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10 Questions on Implementing the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*

As the implementation of the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony, Second Edition* (OCM) gets underway this fall, the Secretariat of Divine Worship has received a number of inquiries regarding details of the new ritual. The following questions and answers might assist ministers as they become familiar with this new liturgical book.

1. Does the Matrimony rite make any provisions regarding the possible role of a non-Catholic minister in a Catholic wedding?

No, there are no changes in this regard. Like the first edition, the text of the OCM itself does not discuss the possibility of the presence of a non-Catholic minister, nor does it provide any instructions as to what might be done in such circumstances. As was the case previously, one must look outside the ritual for direction. In this case, the most pertinent instruction remains the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, issued by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1993. Numbers 143-160 discuss mixed marriages, and no. 158 provides some guidelines:

Upon request of the couple, the local Ordinary may permit the Catholic priest to invite the minister of the party of the other Church or ecclesial Community to participate in the celebration of the marriage, to read from the Scriptures, give a brief exhortation and bless the couple.

So although the bishop's permission is required, the details of how these options might be integrated into the Catholic ceremony are not specified.

2. The Latin *editio typica altera* includes a rite for celebrating Matrimony in the presence of an assisting layperson. Why doesn't it appear in the U.S. editions?

The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* permits delegated lay persons to assist at marriages, when there is a genuine shortage of priests and deacons, provided that the Conference of Bishops has voted favorably with regard to such delegations, and the Holy See has given to the Diocesan Bishop its subsequent permission to grant the delegation (see canon 1112). Likewise, no. 25 in the Introduction of the OCM addresses the possibility of delegated laypersons assisting at marriages, once the proper permissions have been obtained. To account for this possibility, the 1990 Latin *editio typica altera* included a version of the Marriage ritual for those occasions as chapter three of the book, falling between the ceremony for Matrimony without Mass and the ceremony for the marriage of a Catholic and a catechumen or a non-Christian.

In light of the fact that no delegations are currently granted for lay persons to assist at Catholic weddings in the United States, the Holy See removed the chapter during its confirmation of the U.S. edition of the Spanish-language *Ritual del Matrimonio* in

2008. The new English translation of the entire OCM – including the chapter on celebrating Matrimony with an assisting layperson – was confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 2015, but for the sake of consistency with the U.S. Spanish edition, the Congregation also instructed the USCCB to remove this chapter from the English text for publication in the United States.

Should a diocese in this country arrive at an unfortunate shortage of priests and deacons and obtain the requisite permission from the Holy See in the future, the Secretariat of Divine Worship would assist in supplying the ritual text to use in those circumstances.

3. How much of an impact does the liturgical calendar have on the celebration of Matrimony? Are there days when wedding Masses are not permitted?

The new edition changes nothing in this regard, though the pertinent instruction in the Introduction (see no. 34) is more specific than it was in the former *Rite of Marriage*.

In the first place, it is important to be aware of any local norms or legislation. For example, although the Matrimony texts assume that weddings may take place on Sundays and other holy days, some dioceses do not permit weddings on these days. Aside from this, the only days when weddings are “to be avoided altogether” are Good Friday and Holy Saturday (see no. 32).

Matrimony within Mass could theoretically be celebrated on any other day of the year. However, in the feasts ranked numbers 1 through 4 in the Table of Liturgical Days, the Mass orations would be those for the day, and not for Matrimony. The complete instructions for the correct choices of readings and Mass formularies might seem complex, but they are important and should be carefully considered well in advance of the desired wedding day to avoid confusion and disappointment at the last minute. It is also important to note that, although the celebration of Matrimony within Mass can be significantly shaped by the occurrence of the wedding on important feast days, the two orders for celebration without Mass always make use of the prayers and readings provided in the OCM (see nos. 34, 54-56, 90, and 122).

4. Does the second edition change anything with regard to the entrance and recessional at a wedding?

There are some noticeable changes to the descriptions of the entrance procession in the revised English text. The former *Rite of Marriage* included a detailed order of procession if Mass was to be celebrated: “If there is a procession to the altar, the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and bridegroom. According to local custom, they may be escorted by at least their parents and the two witnesses” (no. 20). Since these directives have been largely overlooked for decades in some communities, it may come as a surprise that they had been there all along. The newer Latin *editio typica altera* includes similar language, but in the final English text confirmed by the Holy See, the Congregation replaced the details of the procession with a much less specific instruction: “The procession to the altar then takes place in the customary manner” (no. 46). While the procession described in detail in the previous rite would still be appropriate or even desirable in many cases, the fact that the Congregation replaced specific wording with the a more general reference to the “customary manner” would indicate that there remains considerable latitude in the details and order of procession.

As is the case even with the *Roman Missal, Third Edition*, the OCM does not describe or mandate a concluding procession, aside from the monition that “[i]t is a praiseworthy practice to end the celebration with a suitable chant” (nos. 107 and 142, both occurring in celebrations without Mass). The lack of specific directions in the text would seem to suggest openness a variety of local customs.

The brief observations which accompanied the approved English text indicated that the Congregation was sensitive to the fact that marriage ceremonies admit of many different customs in various places around the world, indeed even throughout the United States, and they did not wish to impose rigid details regarding these aspects of the ceremony. That being said, the implementation of the new translation presents an opportunity to re-evaluate parish customs. The “first form” of the entrance in the ritual does suggest a “liturgical procession,” as one sees in other sacred liturgies, and this sort of procession at a wedding could help counter tendencies that have a more secular inspiration.

5. Why is the Penitential Act omitted at a Matrimony within Mass?

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* observes, “In certain celebrations that are combined with Mass according to the norms of the liturgical books, the Introductory Rites are omitted or take place in a particular way” (no. 46). Matrimony is an example of this, as is a Mass at which the Baptism of a child is celebrated. The Mass for the Dedication of a Church replaces the Penitential Act with a sprinkling rite, and on Ash Wednesday the distribution of ashes after the homily serves as a penitential rite that day. Although the omission of the Penitential Act in a wedding Mass is consistent with other special rites, one can only speculate as to the specific reasons the Holy See arrived at its particular decision when it promulgated the Latin *editio typica altera* in 1990.

6. How is the new acclamation after the Reception of the Consent to be handled?

The second edition of the Marriage rite introduces a new conclusion to the Reception of the Consent: the celebrant says “Let us bless the Lord,” and the congregation replies “Thanks be to God.” This is not an optional part of the ceremony, although the rubric notes that “Another acclamation may be sung or said” (nos. 65, 99, and 130). As a new element in the OCM in English, this dialogue will not likely be familiar to regularly practicing Catholics, let alone to visitors who are present at the wedding, so carrying it out gracefully presents a challenge. Various suggestions have been made that might help overcome this difficulty.

One obvious solution is to include the dialogue in the program or worship aid, although the acclamation takes place at a point in the ceremony when attention will be focused on the bride and groom, and people might not be following along in a printed text. At the very least, practicing the verse and response of the acclamation should be included in the wedding rehearsal. Singing the dialogue could be helpful, especially if the celebrant has worked in advance with the cantor, who would lead the response. Adapting the text to a familiar melody can facilitate participation, such as the melodies found in the *Roman Missal* with the dialogue “The Lord be with you / And with your spirit” or “Go in peace / Thanks be to God.” Also, the option to use another acclamation could be employed, and a familiar setting of “Alleluia” might be used, for example.

This moment provides an important opportunity for the assembly to participate actively in the ceremony; as alternate forms for this acclamation are being considered, it is essential that it retain its dialogical character. In other words, the acclamation should not be replaced by a vocal solo in which the assembly does not participate. Through advance planning, appropriate creativity, and repeated exposure to the dialogue, this will, in time, become a natural part of participation at a Catholic wedding.

7. Are celebrants required to sing the new musical settings for the Nuptial Blessings?

No. The Latin *editio typica altera* added chant settings for the magnificent prayers of the Nuptial Blessings, and as a rule, the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) provides musical settings with their English translations when they occur in the Latin original text. Thus, these chant settings are included in the OCM. The fact that the Holy See included music in its Latin edition suggests a certain encouragement to sing them, but there is certainly no requirement to do so. The settings in the English ritual book, like those of the Latin edition, use melodies that are similar to the standard tones for the Prefaces in the *Roman Missal*, so it is hoped that they will not be difficult to learn. A priest who regularly sings other parts of the Mass but has never sung a Nuptial Blessing is encouraged to try the new musical settings in the OCM. Composers are also welcome to arrange other settings for these venerable blessings; as a reminder, such musical settings must receive copyright release from ICEL and be approved for liturgical use by the Secretariat of Divine Worship before they are published.

8. The order for Matrimony without Mass now includes a more detailed description of the optional distribution of Holy Communion. When would this be useful?

In the majority of circumstances, the factors that lead the pastor and couple to choose to celebrate Matrimony outside of Mass would also seem to argue against the distribution of Holy Communion in these ceremonies. Matrimony without Mass is usually chosen if one of the spouses is not Catholic, and it is advisable to avoid a situation in which only one spouse (and perhaps less than half of the congregation) would be able to receive the Eucharist, highlighting division on a day intended to celebrate a new union of husband and wife.

If, however, a priest is not available to celebrate a Mass for the marriage of two Catholics, exercising the option to distribute the reserved Blessed Sacrament when a deacon presides might be pastorally desirable. This option also existed in the former *Rite of Marriage* (see no. 54), but the one presiding had to discern the details out of an easily overlooked rubric, whereas the option in the new rite is quite prominent.

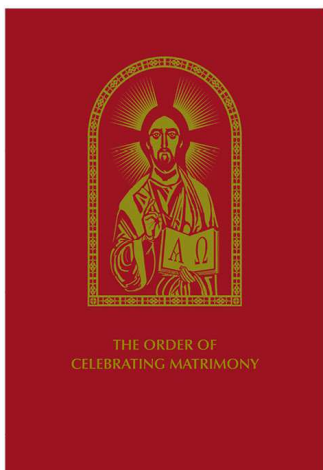
9. Is there flexibility as to when or how the optional rites of the *arras* and the *lazo* or veil are carried out?

Yes, it would seem that there needs to be some flexibility in this regard, and pastors will want to have sensitivity in working with families to determine the best way to carry out these rituals. Informal discussions with faithful and with ministers from the Philippines and various Hispanic countries suggest that there are indeed regional and familial wedding customs involving these elements that vary from place to place. Within the ritual approved for the United States, for example, the rubric for the blessing and placing of the *lazo* or the veil states, “If the *lazo* has not been placed earlier, and it is now convenient to do so, it may be placed at this time” (no. 71B). The ritual does not, however, suggest any specific earlier time at which this might have taken place, which implies a certain flexibility is called for. It should also be noted that the Introduction to the OCM states that “attention should also be given to the appropriate use of options provided in the rite as well as to local customs, which may be observed if appropriate” (no. 29).

10. Does the new rite permit or forbid the use of such popular elements as “Unity Candles” or the placing of flowers at the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary?

This is the most frequently asked question concerning the new *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. Although the venerable customs of the blessing and exchange of *arras* (coins) and the placement of the *lazo* or the veil are now approved options in both the Spanish and English Matrimony texts for the United States, no other additional cultural elements are explicitly mentioned in the rite, either positively or negatively. It is important to note, however, that the Introduction to the OCM allows for the use of options, “as well as to local customs, which may be observed if appropriate” (no. 29). The question remains as to which local customs are appropriate and should or should not be included in Catholic weddings.

This question should be addressed both thoughtfully and locally. On the one hand, it would be undesirable either to dilute or to distract from the rich symbols which are already a part of the approved Matrimony rites. Moreover, it also seems prudent to distinguish between time-honored wedding customs derived from a host of cultural and ethnic traditions, and those of a more fleeting or even commercial nature from the secular wedding industry, such as the use in recent years of “Unity Candles” and even “Unity Sand.” Since the cultural and other optional elements which are likely to be requested will vary greatly from place to place, it is worthwhile for each diocese and parish to identify and discuss common elements requested at local weddings, and to establish clear policies regarding their appropriateness for the communities being served.



The Order of Celebrating Matrimony, Second Edition

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