



During the Questions before the Consent, the couple is now asked if they have come without coercion and if they are willing to follow the “path of Marriage.”

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The Revised Marriage Rite: An Overview of Changes to the Liturgy

Paul Turner

By now, most parishes have in hand the revised edition of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM) and are preparing for its mandated use on the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. This edition expands the material from the first edition and updates its translation.

Many of the revisions have been available since 2011 in the third edition of *The Roman Missal*. There, among the Ritual Masses, is the collection of texts “For the Celebration of Marriage”:

- the Entrance Antiphons
- the Collects (six now instead of four)
- Prayers over the Offerings
- Prefaces

- Commemorations for the Eucharistic Prayers (now including II and III)
- Nuptial Blessings
- Communion Antiphons
- Prayers after Communion
- Solemn Blessings at the end of Mass

A clarification of rubrics can also be found in the Missal: vestment color, rules governing the days when the texts of another Mass take precedence over those for a wedding, and the permission to interchange prayers and antiphons among the three sets in the Missal. All of these prayers and rubrics now appear in the OCM, which contains the complete set of introductions, rubrics, and ceremonies necessary for a Catholic wedding.

Whenever a wedding takes place at Mass, the priest will need both *The Roman Missal* and the OCM because the Missal contains the prayers of the Mass and the OCM contains the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony. If there is no Mass, all that the priest needs is in the OCM.

This article will present an overview of some of the significant differences between the first and second editions of the OCM, considering primarily the situation of a wedding within Mass.

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

The OCM more plainly lays out the options for the Entrance Procession. In the first form, the priest and ministers go to the door of the church, greet the bridal party, and they all process into the building. In the second form, he greets the couple after they have arrived at their place. The two forms still allow great flexibility. The first form intends to create a space for the priest to greet the couple informally and help them make the transition from the cares of the day outside the church to the religious celebration about to take place inside. Although the order of the liturgical procession is not described, the ministers may process first, followed by the witnesses, parents, groom, and bride. This procession beautifully expresses that the couple are the ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony; they both enter this celebration behind the priest. Few weddings begin this way because of the deeply entrenched custom of the procession of the bride. In a concession to this reality, the English translation calls the group at the door “the bridal party,” which implies that the groom may be elsewhere.

The second form is even more flexible. It permits every possible option for the couple and the priest to rendezvous. It says that they all meet together at one place where the priest receives them, but it does not say how they get there. Because of this silence, if the bride wants her own procession up the aisle, having the groom enter from the side and the priest from the sacristy, that may be done. If the couple want no formal procession at all, but simply a gathering at the place where they will be positioned for the ceremony, that may be done. Weddings are as different as couples, and although the Catholic Church has many requirements for the ceremony, it also allows some flexibility.

The rules governing the Entrance Chant at any Mass apply also to a Nuptial Mass. Several antiphons are proposed in the Missal and the OCM, but these may be replaced by others, or by any song. If there is no sung music at the beginning, then the antiphon needs to be recited. This can be done by the priest, a reader, or a small group. If the words are put into a worship aid, the entire community could recite them together immediately after the procession.

After the Sign of the Cross and the Greeting, the priest gives a public introduction to the ceremony. He has already said a few words privately to the couple to welcome them warmly. At this point he speaks so that all may hear. The OCM, for the first time, scripts out two alternative introductions that the priest may give. The priest may also use his own words. Of the two versions, one is addressed to the whole community, and the other is addressed to the couple. Either way, everyone hears a welcome, an introduction to the nature of the ceremony, and an invitation to participate.



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The Order of Celebrating Matrimony states that one of the Lectionary readings needs to speak of Marriage.

The Penitential Act is omitted at a wedding Mass. No explanation is given for this change, but the omission likely relates to the extended procession that may begin the ceremony, as well as the joyous nature of the gathering.

The Gloria is included in the Nuptial Mass. Most Sunday celebrations and all solemnities and feasts call for the Gloria. A wedding Mass has been raised to that level of celebration. Not all congregations know how to sing a Gloria, but many, especially in the Hispanic community, have several versions of the Gloria in their repertoire. If singing it poses a problem, the assembly may recite it. This will gather the common voice of the community, which expresses the faith that unites them.

The priest may choose from six Collects. However, if the date of the wedding falls on one of the days in the first four numbers on the Table of Liturgical Days, he reads the Collect for that celebration. For example, if a nuptial Mass falls on the Saturday night of the Epiphany of the Lord or on any Saturday night during Lent or Easter Time, he replaces the wedding Collect with the appropriate one for the liturgical day.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The second edition of the OCM expanded the repertoire of Lectionary readings at the Nuptial Mass, but most preparers will not notice the difference because the Lectionary already includes nearly all of them. A reading from Ephesians (4:1–6) is missing from the Lectionary’s collection for the Nuptial Mass, and this reading may now be chosen for a New Testament reading. In the Lectionary, it is at number 807, among the readings for the blessing of abbots and abbesses, just a few pages after the Lectionary’s readings for a wedding.

More significantly, a reading that explicitly references marriage must be chosen. In the *Order for Celebrating Matrimony*, an asterisk is beside these readings so they are easily recognizable. The popular hymn to love (1 Corinthians 12:31–13:8a) does not explicitly speak about marriage. It describes the love that all Christians should have for one another. Consequently, this passage does not carry an asterisk. If the couple wish to hear it at their wedding, it must be paired with a reading with an asterisk, such as Matthew 19:3–6, in which Jesus

speaks about the permanence of Marriage. The pairing should not be difficult since more than a dozen of the readings reference marriage. Only two of the nine New Testament readings do not refer to Marriage.

As with the Collect, the choice of readings is limited by the Table of Liturgical Days. If a wedding falls on a day within the first four categories of the table, the readings of that day take precedence. If the wedding takes place during a parish Sunday Mass in Ordinary Time, one reading from “For the Conferral of the Sacrament of Marriage” in the Lectionary (801–805) may replace an assigned reading for the liturgical day.

THE CELEBRATION OF MATRIMONY

The highlight of the celebration of Matrimony is the couple’s exchange of consent. Although many people call these words *the vows*, the Catholic liturgy uses a different word to emphasize the couple’s free agreement to enter into this union: they are not making a vow to God; they are giving each other their *consent*.

The principal parts of the ceremony remain the same, but with a new translation and some new additions. The familiar sequence still unfolds: the priest gives an introduction, he asks several questions, the couple join their right hands and give consent, the priest receives the consent, he blesses the rings, and the couple give rings to each other.

In the revised translation of the questions, the priest now asks if the couple have come “without coercion,” another way of expressing their complete free choice. He then asks if they are ready “to follow the path of Marriage.” When the couple exchange their consent, instead of promising to be “true,” they promise to be “faithful.” The alternative formula, in which they take their partner “to have and to hold from this day forward” now includes the expression “to love and to cherish” to make it similar to the formula spoken in some other countries.

The rubrics have never offered the option of the couple repeating their lines, phrase by phrase, after the priest, even though this nearly always happens. The couple could also read their lines directly from the OCM or from a prepared card without the intervening voice of the priest. The practice would strengthen the impact of the couple’s words of consent.

The priest’s role is to receive the consent. When he does, he now has an alternative formula recalling the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who joined Adam and Eve. The words bear some resemblance to a prayer offered in the Marriage ceremony before the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

The ring ceremony is no longer called the *exchange* but the *giving* of rings. The couple no longer ask each other to *take* the ring, but to *receive* it. These small changes highlight the free choice of the couple to marry. When the priest blesses the rings, he may sprinkle them with blessed water. Many priests have been sprinkling over the past fifty years, but the action never appeared in the first edition of the ritual. Now the sprinkling is included as an option.

The participation of the people has been strengthened by two additions to the celebration of Matrimony. After the priest receives the couple’s consent, the people sing or say an acclamation. “Thanks be to God” is suggested, but “Alleluia” or some other acclamation of praise to God is acceptable. Furthermore, at the conclusion of these ceremonies, the people may all sing a hymn or canticle of praise.



In the giving of rings, the couple asks each other to receive the ring, highlighting the free choice of the couple to marry.

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New to the second edition are some cultural customs. After the blessing and giving of rings, the rite of blessing and giving of the *arras* may take place. Popular among some Latin American and Filipino traditions, the *arras* are a box of thirteen small coins that the groom pours into the hands of the bride as a sign that he will care for her. In the United States, the groom states that these are rather a sign of God’s gifts to them, and making the same statement, the bride returns the coins to the hands of the groom. Traditionally, the *arras* are directly connected with the ring ceremony. They express more abundantly the value of the ring.

The Universal Prayer follows. An appendix to the OCM now gives sample formulas. These may be used or adapted. For those couples taking a more active role in the words of their wedding, these samples will provide solid suggestions for the prayers that they may wish to compose.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

It is rare that someone besides the pope and the bishop are mentioned by name in the Eucharistic Prayer. But at the Nuptial Mass, the priest makes a commemoration of the couple in the Eucharistic Prayer. The previous edition of the OCM included an intention for the couple in Eucharistic Prayer I. Now similar commemorations are in Eucharistic Prayers II and III.

Prior to the Nuptial Blessing, the rite allows for another cultural custom, the blessing and placing of the *lazo*, which is a tradition popular in some Hispanic and Filipino cultures. The *lazo*, which has a double loop, is blessed and then placed around the shoulders of the bride and groom just before the Nuptial

Blessing. Many couples find this an extremely holy symbol and a highlight of the ceremony. Although the priest blesses both the *arras* and the *lazo*, there is no indication that he sprinkles them with blessed water. This seems to give subtle but significant preference to the symbolic force of the rings, upon which he may sprinkle blessed water.

The Nuptial Blessing takes place as in the past, but all three options have a revised translation that has been available in the Missal for a few years. Noteworthy is that each blessing now includes an invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the couple. This is new to the history of this blessing, which has antecedents going back for almost 1,500 years. The prayers now resonate with those in the Eastern Rites, which in general more strongly affirm the role of the Holy Spirit. Also new to the blessing is the instruction that the couple kneel to receive it. A chant setting of all three blessings can be found in the back of the OCM.

When the ceremony is over, the marriage record is to be signed. This signing should not take place on the altar. The altar is reserved for the sacrifice of the Mass. The sacristy or parish office makes a more appropriate venue for the signing of documents.

OTHER MATTERS

Several other features have enriched the revised OCM. The book's introduction has been greatly expanded. Its opening paragraphs give a Catholic understanding of the theology of Marriage, which may be useful in Marriage preparation. The introduction also updates information pertaining to canon law, and it footnotes more generously Pope John Paul II's postsynodal exhortation on married life and the family, *Familiaris consortio*.

The appendix includes the blessing of an engaged couple and the blessing of a married couple on their anniversary. Both have been found in the *Book of Blessings*, but now they are updated and amplified. A member of the family may lead the blessing of an engaged couple, though a priest or a deacon may do so instead. The ceremony permits great flexibility. It may be formal or informal, at home or at church.

Many people will be surprised that The Order of Blessing a Married Couple within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage does not include the public repetition of the couple's consent, a pastoral practice in many places around the world. The consent given on the wedding day lasts forever, so it does not need repetition. Instead, the couple is invited to renew their commitment in silence before God. Words also are provided for the couple to vocally renew their commitment. They then have the option of together saying a prayer thanking God for the gift of their spouse and praying for their future together. The celebration also includes a prayer, inspired by the Nuptial Blessing, that the priest may give after the Lord's Prayer at Mass.

The prayers for a Mass in which an anniversary of Marriage is celebrated are from Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Occasions, 11, "On the Anniversaries of Marriage." These Masses should not resemble a wedding. In the opening procession, the priest enters last, not the couple. The rings may be incensed, but not sprinkled with blessed water, unless new rings are being given. The rules governing the choice of texts are affected even more by the liturgical calendar than a Nuptial Mass. For example, if on the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed



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The Order for Celebrating Matrimony provides for cultural customs, such as the placing of the *lazo*, which many consider a holy symbol.

Virgin Mary, September 8, a parish hosts a morning Nuptial Mass for one couple and an early afternoon Mass in remembrance of the Sacrament of Matrimony for another couple, the priest may celebrate the Nuptial Mass for the first, but he should celebrate the feast day Mass for the second. An anniversary is a day of great celebration, but it should not be confused with the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Chapter 2 of the OCM covers circumstances in which Matrimony is celebrated without Mass, a ceremony over which a deacon may preside. Chapter 3 provides a more detailed description of the Catholic celebration of a person who is not baptized, whether that person is marrying a Catholic or is a catechumen and, therefore, entitled to a Catholic wedding. The words of this interfaith ceremony are extremely sensitive to the possible presence of many who do not believe in Christ.

The revised OCM is a welcome addition to the Catholic liturgical library. It will serve the needs of the Church for many years to come. It will help parishes provide good pastoral care and a joyful celebration to those who are beginning a new life together as a married couple in Christ. ♦

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