

MUSIC IN THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

Roman Catholic Understanding of Marriage

Marriage is the sacrament of love, the life-blood of the Church, and like all liturgical rites, expresses the paschal mystery of Christ: his life, death and resurrection. This is the primary meaning of the Sacrament of Marriage, and this must be evident in its celebration.

The core of the paschal mystery is the acceptance of God's love by the humanity of Christ. The love of God can be experienced in many ways. The most notable of these ways is the love of a man and a woman. It is most notable, for it involves one's whole being, body, mind and spirit, in a relationship that is found wherever human beings are found.

Marriage, then, by its position in the order of creation, is already a Sacrament: it is the most powerful symbol of God's love for the world. God's love is all-embracing: it sets us free to love the world in turn. Married love, as its symbol, reflects the expansiveness of God's love. It cannot become so intimate and exclusive that it ceases to be love at all. The celebration of Marriage in the Christian Church must not be allowed to reflect anything but the fullest meaning of human love. Married love is not only symbolic of God's love for the world, but also and especially of the very incarnation of God's love in the Christ-event. Real love, as it is lived out by Christ and his followers, leads to life, more and more abundant life. And love never fails, never falters: it is stronger than death.

For this reason, Christian people of all times and places have used the best elements of their cultures in its celebration. Music, especially, is expressive of the joy the God's people experience at a Marriage. Visual art forms, too, are used to enhance the colour and dignity of the celebration.

Good Taste: It should be noted by all concerned, however, that what is used in the celebration of a mystery is always indicative of how those planning it conceive it. This is especially true of Marriage, for it is the sacrament of love, at once the highest achievement of the human heart and, therefore, the human experience which is most easily degraded. Pastors have the responsibility of pointing this out to the families and spouses. What is gaudy, sentimental or trivial will indicate a poor perception of the seriousness and dignity of Marriage, and especially of the particular Marriage being celebrated. What is noble, inspiring and artistic will lift the minds and hearts of all who celebrate to an understanding and appreciation of the mystery of love which is worthy of the best efforts that can be put into its celebration.

Music for Worship

As for any worship service, the music is chosen with care according to sound liturgical principles. A wedding is first a worship service. It is worship of God. At weddings this is all too easily forgotten, for we are more influenced by a consumer culture than we would like to admit. Much of modern love music is expressive of worship, to be sure, but it is worship of love itself (often only of its physical aspects) or worship of the people who fall in love or worship of the object of one's love. Music in Catholic worship must express the worship of God for the mystery of love He created and transforms in this sacrament.

It is the Church assembly which worships at a wedding. It is a celebration of the believing community which expresses the faith and worship of both the universal Church as well as the local parish community. It is not a private or family affair. The selection, arrangement and the execution of all the music must respect the rights of the assembly. Music is chosen that enables the assembly to praise and worship God. Sentimental favourites do not necessarily make for good liturgy and participation.

The music chosen for the wedding liturgy should be familiar to the people of the church where the celebration takes place. If the music is mostly new, or beyond the ability of the local congregation, it will limit their participation, and thus hamper the community's worship.

Musicians: Liturgical Ministers

The Roman Catholic liturgy promotes the role of a cantor or psalmist, a minister who leads the assembled worshippers in singing the responsorial psalm, the gospel acclamation, and other acclamations and hymns. Our tradition does not encourage the use of a soloist at other parts of the wedding liturgy.

Groups or choirs who sing at weddings are to be aware of the difference between singing at worship and singing on the stage:

- On the stage, the musicians and singers dominate the action, and others follow their words, rhythm, and actions. They and their music are at the centre of what is happening: they are what is happening.
- In liturgy, however, the musicians are ministers or servants. Their role is subservient to the worship of the community, and should help the people to give God greater praise. The ministers of music are there to

intensify the spirit of prayer and worship, not to entertain the people. Their music is to fit into the mood and action of the various parts of the rite, and is to help its progress.

Aids to participation: In order to help the members of the assembly take a fuller part in the singing, a parish community needs to make sure that all have the words to be sung, if these have not been committed to memory. The pew edition of *Catholic Book of Worship* provides an adequate selection of music for the people. If a printed program is produced, it should be remembered that copyright is a matter both of civil and moral law.

Place of Music In the Rite

Music has an important place in the celebration of marriage. All the places where it may be used are mentioned here, in order of importance, along with possible options and alternatives. The choice of music is also discussed under "Choosing wedding music," below.

Responsorial Psalm: This is sung by a cantor, with the people singing the refrain. It should not be replaced by a hymn.

Acclamations: Particular effort should be made to sing these during the Mass. They are:

- Gospel acclamation: Sung before the reading of the gospel. If not sung, it is better to omit it.
- Holy, holy, holy Lord. Comes at the end of the preface of the eucharistic prayer. It is desirable for the priest to sing the preface.
- Memorial acclamation: After the narrative of institution in the eucharistic prayer.
- Great Amen: Concluding and sealing the praise offered in the eucharistic prayer.

The Lord's Prayer: The "Our Father" is the communion hymn of the Christian people. Normally, it is recited by the people. It may be sung, but always by all present, and never as a solo.

Other chants: Chants and hymns are sung at other points during the Mass. These include several which the choir may sing alone:

- If the Lord, have mercy is sung, choir and people may alternate;
- Glory to God: This is normally sung by the people and choir. Some compositions use a more elaborate setting with a refrain to be sung by the people;

- Lamb of God;
- Preparation of the gifts;
- Communion procession hymn;
- Music during the signing of the marriage register.

Processions: There are four processions in the Mass: entrance, preparation of gifts, communion, and recessional. These are properly accompanied by community singing. At the preparation of the gifts, the choir may sing while the assembly listens. The more important are the Communion hymn and the entrance procession. The Communion hymn must be sung by the people. It is more proper for the assembly to sing during the entrance procession than to have only organ music.

A special word needs to be said about the entrance procession. The Marriage Rite of the Catholic Church directs the priest to greet the couple, their families and attendants at the door of the church and to lead them into the church. A secular custom in many places has the bride arriving alone with her attendants after all are in place. This custom diverts the focus away from the *couple* and their union in love and worship and prevents the assembled people from welcoming the couple through the priest or deacon who presides and speaks in their name. It also works against the Introductory Rite of the Liturgy which seeks to build a sense of oneness in Christ by helping the assembled people to become one in worship and praise.

Prelude and postlude Before the service begins, the organist may play quietly to set an appropriate atmosphere of prayer and reverence for the celebration. Similarly, a postlude may be played after the service is over, until all the people have left.

Choosing Wedding Music

There is often great difficulty in choosing suitable pieces of music for a wedding, and it is too easy to blur the distinction between "sacred" and "secular," which leaves no one satisfied. This is because the distinction between the secular and the sacred is not a clear one. There are very deeply religious songs which have a "secular" origin, and many so-called "religious" songs are trashy and sentimental. What is being brought to expression in a wedding liturgy is the

mystery of human love as a covenant relationship.

Many songs mention "love." We must ask what is meant by "love" in a song before choosing it. Songs which express the religious dimension of love explicitly, of course, have pride of choice. Songs which imply this religious dimension are also suitable. But a song which denies this dimension either explicitly or implicitly must be avoided at all costs, for it belies the mystery: it is a falsehood in liturgy.

What is stated here about choice of music applies not only to the words of a song, but to its melody. We are, in fact, more easily influenced by melody than by words, for that influence is unconscious. Therefore, the melodies used are to be chosen carefully. Melodies which have their origin in stage or screen can subvert the Christian mystery of love quite insidiously. Merely to change the words of a song is not sufficient to make it suitable.

Choosing the music for a wedding is an opportunity for all involved to deepen their appreciation of the mystery being celebrated. The influence of music for good or ill is greater than might appear on the surface. Choosing suitable pieces requires prudence, sensitivity and openness to God's word. The time and effort that pastors and liturgical committees devote to this task, in conjunction with the spouses and families, is well spent.

The General Instruction of the Mass requires that the bishops of each country or region approve the texts that are sung at the Liturgy of the Church. Care should be exercised that hymns are now chosen from approved hymnals.

Other Art Forms

All the art forms can be brought into the service of good liturgical celebration. Often, in more modern churches, even the architectural and structural elements as well as the placement of furniture may be adapted for the particular celebration. The use of banners and posters and the arrangement of flowers may be a means of enlivening worship.

GUIDELINES FOR CELEBRATING MARRIAGE

CHOOSING MUSIC

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