



Word on Worship

Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ

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Editor's Note: This issue contains two guides for use in wedding preparation that are ready made for photocopying which can be given to couples during marriage preparation.

Father, I want a church wedding." Every priest has heard those words from an engaged man or woman. Sometimes those words are spoken when a person telephones to check the availability of a date for a wedding, or when the engaged couple comes to the rectory to speak to one of the priests. Sometimes those words come later, when, during an interview, the priest asks the engaged couple why they want to be married in the parish church.

A BEAUTIFUL PLACE

"Father, I want a church wedding." In many cases what those words mean is "Father, I want a wedding in your church building." A church building provides a beautiful setting for a wedding. There is a large, and architecturally engaging building, with plenty of room for guests. There is a long aisle for the bride to walk down. There are places to put flowers. There is a wonderful organ on which to play triumphant music. There are musicians and singers readily available for hire. There are numerous opportunities and places for

great pictures and videos. There is a person who comes with the building, to perform the ceremony, a person whose liturgical garments will nicely match the formal wear of the wedding party. And at times, there is a sentimental attachment to a place where the prospective bride and groom, or perhaps both of them, have observed significant moments in their lives, such as baptism, first communion, or confirmation. "Father, I want a church wedding."

On Sunday, August 17, 1997, I had the opportunity to preside at what I consider my first, true **Church wedding** in twenty-two years as a parish priest. It was a **Church wedding** in every sense of the word.

A SCHEDULED SUNDAY MASS

Preparations for the wedding began when Lisa, our leader of song for the past two years, announced her engagement to David, one of our readers at Mass. David met Lisa when he joined the parish soon after she began leading song at our Sunday Masses. Love germinated, grew, and blossomed, and they were engaged. When we began to discuss a possible date and time for their marriage, I suggested they celebrate the sacrament of marriage at one of our regularly scheduled Sunday Masses. I explained this option is provided in the Rite of Marriage itself. Furthermore, it only seemed right, that as active, well known members of the parish

they celebrate the sacrament of marriage before the community. I should add that our parish is very small, total Sunday Mass attendance is only about 330, and Lisa and David are personally known by most parishioners. Lisa and David immediately accepted the idea of being married at the Sunday liturgy. We decided upon Sunday, August 17 at the 12 Noon Mass.

We also decided that we would have an informal reception in the hall under the church for all who attended the liturgy — family, friends, and parishioners. When this was announced, some members of the parish quickly stepped forward and volunteered to take responsibility for this parish reception. David and Lisa's family also decided to hold a traditional, invitation only reception, later that afternoon at 4:00 PM in a local restaurant.

In this article I would like to share with you the preparations for the wedding and how the actual liturgy took place.

LITURGICAL DOCUMENTS

We began by considering the direction and guidance given us by the Church for the celebration of the marriage rite during Mass, specifically, during a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass. The liturgical documents give the following specific guidance concerning the Mass texts and readings.

At a marriage during a

A CHURCH WEDDING

regularly scheduled Sunday Mass, the Mass texts of the day are to be used. That means the presidential prayers are those of the day. The nuptial blessing is included, and if desired, the proper solemn blessing from the Rite of Marriage may be used during the concluding rite. (Rite of Marriage 11, Ceremonial of Bishops 603). In our case the prayers were those of the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time.

At a marriage during a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass the readings of the day are used. However, one of the readings may be replaced with a reading from those provided for the ritual Mass for weddings. But on Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, the Sundays of Advent, Lent and the Easter Season, Ash Wednesday, the weekdays of Holy Week, the days within the Octave of Easter, all solemnities, and All Souls Day, only the readings of the day are permitted. (Rite of Marriage 11, Ceremonial of Bishops 603)

In our situation, although we could have replaced one of the Sunday readings with a reading from the wedding Mass, we decided to use all the readings of the Twentieth Sunday in

Ordinary Time, Cycle B. They were: Proverbs 9: 1-6 (Lady Wisdom invites the simple to share at her table.) Psalm 34 (Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.) Ephesians 5: 15-20 (Paul calls on his hearers to watch their conduct and, filled with the Spirit, to give praise and thanks to God.) John 6: 51-58 (Jesus says we must share his flesh and blood if we want to have life.)

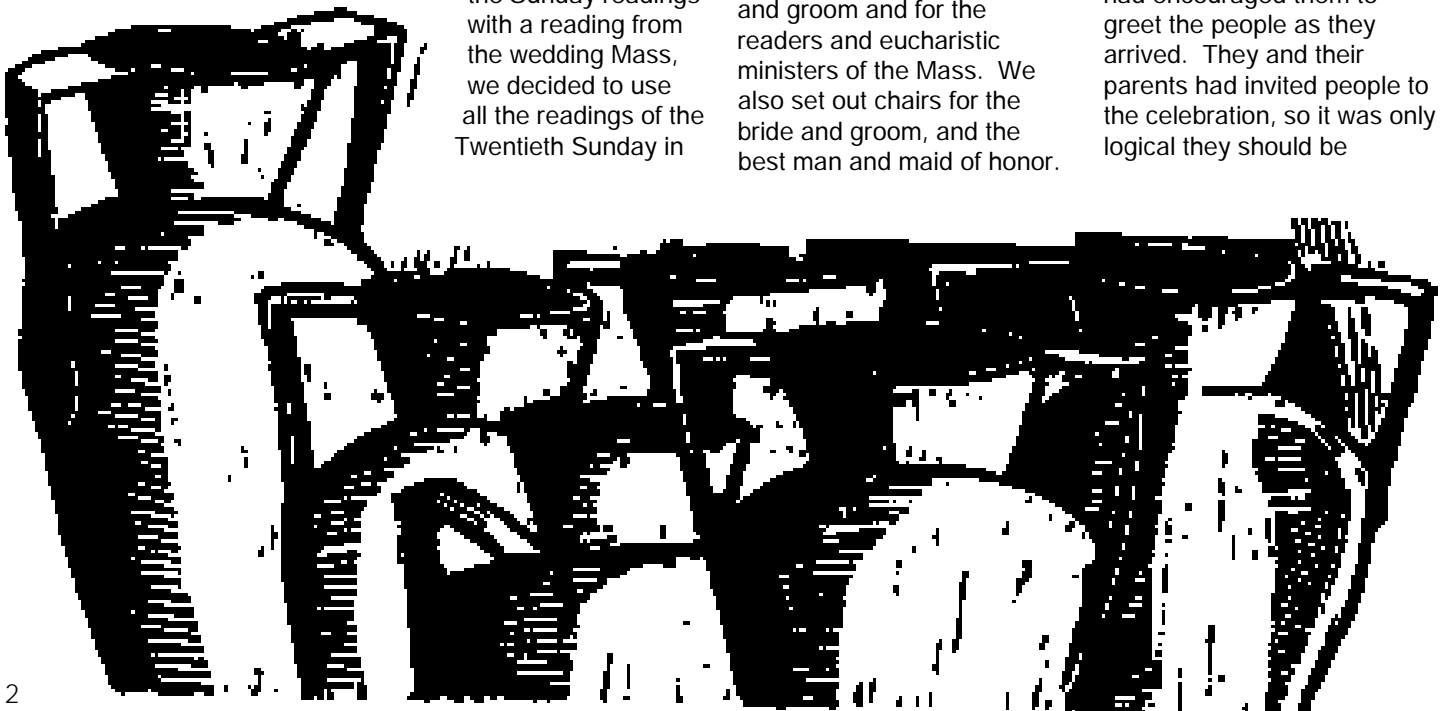
Basically the Church tells us that in celebrating marriage at a regularly scheduled Sunday Mass, follow what is normally done at the Sunday liturgy. This we did.

PREPARATION AND GATHERING

People began gathering for the Noon Mass at 11:30 A.M. The previous Mass had concluded at 11:15 A.M. The intervening fifteen minutes gave us an opportunity to replace the flowers in the sanctuary with those ordered for the wedding, and to remove the worship aids from the pews since there were special booklets prepared for the Noon Mass. We reserved three pews on each side of the church for the immediate family members of the bride and groom and for the readers and eucharistic ministers of the Mass. We also set out chairs for the bride and groom, and the best man and maid of honor.

These four chairs were placed just before the front row on the pulpit side of the church. In other words, the bride and groom, and the best man and maid of honor were seated with the rest of the assembly. The only difference being that they were seated in chairs and not in a pew. This would allow them to more easily come forward at the proper times, and also give the bride more room for her gown. The parents of the bride and groom were seated in the first row directly behind them.

Before the Mass, members of the bride's and groom's families were at the doors of the church distributing the special worship aid that had been prepared for the occasion. This aid contained the order of service and the music to be sung by the assembly. At 11:40 AM the bride and groom arrived, along with their parents. They stood by the doors of the church and assisted in greeting their guests and fellow parishioners. Rather than having the bride and groom remain hidden — the bride in her limousine, and the groom in the sacristy — I had encouraged them to greet the people as they arrived. They and their parents had invited people to the celebration, so it was only logical they should be



present to greet their guests. Having the bride and groom greeting at the doors of the church helped to create a wonderful sense of community. There was also no division of the church into bride's side, and groom's side. People simply sat as they do for any other liturgy.

At Noon, I came forward, vested in an alb, to lead the people in a brief rehearsal before Mass. I explained the worship aid and encouraged their participation in the liturgy. The cantor and I then practiced the refrain of the responsorial psalm with the people. The purpose of this brief rehearsal was not so much to teach a piece of music, as it was to encourage the people to participate. I emphasized we were not in church to watch something, but to join with Lisa and David in giving praise and thanks to God.

THE PROCESSION

After the rehearsal, I went to the doors of the church, where the wedding party and ministers were gathered, put on my stole and chasuble, and took my place in the opening procession. The order of procession was: a server with the processional cross, two readers and a psalmist, two eucharistic ministers, a concelebrant carrying the Book of Gospels, two other concelebrants, myself as presider, the best man and maid of honor as a couple, the groom with his mother and father, and last, the bride with her mother and father. "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. Meanwhile, the entrance song is sung." (Rite of Marriage 20) Though the

Rite of Marriage suggests the entrance song be sung as the procession comes forward, we thought it best to begin the song when those in the procession reached their places. This would allow people to watch the ministers and the wedding party come forward and then all could join in the opening/entrance song.

OPENING SONG

Upon reaching the sanctuary, those in the procession bowed to the altar, and took their assigned places. We then sang God Who Created Hearts to Love, as our opening song. We chose this particular piece since it has the same melody as the well known hymn, All Creatures of Our God and King, and its verses are appropriate for the celebration of marriage at Mass. For example, the words of the second verse are: "Sing, friends and fam'ly gathered here, Voices in witness ringing clear, Alleluia, Alleluia! Here is the mystery begun, Woman and man becoming one. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!"

When the song concluded, I made the sign of the cross and continued as usual with the other parts of the introductory rite. We then sat for the liturgy of the word.

READINGS

The first and second readings of the Mass were proclaimed by family friends. They had been given the texts in advance in order to practice, as well as a copy of the procedures followed by our parish readers at Sunday Mass. The two readers also prepared by proclaiming their readings during the rehearsal the evening before the liturgy.

Between the readings, a psalmist came to the pulpit to sing the verses of the eucharistic prayer and the

and to lead us in singing our response. Following the second reading one of the concelebrants came to the altar for the Book of Gospels, then carried it in procession to the pulpit as we sang the gospel acclamation. After the proclamation of the gospel, I came forward for the homily. Rather than using the pulpit, I stood in the center aisle. This brought me closer to the assembly and to the bride and groom.

During the homily I preached about the fact that we were part of true Church wedding:

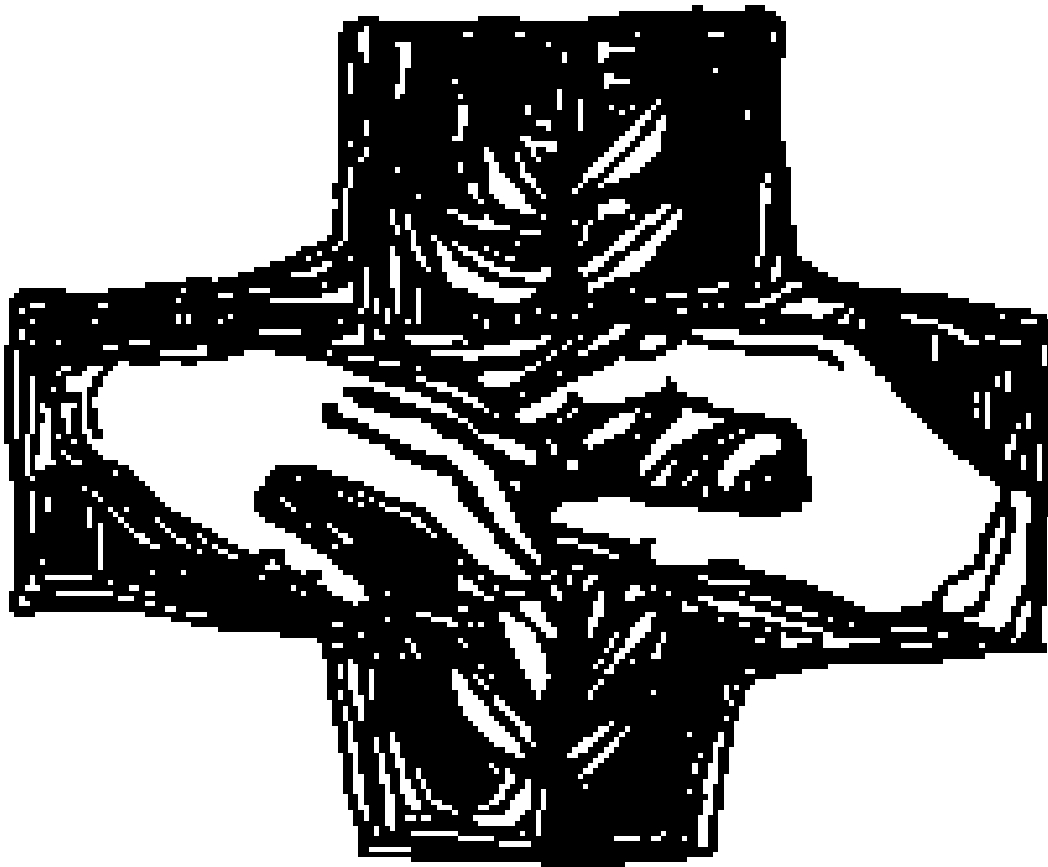
- A wedding taking place between two people involved with the Church and living out their faith.
- A wedding taking place on Sunday, the day the Church gathers to celebrate the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord.
- A wedding taking place at a regular gathering of the parish community for Sunday Mass.
- A wedding taking place during the celebration of the eucharist when Christ shares with us his body and blood and the couple pledge their body and blood to one another in the covenant of marriage.

EXCHANGE OF VOWS

After the homily, I remained in the center aisle for a time of silent reflection. I then motioned to the bride and groom, and the best man and maid of honor, to come forward.

David and Lisa, the bride and groom, came and stood before the altar, facing out toward the assembly. The best man took a place off to the side of the groom, and the maid of honor a place off to the side of the bride. I continued to stand in the main aisle, next to the first

"I will
love you
and honor
you, all
the days
of my
life."



pew.

Having the bride and groom in this position, allowed the assembly to see their faces and to more clearly witness their exchange of vows. In many parishes, the bride and groom stand facing the priest who is before the altar or at the presidential chair, but this location gives the assembly a view of only the back of the bride and groom. By standing before the altar, facing the people, everyone in the church could witness David and Lisa, the celebrants of marriage, as they exchanged vows. By standing in a position related to the assembly, it was clear that I was joining them as a witness to the sacrament.

During the statement of intentions David and Lisa faced me, then during the exchange of vows they faced one another as they joined their right hands. David and Lisa repeated their vows after me. I made a point to speak

very softly so people would only hear the bride and groom, and not me.

After the exchange of vows, the best man held out the rings toward me in his right hand. I blessed the rings. I did not use holy water. The Rite of Marriage does not call for using holy water at this time. Though, the Ceremonial of Bishops says it might be used, as circumstances suggest, it is probably more in keeping with the use of holy water as a baptismal symbol, not to use it to sprinkle the rings. (Ceremonial of Bishops 608) After blessing the rings, I gave the ring for David to the maid of honor. The best man then gave the ring for Lisa to David, who put it on her finger while saying, "Take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The maid of honor then gave the ring she was holding to Lisa who put it on David's

finger while saying the appropriate words.

ACCLAMATION

After the exchange of rings the entire assembly joyfully sang an acclamation. We used the Celtic Alleluia. While presiders sometime encourage people to applaud at this time, using a sung acclamation works much better. It keeps the moment God centered. During the acclamation the newly married couple kissed and then came and stood where I had been standing. I returned to the presidential chair. After the acclamation, everyone stood, and the general intercessions were announced. We used the intercessions prepared for the other Masses for the Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time and added two petitions for the newly married couple. After the intercessions everyone was seated, and the bride and groom, and the best man and maid of honor, returned to their places.

The Rite of Marriage says that, if required, the profession of faith follows the general intercessions. (Rite of Marriage 29) However, for reasons of consistency with the usual pattern of Sunday Mass, and for reasons of time, we did not say the profession of faith.

PRESENTATION OF GIFTS

The collection was then taken up as the assembly and choir joined in song. After the collection, one of the collectors, the mother of the bride, the mother of groom, and a cousin, presented the gifts. The gifts included the monetary offerings of the people, the bread, the wine, and a special gift for the poor from the bride and groom.

It is the custom of the parish to invite the bride and groom to make a special donation

on the day of their marriage to a charity that serves the hungry and poor. We suggest the amount of the donation be equal to the cost for one guest at their wedding reception. In this way, the newly married couple set a symbolic place at their reception for the poor who more often fast than feast.

EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

After the presentation of the gifts the Mass continued as usual. We used the Preface for Ordinary Time VI, and Eucharistic Prayer III. We chose them since they had a relation to the scripture readings. The eucharistic acclamations were sung.

While the assembly normally kneels during the eucharistic prayer, I invited the assembly to remain standing for this Mass. I did this for two reasons. First, the church was so filled with people that a substantial number were standing in the back and up the side aisles, and others were in flexible seating we had placed in our side transepts. Having everyone stand would keep the assembly united in posture, rather than having some people kneeling, others standing, and still others sitting. Second, having the people stand eliminated the need of supplying the bride and groom, the best man and the maid of honor, with kneelers, which would only block the pathways needed for the communion procession. Having the people stand certainly seems to be in keeping with the provision found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. The people should kneel "unless prevented by lack of space, large numbers, or other reasonable cause." (GIRM 21)

After the Lord's Prayer, when it was time for the nuptial blessing, David and Lisa came forward and stood before the altar facing me. I then prayed the nuptial blessing. Following the invitation to exchange the sign of peace, David and Lisa, as a couple, went to their parents and to the best man and maid of honor, with whom they exchanged the sign of peace. They then returned to their place before the altar.

After the invitation to communion, the other priests and I received, then I distributed the Body of Christ to the bride and groom, while a concelebrant ministered the Blood of Christ. The bride and groom returned to their place and communion was distributed to the rest of the assembly following our usual pattern for Sunday Mass.

Following the distribution of holy communion, we all sat for a time of silent reflection. We then stood for the prayer after communion. Following this prayer, I invited everyone to the parish reception that was to follow immediately after the liturgy.

CONCLUDING RITE

I then greeted the assembly, and pronounced a simple blessing. I then asked everyone to join in praying God's blessing upon David and Lisa by singing the hymn Hear Us Now Our God and Father. This hymn, which can be sung to the tune of the very well know hymn, Alleluia! Sing to Jesus, worked perfectly. It has wonderful words and imagery. For example, the words of the second verse are: "Give them joy to lighten sorrow! Give them hope to brighten life! Go with them to face the morrow, Stay with them in ev'ry strife. As your Word has promised, ever Fill them with

your strength and grace, So that each may serve the other Till they see you face to face." Although one of the final blessings from the Rite of Marriage could have replaced the simple blessing, I chose not to use it since its ideas were beautifully contained in the hymn sung by the assembly.

After this hymn, which was rousingly sung by everyone, I dismissed the assembly. The organist then began the instrumental piece, Ode to Joy. At this time the ministers and wedding party recessed from the church. The order of recession was: the server with cross; the other servers; the readers and eucharistic ministers; the concelebrants; the presider; the best man and maid of honor; and finally, the newly married couple. As David and Lisa made their way down the aisle, the assembly spontaneously broke into applause. Upon reaching the doors of the church the bride and groom continued directly to the church hall. The liturgy had lasted one hour, just ten minutes longer than our usual Sunday Mass.

Almost everyone present went to the church hall to greet David and Lisa and to share the light lunch which had been prepared by members of the parish. This informal parish reception lasted about ninety minutes. The bride and groom and their families then went to the church for formal pictures, and then left for the family reception.

REFLECTIONS

This liturgy was a powerful experience for me, and for everyone present. There was a wonderful spirit of prayer and excitement, and a very real sense of the presence of

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THE WEDDING CANDLE

WHY? — WHY NOT?

Since the wedding candle, sometimes referred to as the unity candle, is not part of the Church's marriage rite, it is regarded by many as an intrusion into the ceremony. Moreover, when its use is accompanied by words of explanation, it overburdens the ceremony (especially the Mass) and overshadows the primary symbols, namely the exchange of consent (vows) and the exchange of rings which should stand out above all else. These are the Church's symbols of unity.

Because of its overpowering presence, however, some couples think that the wedding candle is an integral part of the marriage rite, when in reality, it is frowned upon by some priests, and even forbidden by others. Nevertheless, it has become a popular visual symbol. You may want to consider using it as part of the **table prayer** at your reception, rather than adding it to the church ceremony.

Here is a **table grace** which may be used before the wedding banquet. It incorporates a ceremony of lighting the wedding candle. Why not consider giving it a try? You and your guests might be surprised at the effect it will have. Used at the wedding banquet, rather than during the liturgy, it can be an effective reminder of what happened in church. It may help those who attend only the reception to connect with the marriage ceremony.

LIGHTING THE WEDDING CANDLE WITH 'TABLE PRAYER' AT THE RECEPTION

The wedding candle, two side candles, matches and tapers for lighting are set up at the table where the newly-married couple will be seated. Just before the entrance of the bridal party, the parents (or family representatives) light the two side candles. The bridal party enters the reception hall according to custom.

Once all are in place a designated person may offer a blessing for the meal using the following or similar words.

Lord Jesus, be present among us
as you were present at Cana in Galilee.
Come with abundant gifts for N. and N.
May their union in marriage
truly image your love for your Church.
Bless all of us, too,
who have come to join with them in joyful
celebration.
We thank you, Lord, for this food
and for the grace to eat it together.
May we all feast with you one day
at the banquet of eternal life.
We ask all this of you, Lord Jesus,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Immediately following the blessing, one of the attendants (possibly the matron of honor) continues the prayer with the lighting of the wedding candle saying:

We continue to ask God's blessing upon N. and N.
as we celebrate their commitment to each other
in the sacrament of matrimony.

As a sign of their marriage,
they light the wedding candle from the two
candles
which represent their individual lives.

Lighting their tapers from the two side candles, the bride and groom join the two flames and light the wedding candle. As they do so the attendant continues:

As the two flames become one,
symbolizing their union with each other in the
Lord,
we ask God to bless their marriage,
and to keep N. and N. close to him in the years
ahead.

May they always turn to God
in times of joy and in times of need.
We pray this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The two side candles are extinguished. The best man may then offer the customary toast. The reception continues.



FLOWERS FOR THE VIRGIN MARY

DISPLAY? — OR — DEVOTION?

Like the wedding candle, some think that the custom of bringing flowers to the shrine of Our Lady is part of the Church's marriage ritual. Many are surprised to discover that it is not.

There are several things to consider before deciding to include this pious practice in your wedding. Here are some questions to reflect on as you come to a decision.

- How deep is your devotion to the Mother of God?
- Is prayer to Mary part of your devotional life?
- Do you occasionally participate in Marian devotions?
- Do you pray the rosary?
- Do you ever visit the shrine of Our Lady for private prayer after Sunday Mass?
- Why do you want to bring flowers to the shrine?

Recognizing, however, that this occasion can be a moment of special grace and a new beginning in one's devotional life, it need not be excluded summarily. Seeking Mary's intercession is a good and laudatory practice — a very Catholic thing! Therefore you should want it to be authentic and meaningful for **you**, not empty display. You should not want to do this if devotion to Mary is not part of your life. If, however, you decide to do it, it should be done appropriately.

First of all, this is how it should **not** be done:

- Never during the Mass or wedding ceremony, because as a private devotional practice, it should not intrude into the liturgical rites of the church.
- Not after the vows nor after communion, because it should not detract from the primary symbols of marriage, nor from the eucharist.
- Never with words of explanation: the action speaks for itself.

This is how it **may** be done appropriately.

- This pious practice is the first act of private devotion you engage in as a married couple before leaving the church after your marriage. Since it is an act of **private** devotion, it doesn't take place during the **public** worship of the Church. It occurs at a **private** moment.
- Arrange with the florist to have a bouquet, or perhaps a single rose, prepared in a tube of water. You don't want to present a drooping flower,... not a good sign!
- You go to Our Lady's shrine after the Mass or

ceremony, just before you leave the church. . . . like people who do their private devotions after Mass on Sunday by going to light a candle and/or to say a prayer at the shrine of a favorite saint. This way the presentation of flowers doesn't detract from the marriage ceremony, nor does it add an extraneous element that overburdens the ritual.

- **After the dismissal**, leave the altar area and go directly to the shrine of Our Lady. The groom takes the flower from where it has been prepared and hands it to the bride who places it before the image of Mary. Both pause for a few moments in private prayer. (This might be the time for the assembly, or even a soloist, to sing a favorite Marian anthem.)
- When the song or prayer is over, depart from the shrine area and proceed to the main aisle to leave the church in the usual manner...and,

May the prayers of the Mother of God
accompany you throughout life!



Continued from page 5

God. One parishioner put it this way, "Father, if there were any non-believers in church, by the end of the Mass they would have believed in God."

For me as a priest it was a pleasure to celebrate a wedding with such a participating community. The guests, some of whom are not regular church goers, and some who were not Catholics, were swept along by the participation and enthusiasm of the parishioners. I am sure guests participated in prayer and song who would not have done so if the assembly were only composed of other guests and relatives.

The liturgy was also a wonderful community builder

for the parish. I was surprised how many parishioners switched Mass times to be at the Noon Mass, and how many came dressed for a wedding. Some older women wore gowns to the liturgy. Others wanted to know when the next wedding was going to take place. It was both a liturgical and a social occasion for the parish.

The liturgy was also a great moment of catechesis about marriage. Just as people learn about baptism and confirmation by being present for those celebrations at Sunday Mass, so people learned about marriage by witnessing David and Lisa's marriage at Sunday Mass. They also learned something about the importance of Sunday in our tradition. Sunday is our day. The day of the Lord's resurrection; the

day of coming of the Holy Spirit; the day the Church was born; the day for baptisms, for first communions, for confirmations, and for weddings!

Having been part of a real Church wedding, it will be hard to settle for anything less.

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"Let no
one
separate
what God
has
joined."



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