer than most university degrees – the time in the major seminary is hardly enough to produce an academically “well-baked” priest, not mentioning the other aspects of a priest’s training which are in no way less important.

This booklet is one in a series that emerged in the course of liturgy lectures in St. Paul’s National Seminary, at the time of affiliation to external universities. The writer realised like other fellow lecturers, that it was almost impossible to cover the material taught before the affiliation, while at the same time giving due time to the new university program. On the other hand reducing the areas covered in liturgy would have meant sending out priests who were ill-prepared for their ministry in that all-important aspect of a pastor’s life. The alternative course of action would then be to cover less in class, while giving a future priest a package of ready reference in his pastoral activity.

The series therefore is a form of liturgical companion, written particularly with a pastoral orientation. It is written with the realisation that in the modern world of fast-moving technology the most important thing is not to know all that is necessary in one's area of work, for that is absolutely impossible. Rather, it is to know where to look for the answers in case of questions. For that reason, a lot of effort has been put in referring to the basic liturgical sources that are available to pastors.

Because it is a form of "liturgical companion" it renders itself beneficial also to those priests and other pastoral workers who are already in the field. The book is not a substitution for the actual rituals. That would be both unnecessary since such rituals are available and impossible since it would imply reproducing a great bulk of material. Rather, it is a parallel to the corresponding ritual. It helps the pastor to see the rationale behind the rubrics. It brings in focus the importance of the General Introduction, Instructions or Norms, relating them to other relevant liturgical sources as well as adapting them to the present situation.

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THE SITUATION TODAY

Marriage is one of the most fundamental institutions of society. At the same time it is one that is highly threatened today by so many factors. Many young people are afraid of a life commitment and prefer to cohabit and to switch from one partner to another. Women who value their independence now and then decide by choice to be single parents. There are so many cases of divorce, of broken marriages, of extra-marital sex, of infidelity. To many marriage appears out-dated. In many parish situations the norm is to have people who have lived with each other squaring their marriage. It is the exception to have fresh marriages of people who have not lived intimately before.

APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF THIS TOPIC

Marriage is one of those topics that is given a wide coverage in nearly all the ecclesiastical disciplines because of its importance. It has juridical, pastoral, cultural, moral, and dogmatic implications, to mention but a few. Each of the ecclesiastical disciplines treats a particular aspect of it. An effective pastor needs to have knowledge of all these different facets in order to have a comprehensive picture.

Here marriage is studied from the liturgical point of view. That mainly concerns what takes place within the church on the wedding day. Naturally one has also to be concerned with the immediate preparations.

It is assumed therefore that the student will have learnt from canon law such questions as the importance of knowing the law of the state with regard to Christian marriage. Or the importance and implications of the marriage consent, as well as the legal importance of signing the marriage register and preserving the marriage certificates. From the point of view of Pastoral Theology the student will be acquainted with importance of giving the couples a catechesis in preparation for marriage. He will make sure that they have received the appropriate prior sacraments which are baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. Before the celebration of the marriage it is part of the immediate preparation to make sure that they have received the sacrament of reconciliation, if they need it.

The pastor should also be acquainted with the culture of the people in relation to marriage. This helps in not to offend against the cultural practices of the people. He should know those customs that are congruent with the faith so that he may promote and enhance them, as well as those

that are not in harmony with the faith, in order to help the new family to avoid them. It often happens for example, that the pastor is invited to the reception after the wedding. Such gatherings also provide an opportunity for him to learn more about the social behaviour of the people.

Again marriage has ecumenical implications. It is quite frequent that marriages are between different Christians. Even in those cases where marriage is contracted between two Catholics it is quite often that among those that are invited to the occasion, the friends and acquaintances of the spouses, there are some who are not Catholics. The pastor should not in any way offend the visitors of the couple if he can avoid it. Rather he should seek to edify them through the liturgy.

IMPORTANCE AND DIGNITY OF THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

In virtue of the sacrament of marriage, married Christians signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love that exists between Christ and his Church;¹ they thus help each other to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and rearing children; and they have their own special place and gift among the people of God.

Marriage is Self-donation

In marriage the couples donate themselves as it were to each other. Each donates and receives love. They give to each other their time, talents, possessions, etc., to be shared in the family. They must be ready to give up some of their personal interests in order to allow for a common life. A successful marriage also demands an amount of tolerance of those things that may be disagreeable to the opposite party. It requires that each learns to accept the other as they are. At the same time marriage requires that the couples learn to grow, to change to forge together a new identity.

¹ Ephesians 5:31-33: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Marriage is established by the Marriage Covenant

Marriage is established by the Marriage Covenant, the irrevocable consent that the spouses freely give to and receive from each other. This unique union of a man and woman and the good of the children impose total fidelity on each of them and the unbreakable a unity of their bond. To make the indissoluble marriage covenant a clearer sign of this full meaning and a surer help in its fulfilment, Christ the Lord raised it to the dignity of a sacrament, modelled on his own nuptial bond with the Church.

Christian couples, therefore, are to strive to nourish and develop their marriage by undivided affection, which wells up from the fountain of divine love: in a merging of the human and the divine, they remain faithful in body and in mind, in the good times as in the bad.

Marriage is a vocation of the two. Every human being is destined to eternal life. That destiny is shaped by our activities on earth. Those who are married work out their destiny together. They also help each other in their growth in the faith through fidelity, common prayer, example of virtue, mutual correction and forgiveness, mutual instruction in the faith.

The irrevocability of marriage shows the seriousness of the marriage covenant. It also is an indication of how much the couple needs to be close to God in order to keep this covenant. This irrevocability sounds simple enough when the two love each other. It becomes very difficult for them to understand and to bear under those circumstances when the couples “fall out of love”, or when one of the spouses cheats on the other, or even in the case of chronic sickness. Yet it is the only foundation for the family and for society. Christianity calls for heroism.

Marriage is Ordained to the Procreation of Children

By their very nature, the institution of marriage and wedded love have as their purpose the procreation and education of children and find in them their ultimate crown. Children are the most precious gift of a marriage and contribute most to the well-being of the parents. Therefore, married Christians, without in any way considering the other purposes of marriage of less account, should be steadfast and ready to co-operate with the love of the Creator and Saviour, who through them will constantly enrich and enlarge his own family.

Marriage is both for the mutual fulfilment of the couples that contract it and at the same time it should be open to God’s gift of children. Marriage

is equally valid if by no selfish decision of the couples they cannot have children. But on the other hand of its nature marriage is ordered towards procreation. Man and woman are made for mutual companionship while at the same time children are given them as the crowning of their marriage, a share in the creative power of the Creator. Procreation also includes the duty to raise the children through supporting them financially and giving them a moral and religious education especially by example.

The parents have the duty not just to bring new members to the world, but of raising their children in a responsible way. The family is the first Church. Children are to be baptised, raised in the faith, taught Christian morals. They should be guided to use their freedom well in discerning their particular calling.

The family should also look beyond itself to the needs of and duties towards the wider Church. It should take its share of evangelising through example. It should be involved in the activities of the local Church and in the betterment of society. They should be honest and hard working, in order to meet their own needs and to come to the assistance of the less fortunate as much as they can.

PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

Remote preparation for marriage takes place right from childhood. It includes the teaching to the children the esteem for family values, the right use of their inclinations, personal hygiene, respect for their own bodies and love for honest work. Children should also be taught at this stage respect and proper behaviour towards the opposite sex. These are values that are hard to learn later in life if they are not learn right from childhood.

Proximate preparation includes the teaching on the nature of conjugal sexuality, responsible parenthood, some of the essentials that the future spouses need to know about family budgeting, housekeeping, family apostolate and prayer, etc.

Immediate preparation is the one that directly concerns the liturgy. It includes looking into the liturgical requisites for the wedding day. At this stage the minister should also ensure that the necessary sacraments have been received such as baptism, confirmation and penance (if needed). It is the time for the proclamation of the marriage banns, the buying of the rings and trying them on the fingers to see that they fit. It is at this stage

that the couple goes through the rite, are helped to choose the formula that is most suited for them among the alternatives. They may also be asked to make suggestions with regard to the choice of readings. They present those who will be their sponsors. The minister also gives them some catechesis on what is involved in the marriage contract: permanence of the covenant, openness to children and the duty to give them a good Christian upbringing, mutual respect, family prayer. The immediate preparation occupies the months or weeks that precede the wedding. Towards the actual day the couple is given the sacrament of penance. Other liturgical details that one might look into at this stage are whether or not the couples will take communion under both kinds, and what they are supposed to do, whether they will be required to bring the gifts in procession, whether the local custom requires the brother-in-law to hand over the bride during the liturgy, what the time for arrival in church will be, the type of procession that they will have, details regarding the choir and other secular bands or music groups involved in the liturgy, etc.

CHOICE OF RITE

Three forms for celebration of marriage are provided in the ritual: the rite of celebrating marriage during Mass, the rite of celebrating marriage outside Mass, and the rite for celebrating marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptised person. Marriage between two Catholics is normally celebrated in the context of Mass. In a marriage between a Catholic and a baptised person who is not Catholic, the usual form is the rite of celebrating marriage outside Mass. However, if suitable, and if the ordinary of the place gives permission, the rite for celebrating marriage within Mass may be used also in this case, 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 third form of the rite is to be used.²

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.

In the celebration of matrimony, apart from the liturgical laws providing for due honours to civil authorities,³ no special honours are to be paid to any private persons or classes of person, whether in the ceremonies or by external display.

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.

² *Rite of Marriage*, 55-66.

³ See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 32: "In the liturgy, apart from the distinctions arising from liturgical function or sacred orders and apart from the honours due to civil authorities in accordance with liturgical law, no special exception is to be made for any private persons or classes of persons whether in the ceremonies or by external display." Cf. "**Error! Reference source not found.**" on page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

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 numbers 67-105 of the ritual 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 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.

ADAPTATION AND INCULTURATION

PREPARATION OF LOCAL RITUALS

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. 63b⁴ and 77⁵ 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:

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 consent). When the Roman Ritual has several optional formulas, local rituals may add other formulas of the same type.

Within the rite of the sacrament of matrimony, the arrangement of its parts may be varied. If it seems more suitable, even the question before the consent may be omitted as long as the priest asks and receives the consent of the contracting parties.

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.

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

⁴ “In harmony with the new edition of the Roman Ritual, particular rituals shall be prepared without delay by the competent territorial ecclesiastical authority mentioned in Art. 22, 2, of this Constitution. These rituals, which are to be adapted, also as regards the language employed, to the needs of the different regions, are to be reviewed by the Apostolic See and then introduced into the regions for which they have been prepared. But in drawing up these rituals or particular collections of rites, the instructions prefixed to the individual rites the Roman Ritual, whether they be pastoral and rubrical or whether they have special social import, shall not be omitted.”

⁵ “The marriage rite now found in the Roman Ritual is to be revised and enriched in such a way that the grace of the sacrament is more clearly signified and the duties of the spouses are taught.”

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.⁶

RIGHT TO PREPARE A COMPLETELY NEW RITE

Each conference of bishops may draw up its own marriage rite suited to the usage 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,⁷ and the nuptial blessing should always be given.⁸

Among peoples where 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.

One particular aspect, at least in many areas of African society that would require the adaptation of the rite of marriage is that of "squaring up" of trial marriages. Sad to say in many areas by far the marriages contracted in the Church are people who have already cohabited, sometimes for several years. Often these couples already have children and sometimes with grandchildren as well. Under such circumstances the present rite of marriage which is worded for people who are coming together as man and

⁶ *SC*, 37: Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. Anything in these peoples' way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonise with its true and authentic spirit.

⁷ *SC*, 77.

⁸ *SC*, 78: Matrimony is normally to be celebrated within the Mass, after the reading of the gospel and the homily, and before "the prayer of the faithful." The prayer for the bride, duly amended to remind both spouses of their equal obligation to remain faithful to each other, may be said in the mother tongue. But if the sacrament of matrimony is celebrated apart from Mass, the epistle and gospel from the nuptial Mass are to be read at the beginning of the rite, and the blessing should always be given to the spouses.

wife for the first time proves unsuitable. Consider for instance the phrase "I N. take you N. to be my wedded wife..." One bishop narrated an occasion when he officiated at a mass marriage of 25 couples (all of them second hand in the sense of consisting of couples who have already cohabited). In this marriage ceremony one old man who had to repeat after the bishop objected when it came to saying that he took N. to be his wedded wife. He answered instead in his own words: "but she has been my wife for a long, long time!

A rite for couples who already live together should bring out the fact that these two are now calling for the blessing of God to a union that before was not acceptable either to him or to his Church. It should mention the privileges in the Church that previously were denied of them in the Church, which now they are admitted to. Their children are now children of a legal marriage and not bastards. The couple can now receive the sacraments. In particular they can share the table of the Lord, they can receive forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation. They have a rite to a Christian burial. In addition they may now fully take an active role in the Church. They can teach the Catholic doctrine to their children not only by word but also by example. In places where children of an illegitimate marriage may not enter the seminary or religious life, it can be mentioned in the marriage rite that the children of such a couple have such rite and privilege should they choose to consecrate themselves to God.

In drafting a rite that caters for couples who have lived together as man and wife before great precaution should be taken that the rite does not give the implication that the Church condones their previous condition. This might create the tendency to regard marriage in Church as something secondary and optional, an accessory to traditional marriage that makes it only a little better.

Another precaution to be taken is to make a distinction between marriage that is accepted as legal according to tradition and trial marriage. It is one thing for a man to have fulfilled all the customs required of him and to be in good standing before the in-laws and traditional society, it is another thing to irresponsibly and exploitatively take a woman to one's home with experimenting whether she can stay to forge a more permanent relationship, on conditions laid down by the man. The former is authentic marriage according to tradition, the latter is trial marriage.

ECUMENICAL ASPECTS OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is one of those areas in the Church's pastoral activities in which a realistic approach must pay attention to the question of ecumenism. It is true that there have been and still are areas where marriage is by arrangement so that only those partners that are regarded as suitable are matched. However, such areas are few today. The phenomenon of choosing a partner does not always follow rational procedure. People often fall in love with people of a different faith from the one they profess. As often people find in these what they do not find in those of their own faith. Again there is the case of one who has waited for so long to find a partner. Some Catholics do not consider the faith of the partner an important issue.

When people of divergent faith come to the Church, the Church must not be quick to condemn but show understanding to them. For this reason a pastor ought to take care not to lose the Catholic party to the other faith. In fact he ought to consider it an opportunity for it to win also the other party to the Catholic faith.

With regard to the marriage between a Catholic and a Christian of another different denomination there are two practical possibilities to be considered: whether the marriage is to be celebrated in the Church of the non-Catholic partner or whether it is to be celebrated in the Catholic Church.

When it is to be celebrated in the Catholic Church the marriage instructions during the pre-marital catechesis focuses on the Catholic partner. This is obviously because the Catholic Church has no right to teach the non-Catholic who has not expressed any desire to convert, what it expects of its married members. Nonetheless, the non-Catholic partner who has accepted that their marriage be conducted in the Catholic Church also has to accept some other conditions. Namely that the Catholic consort has freedom to worship in his or her Church. Secondly that children born of this union be raised in the Catholic faith.

In this case too another question arises: whether marriage is to be celebrated within the context of Mass or outside, in the context of the liturgy of the word. Both possibilities are catered for in the ritual. The decision as to which rite to choose ought to involve the partners in the marriage. It may be more suitable for them to have their wedding outside

the context of the Eucharist so that there are no exclusions that would otherwise be brought about by the sharing in the Eucharist.

In the celebration of the rite for a mixed marriage the pastor should lay emphasis on those values that the couple in their different creeds have in common. In the case of two Christians attention is to be focused on the teaching of Scripture, on the importance of common prayer, on the importance of selfless and generous love, of forgiveness and tolerance. That way the non-Catholic together with other people attending the wedding ceremony does not feel alienated. However, the Eucharistic communion is not to be extended to the non-Catholic partner or to other non-Catholics attending the ceremony. Only the Catholic partner communicates.

In the case where marriage is to be celebrated in the Church of the non-Catholic partner the Catholic Church has the shorter end of the stick. But even then it does not pay to write off the Catholic party as lost. It is likely that the other conditions will lay down the conditions and the Catholic party will have to abide them, such as to which faith the children have to be raised. Still the Catholic pastor can show good will by attending the occasion if invited. Moreover after the wedding arrangement can be made to have a thanksgiving Mass in the Catholic Church for both partners, but mainly for the sake of the Catholic member.

DIFFERENT MODES OF ADMINISTERING THE SACRAMENT

RITE FOR CELEBRATING MARRIAGE DURING MASS

This rite has four major divisions: the entrance rite, liturgy of the word, rite of marriage, and liturgy of the Eucharist.

Entrance Rite⁹

At the appointed time, the priest, vested for Mass, goes with the ministers to the door of the church. Or, if more suitable, to the altar. There he meets the bride and bridegroom in a friendly manner, showing that the Church shares their joy. The couple may then be guided by the Master of Ceremonies to their seats. Their sitting should be arranged in such a way that they do not obscure the view of the altar. For instance their seats could be placed slightly to the side. Or if they are placed directly before the altar they may be placed directly at the head of the aisle so that no people are found directly behind them. Or the seats may be moved before the altar only at the time of the rite of marriage.

Where it is desirable that the rite of welcome be omitted, such as in the case where one has a large number of couples to be wedded, the celebration of marriage begins at once with the Mass.

If there is a procession to the altar, the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and the bridegroom. According to local custom, they may be escorted by at least their parents and the two witnesses. Meanwhile, the entrance song is sung.

Liturgy of the Word¹⁰

The liturgy of the word is celebrated according to the rubrics. There may be three readings, the first of them from the Old Testament. Usually the minister will have involved the couple in the selection of the readings during the pre-marital catechesis.

After the gospel, the priest gives a homily drawn from the sacred text. He speaks about the mystery of Christian marriage, the dignity of wedded

⁹ *Rite of Marriage* 19-20.

¹⁰ *Rite of Marriage* 21-22.

love, the grace of the sacrament and the responsibilities of married people, keeping in mind the circumstances of this particular marriage.

*Rite of Marriage*¹¹

After the homily all stand, including the bride and bridegroom, and the priest addresses them in the words given in the ritual or in his own words. If practical the bride and groom come before the priest in front of the altar, if they are not already there. Their attendants may flank them. In the words of introduction the priest may talk about the purpose of their gathering, God's approval of the decision they have made to marry, and his blessing of such a union. At the end of his introductory words the minister asks the couple to state their intention before the community.

In stating the intention the priest questions the couple about their freedom of choice, readiness to remain faithful to each other, and, if applicable, the acceptance and upbringing of children that God may give them. Each answers the questions separately.

Next the couple declare their consent. The priest invites the couple to declare this consent with the words: "since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and his Church." At the discretion of the priest, other words which seem more suitable under the circumstances, such as "friends" or "dearly beloved" or "brethren" may be used. This also applies to parallel instances in the liturgy. The formula for the marriage consent is: "I, [name of the one declaring], take you, [name of the one addressed], to be my husband/wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life." If however, it seems preferable for pastoral reasons, the priest may obtain consent from the couple through questions. Alternatively he reads in a subdued voice the words of the consent, prompting the couples in turn. They repeat after him. Where there is use of the microphone, it is important that the priest strives not to be heard through the microphone, while at the same time he is loud enough to be heard by the couple he is prompting so that it is not necessary for them to ask during the declaration of the consent: "what did you say?"

¹¹ *Rite of Marriage* 23-24.

When each of the couples have declared their consent,¹² (usually the man first and then the woman), the priest then, in the name of God and of the Church, receives their consent. He says: “You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God has joined, men must not divide.” It is appropriate to receive the consent with some appropriate gesture. In some areas the priest covers with his hands the joined hands of the bride and bridegroom. In others he may cover their hands momentarily with his stole, before they release each other.

Next is the blessing and exchange of rings.¹³ The priest says the prayer invoking God’s blessing of the rings, symbol of the couple’s love and fidelity. He may use other forms of the prayer of blessing given in numbers 110 and 111 of the rite. If the bride is wearing gloves as part of her wedding dress, they should be removed at list on the right hand, before placing of the ring. First the bridegroom places his wife’s ring on her ring finger (the fourth finger after the thumb), with the words “take this ring as a sign of love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Then the bride does the same. They do not need to add “Amen” since this is accent to what someone else has said. Nor should they accompany the gesture with making the sign of the cross. Some couples who are so used to relating the Trinitarian formula with the sign of the cross may be tempted to do so. Again in some areas there is the practice of placing the ring on the pointing finger as one pronounces the words in the name of the Father, then on the middle finger on mentioning “and of the Son”, and finally on the ring finger at the words “and of the Holy Spirit”. This gesture seems to be meaningless and rather exaggerated.

The general intercessions or prayers of the faithful follow, using formulas approved by the conference of bishops. If the rubrics call for it, the profession of faith is said after the general intercessions, and not before as usual. The general intercessions conclude the rite of marriage.

The order of Mass is followed, with the following changes: 1) During the offertory, the bride and bridegroom may bring the bread and wine to the altar. 2) The Preface is proper to marriage.¹⁴ 3) When the Roman Canon is used, the special formula for matrimony is used. 4) The Nuptial blessing is

¹² *Rite of Marriage* 26.

¹³ *Rite of Marriage* 27-28.

¹⁴ From the *Roman Missal*, or from the *Rite of Marriage*, 115-117.

inserted. After the Lord's Prayer, the prayer "Deliver us" is omitted. The priest faces the bride and bridegroom and, with hands joined, says the nuptial blessing. This, like many other blessings, has an anamnetical part and a part of petition. First it recalls God's goodness in creating out of nothing, in giving a man and a woman as mutual gifts to each other for companionship, in the permanence of the marital covenant according to God's plan, and in the reflection of that union in Christ's union with his Church. Then the prayer petitions for the grace of mutual fidelity and honour, for the grace of faithfulness to God's commands, the grace to be exemplary to others, the blessing with a long life and the grace for the couple to share in eternal life. The rubrics guide the minister to adapt the nuptial blessing to the circumstances of the couple, for instance is one or both of the parties will not be receiving communion, or if the couple are advanced in years or have no hope of receiving children. 5) At the words "Let us offer each other the sign of peace", the married couple and all present show their peace and love for one another in an appropriate way. In Western culture for instance, it is customary that the couple kiss on the mouth. Some of the African cultures may find this gesture too intimate to be performed in public. 6) the married couple may receive communion under both kinds. They may even drink directly from the chalice. If this is done it is the minister who gives to each the chalice, not that each gives the other the chalice, as they do in many places at the reception with regard to the wedding cake. In this case, the minister places the role of Christ who took the chalice filled with wine, transformed into his blood and gave to his disciples, inviting them to take and drink. 7) Before blessing the people at the end of Mass the priest blesses the bride and bridegroom, using one of the formulas provided in the rite.¹⁵

If two or more marriages are celebrated at the same time, the questioning before the consent, the consent itself, and the acceptance of consent are always done individually for each couple; the rest, including the nuptial blessing, is said once for all, using the plural form.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Rite of Marriage* 125-127.

¹⁶ *Rite of Marriage* 38.

RITE OF MARRIAGE OUTSIDE MASS

It is important to bear in mind that the normal and preferred form is marriage within Mass. However, sometimes circumstances may be such that this is not possible. On other occasions it may even not be desirable. The present rite is the one to be used under such circumstances, for instance in mixed marriages. At the appointed time, the priest, wearing surplice and white stole (or a white cope, if desired), proceeds with the ministers to the door of the Church, or, if more suitable, to the altar. There he greets the bride and bridegroom in a friendly manner, showing that the Church shares their joy. Where it is desirable that the rite of welcome be omitted, the celebration of matrimony begins at once with the liturgy of the word.

The entrance rite, the liturgy of the word and the rite of marriage up to the General Intercessions, take place as in the rite of marriage within Mass.

The general intercessions in this rite are integrated with the nuptial blessing. They take place in this order: first the priest uses the invitatory of any blessing of the couple,¹⁷ or any other, taken from the approved formulas for the general intercessions; b) immediately after the invitatory, there can be either a brief silence, or a series of petitions from the prayer of the faithful with responses by the people. All the petitions should be in harmony with the blessing which follows, but should not duplicate it; c) then, omitting the prayer that concludes the prayer of the faithful, the priest extends his hands and blesses the bride and bridegroom. The same blessing as used in marriage within Mass is also used here.

If the marriage is not celebrated in the context of a communion service, the Lord's Prayer follows, then the conclusion with a blessing; whether the simple form "may almighty God bless you..." or with one of the forms given in numbers 125-127 of the rite. of on the other hand it is celebrate in the context of a communion service, after the Our Father, follows the communion rite. After communion a reverent silence may be observed for

¹⁷ For instance: "my dear friends, let us turn to the Lord and pray that he will bless with his grace this woman (or mention her name) now married in Christ to this man (or mention his name) and that (through the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ,) he will unite in love the couple he has joined in this holy bond." *Rite of Marriage* 33. Others are given in numbers 120, 121 of the rite. any other taken from an approved set of formulas for ghe general intercessions may also be used.

a while, or a psalm or song of praise may be sung or recited. If only the bride and bridegroom have received communion, then follows the prayer: “Lord, we who have shared the food of your table pray for our friends N. and N., whom you have joined together in marriage. Keep them close to you always. May their love for each other proclaim to all the world their faith in you. We ask this through Christ our Lord.” Another suitable prayer may be used instead. Then comes the blessing.

If two or more marriages are celebrated at the same time, the question before the consent, the consent itself and the acceptance of consent are always done individually for each couple; the rest, including the nuptial blessing, is said once for all using the plural form.

The rite described above can also be used by a deacon who, when a priest cannot be present, has been delegated by the bishop or pastor to assist at the celebration of marriage, and to give the Church’s blessing.

MARRIAGE BETWEEN A CATHOLIC AND A NON CHRISTIAN¹⁸

if marriage is celebrated between a Catholic and unbaptised person (either a catechumen or a non-Christian), the rite may be performed in the church or some other suitable place and takes the following form.

All proceed as in the rite outside Mass except the following: the nuptial blessing is optional. If it is used it is combined with the general intercessions as in the rite outside marriage. However, its wording is adapted to this rite; it excludes reference to a memory of God’s actions in the history of salvation that is believed by the Christians. Instead it stresses general qualities of marriage that are supra-denominational such as love, good lives, perseverance in sorrow, dedication to work, having a long life, mutual friendship, etc. In this rite the Lord’s Prayer is also optional. It may be replaced by another prayer formulated by the priest. The final blessing may be taken from those given for the rite within and outside

¹⁸ (RM 55-66).

CONCLUSION

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY