

# The Order of Celebrating Marriage

by Simon C. Kim

In the 1969 edition of the Order of Matrimony, the church, although energized by Vatican II, had little time to reflect on the development of a post-conciliar document on marriage. Thus, “the first attempt at writing such an essay for a revised liturgical book” had a minimal introduction that many often gloss over.<sup>1</sup> Almost fifty years later, *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (OCM) is the product of the church’s ongoing reflection, and the introduction (*praenotanda*) has been greatly expanded from the original eighteen paragraphs in the 1969 edition. The current introduction is a deeper reflection relying upon conciliar documents and the richness found in scripture and tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Of special interest, “matrimony” is used instead of “marriage” to capture the broader religious context. This subtle, yet important, change is significant. While “celebrating” a life event is located within the moment of marriage, “matrimony” goes beyond a specific location and encapsulates a lifelong journey together.<sup>3</sup> “The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops hoped that putting the word ‘matrimony’ in the title of this book would set its Catholic meaning in relief against other usages of ‘marriage’ in the culture.”<sup>4</sup>

Paragraph thirty-six of the recently revised order reflects the church’s development as well as ongoing tensions still involved in welcoming non-Catholics into the rite. The liturgist Paul Turner notes that this is not a new legislation, just one that has not always been observed.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Catholics marrying baptized non-Catholics should avoid the distraction of disunity and have their union celebrated without mass. Only with permission from the local ordinary can couples from differing faith traditions include the Eucharist.

36. If a Marriage takes place between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic, the rite for celebrating Matrimony without Mass (nos. 79–117) should be used. If, however, the situation warrants it, the

1 Paul Turner, *One Love: A Pastoral Guide to The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016), 4.

2 Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC), *This Sacred Bond: A Pastoral Companion to The Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2016); see page 18 for a detailed list of sources in the *praenotanda*.

3 Turner, *One Love*, 2.

4 Turner, *One Love*, 2.

5 Turner, *One Love*, 51.

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rite for celebrating Matrimony within Mass (nos. 45–78) may be used, with the consent of the local Ordinary; but with regard to admission of the non-Catholic party to eucharistic Communion, the norms issued for various cases are to be observed. If a Marriage takes place between a Catholic and a catechumen or a non-Christian, the rite given below (nos. 118-143) is to be used, with the variations provided for different situations.

### **Celebrating Matrimony Without Mass**

A central rationale for matrimony without mass is based on the unity signified in the Eucharist. Since reception of communion reflects union with Christ and the church, the nuptial blessing should ultimately reflect this. When such couples celebrate their union in the church there is disunity when it comes time for communion. “Most importantly, the wedding is a celebration of the unity and equality of the two partners” through the church’s welcome, readings, exchange of rings, universal prayers, and nuptial blessing.<sup>6</sup> Turner emphasizes that people attending this kind of a wedding, along with the bride and groom, are on more equal footing by uniformly fulfilling “their function as a community that witnesses and prays.”<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that there are two options for celebrating matrimony without mass, and the second option where the distribution of communion occurs is not an attempt to avoid the parts that may be foreign to non-Catholics. Rather, the distribution of communion should be reserved for those areas where priests are not readily available.<sup>8</sup>

The eucharistic meal has always unified those gathered at the Lord’s table. In *Doors to the Sacred*, Joseph Martos emphasizes this unity in the first three centuries of the early church even when the fellowship meal became a ritual stressing the sacrificial aspect of Christ.

For the early fathers eucharistic worship was both an expression and source of Christian unity . . . In their eucharistic worship they experienced unity with each other in the living presence of Christ: they experience it because they believed it, and they believed it because they experienced it.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, unity is not simply a profession but a way of life. While the bride and groom consent verbally and experience this reality, the experience of eucharistic unity is incomplete due to the inability to receive Christ in his body and blood.

Similarly, the *Catechism* stresses this unity since the Eucharist completes our Christian initiation as well as makes us the church (no. 1396). While the common bond of baptism allows for full participation in the marriage celebration, the divisions are painfully felt at communion (no. 1398). Therefore, the church’s guidance for matrimony without mass is sensitive to what the Eucharist requires, and desires to maintain the joyful hope found in the baptismal bond of matrimony.

Liturgical discordance also occurs as the inability to receive communion is not only limited to the couple but also extends to family and friends. It is not uncommon that one side receives communion while others either wait or come forward to receive a blessing. “If the ceremony takes place during Mass, and only the bride or the groom receives Communion, it signals an imbalance at the very summit of the Liturgy of the Eucharist between the couple who have just been joined as one.”<sup>10</sup> Coupled with this discord is the uneasiness of those in attendance of not knowing why actions such as standing and kneeling are required during the eucharistic prayers. Rather than

6 Turner, *One Love*, 51.

7 Turner, *One Love*, 51.

8 Turner, *One Love*, 53.

9 Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MI: Liguori, 2014), 247.

10 Turner, *One Love*, 51.

being a moment of prayer that draws people into the memorial of Christ's death and resurrection, non-Catholics may feel further alienated from what is signified. Although this discord is not uncommon during Sunday liturgies, the OCM stresses the aspect of unity not for appearance's sake but for active participation and full communion.

Not every prayer of the church involves mass. The church's prayer reaches its summit in the eucharistic celebration; however, this does not mean that the Eucharist must be included with every sacred encounter. Though every moment of our prayer anticipates full communion, special moments directed to this calling are needed to remind us of our limitation, and more importantly, our potential. For example, baptisms are often celebrated without mass due to overwhelming numbers. Practical protocols are not the only reasons as each sacrament has its own value. How else could the church explain the separation of the sacraments of initiation to be experienced at different moments of people's lives? Renewal in the life-giving waters of baptism involves a lifelong journey with the community into which one is baptized. Periods of formation before sacramental encounters are important milestones in the faith journey. Therefore, each Sacrament is invaluable as it points to communion with the Lord and one another ultimately found in the Eucharist.

### **Celebrating Matrimony with Mass**

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis calls for the proclamation of the gospel to those who are not regularly practicing their faith as well as to non-Catholics. This opportunity comes not only during marriage preparation, but also in witnessing the church's celebrations. Rather than discouraging couples and, by extension, the entire assembly, to forego the Eucharist, could this moment serve as "the center and high point of the entire celebration" (GIRM 78), within which the proclamation of the gospel message takes place? Furthermore, this inclusion serves as a pastoral incentive to inform couples and the entire assembly about the deeper unity of matrimony and how this is ultimately realized in communion.

Pope Francis also advocates for couples to be prepared for "a profound personal experience and to appreciate the meaning of each of its signs" (213). If couples understand the reality of their inability to participate fully in communion, yet comprehend the sacramental moment, should they not be encouraged to do so as a fuller sign of their potential lives together? "In the case of two baptized persons, the commitment expressed by the words of consent and the bodily union that consummates the marriage can only be seen as signs of the covenantal love and union between the incarnate Son of God and his Church" (213). Since the love shared points to a deeper reality—Christ and his church—the presence of baptized non-Catholics provides another perspective that enriches the church.

Another liturgical occasion where non-Catholics witness communion without raising the issue of disunity is found when candidates (baptized non-Catholics) are encouraged to participate in the liturgy as much as they can when catechumens are dismissed during the Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA). This rite recognizes the baptism already conferred on non-Catholics, binding them in a special way to the wider community even when not fully initiated. This baptismal bond is fully recognized since Christians are not rebaptized.

Symbolic discrepancies have accompanied the church's development. Early followers listened to the Word of God at synagogues and then continued at another location for a fellowship meal. By remembering Christ through the hearing of the Word and partaking of the meal, followers underwent a transitional moment until coming together of both parts in our current celebration. Later sacramental developments such as matrimony took place both outside and inside the church to reconcile civil and canonical rituals. Not until the eleventh century did it become customary for weddings to be near a church so that a priest's blessing could be received afterwards.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 425.

Liturgy—the people’s participation in “the work of God” (CCC, no. 1069)—had its disruptions since the church’s belief took time to be expressed in rituals (and vice versa). Thus, revisions of sacramental practices should not be viewed as a retreat. Those of differing Christian backgrounds relegated to marriages in convents, rectories, or separate chapels before Vatican II should not feel the return of such attitudes. Otherwise, the message of inclusion becomes blurred when couples are asked to raise their children in the faith. Proper instructions on what baptized non-Catholics can experience, yet not fully participate in, are important lessons in a person’s faith journey.

Just as other sacraments do not include mass, the church still maintains a fuller expression of the sacramental life when it does. Again, baptisms are encouraged to be celebrated within the Sunday liturgy so more parishioners can experience this saving grace as well as the visual benefits of the wider community for those bringing their children to the initial sacrament.<sup>12</sup> Since the church desires that families raise their children in the faith, non-Catholics are not excluded from this initiation. They are present as their children begin their faith journey towards the ultimate realization of full communion.

### **Conclusion**

One should not be so quick to draw the attention of couples to paragraph thirty-six of the introduction of the OCM. The guidelines are clear but also give the option to appeal to the local ordinary out of pastoral sensitivity. This then places the weight not strictly on the status of the couple but equally on the marriage preparation process and those entrusted with such formation. When the local parish journeys with the couple, teaching all the richness and symbolism of matrimony, the decision is reached through a process of prayerful reflection. If the change of terminology from “marriage” to “matrimony” signifies not just a moment but something that reflects the couple’s entire journey—prior to and afterwards—then a more comprehensive vision must be presented.

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<sup>12</sup> Martos, *Doors to the Sacred*, 203.