

Saint Thomas More Catholic Church
Houston, Texas
Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Wedding Music Guidelines

~

Part I

The Rite of Marriage and the Role of Music

~

Introduction

Music is an important and integral part of any Catholic Liturgy. Therefore, it makes sense to include it as a part of your wedding celebration. The Sacrament of Marriage is indeed, a very special liturgy in which two are committed to be one. This is not just a private devotion, family event, or even just a social celebration. It is an action of the entire Church that witnesses your commitment to one another in Jesus Christ. Like all liturgies, the Rite of Marriage (within Mass or without Mass) is a form of public Worship. It is neither a show nor a performance. Extreme care must be taken so that the music is truly Sacred Music, and that the gathered congregation can fully participate by hearing, seeing, singing and praying.

Our Church has a vast and colorful history of music from which to choose. The following document will serve as a guide to selecting music that is liturgically appropriate to the Sacrament of Marriage.

Sacrament

The Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is one of seven distinctive Sacraments of the Catholic Church. A Sacrament is an outward sign of the inward grace that God bestows on those who receive it. The Sacraments were instituted by Christ for our sanctification. They are: Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance, Anointing, Holy Orders, and Matrimony.

The Sacrament of Matrimony forms an indissoluble bond between husband and wife with Christ at the center. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “The consent by which the spouses mutually give and receive one another is sealed by God himself. From their covenant arises ‘an institution, confirmed by the divine law. . . even in the eyes of society.’ The covenant between the spouses is integrated into God's covenant with man: ‘Authentic married love is caught up into divine love.’” (CCC 1639)

The beauty of the Sacrament of Matrimony and indeed all the Sacraments means that there are specific rites as to how each is administered and celebrated. Because of the connection of the Sacraments to the Paschal Mystery, which is the Eucharist, the Rites of the Sacraments usually occur within in the context of the Liturgy of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, though some are often conferred outside the context of Mass.

Liturgy

In the Catholic Church there are many ways in which we worship the Lord. The public and communal rites and celebrations of worship are the Liturgies. The Catechism defines a liturgy as “the participation of the People of God in the work of God.” (CCC 1069) From this, we can glean that any Liturgy is not something that we DO, but that God bestows on us and in which we participate.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the highest Liturgy of the Church, because it is here that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is re-presented to us through the Eucharist. We are able to fully receive Him, body and blood, soul and divinity, just as He commanded His apostles the night before He died. Because of the unbreakable bond of matrimony that is sealed in the Sacrament, and its union to the Paschal Mystery itself, you should certainly consider having your marriage within the Mass Liturgy.

However, sometimes, this just is not possible and therefore it is perfectly acceptable for you to perform the Rite of Marriage without Mass. When this occurs, there will still be a Liturgy of the Word and the Rite of Marriage itself.

Regardless of how the Rite of Marriage occurs, you should remember that the Priest (or Deacon) is not marrying the couple. He is not the minister of the Sacrament; he is there as the primary witness of the Church. The ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage are the ones seeking marriage! This is an important distinction because it is you, the betrothed, who profess your vows to one another before God, and the people of the Church. You carry out the Rite. Again, let’s turn to the Catechism: “...the spouses, as ministers of Christ's grace, mutually confer upon each other the sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church.” (CCC 1623)

Music

The music of the Liturgy and its function depends on the type of liturgy that your wedding will be. And we must always remember that the Catholic Liturgies are the work of God; we are humbled to be ministers and participants. Therefore, in any Liturgy, the focus should be on God, alone. Let us remember Psalm 115:

Non nobis Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam.
Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give the praise.

The Liturgy and the Rite of Marriage must be held in high regard and must adhere to the rubrics set forth as to how to perform each. Since they are both the work of God, they must be completely Sacred. They should transport you, as the ministers, and the entire congregation from the everyday, worldly, secular environment into to the heavenly realm where you can use all your senses to be in the presence of God.

The music for Mass requires nothing less. It is meant to be the vessel of the Sacred texts of the Liturgy, to carry the Word of God into our ears so that we may dwell more prayerfully on their meaning. It is meant to be an instrument for us to raise our voices in concert with the Priest (or

Deacon) as we offer our worship to the Lord. Yes, even Sacred instrumental music is meant to aid our meditation on higher things and to take our minds heavenward as we contemplate the mysteries of our Faith, and in regards to Marriage, so that we may pray that the newly married receive every grace that God may grant to them. Yes, music is integral to our celebration of Liturgy!

There are some important things to consider when choosing the music for your wedding. The music used during the Catholic Mass must, above all else, reflect the Paschal Mystery. It is very integrated in the ritual of Mass. Music never exists at any Liturgy just for its own sake or that of the performers'. The same is true for music used for the Rite of Marriage. The following points illustrate what kind of music is appropriate for your wedding:

The music must be liturgical. First and foremost, the entire Liturgy can be sung. I encourage you to talk to the priest (or deacon) about chanting the parts that pertain to him. These parts are the dialogues with the congregation and the prayers. Secondly, if you will be marrying within Mass, there are other hymns and acclamations that form what is called the Ordinary of the Mass. These most definitely should be sung by the whole congregation. These include the Gloria, the Alleluia before the Gospel, the Sanctus (Holy, Holy, Holy), and the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God).

If supplemental hymnody (i.e. from the hymnal) is chosen, then both the text and music must adhere to the teachings of the Church. Secular music is not permitted during the Mass; this includes music derived from secular sources. The personal meaningfulness of a particular song does not necessarily make it worthy of the Liturgy. The same rules above apply to Instrumental Music, if it is used for prelude, or processional music. The Director of Music can help you ascertain whether a piece is appropriate or not. But we need to remember that before any other music is considered, the parts of the Mass should be sung by the Priest and the congregation.

The music must be performed live. Full, active participation from the congregation is desired and therefore it is forbidden to use recorded music. Because the singing of the Sacred texts of the Liturgy is integral to the Liturgy itself, this means that we cannot accommodate the playing of CDs or MP3 players through the church sound system.

~
Part II
Choosing the Music for your Wedding Liturgy
~

Within Mass

Mass Ordinary

The Mass Ordinaries are the texts of the Mass that NEVER change. These are the words that are sung at every Mass, whether it is a Sunday Mass, weekday Mass, or a special Mass celebrating a Sacrament, like your wedding. There are five main parts to the Ordinary, and by rule, some may be omitted for various reasons, for instance, we omit the Gloria during the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent. The parts of the Ordinary are: Kyrie (Lord have mercy), Gloria, Credo (Creed), Sanctus (Holy), and Agnus Dei (Lamb of God).

Mass Proper

The Mass Propers are the parts of the Mass that DO change from Mass to Mass, depending on what day of the year it is, which Feast or Solemnity is being celebrated, or if there is a special celebration with its own set of Propers. These parts generally include the sung texts at the three processions of the Mass: Entrance, Offertory and Communion and the Gospel Acclamation. They can also include the specific prayers that the priest chants and the readings (remember, the entire Mass CAN be sung, even the readings!)

The Church does assign specific texts for each of the Propers that are meant to be sung during the Mass at the appropriate time.

With these Ordinaries and Propers in mind, this outline shows the typical parts that will be sung or have instrumental music to accompany a liturgical action during a wedding:

Procession of Ministers (instrumental-variable)

- Priest (and servers etc.)
- Groom and Groomsmen
- Bridesmaids
- Bride

*This can be one continuous piece of music or broken up into different pieces for each group. (customarily, there is one piece for everyone except the bride, who has a distinct piece.)

Entrance Antiphon (sung)

- The priest reverences the altar
- Cantor sings
- Latin or English

Gloria (sung)

- Congregation

Psalm (sung-variable)
Cantor/Congregation

Acclamation before the Gospel (sung)
Cantor/congregation

Offertory (sung or instrumental-variable)
Congregation or Solo

Sanctus (sung)
Congregation

Agnus Dei (sung)
Congregation

Communion Antiphon (sung)
Cantor
Latin or English

Communion Hymn (sung-variable)
Congregation or Solo

Recessional (instrumental-variable)

Without Mass

The music during the Wedding Liturgy when it is celebrated without Mass follows the same norms and guidelines. After all, it is still a liturgy and a sacrament of the church! Some things, however, are omitted when there is no Mass.

Procession of Ministers* (instrumental-variable)
Priest (and servers etc.)
Groom and Groomsmen
Bridesmaids
Bride

*This can be one continuous piece of music or broken up into different pieces for each group. (customarily, there is one piece for everyone except the bride, who has a distinct piece.)

Psalm (sung-variable)
Cantor/Congregation

Acclamation before the Gospel (sung)
Cantor/congregation

Recessional (instrumental-variable)

An appropriate solo can be chosen as a prelude.

The places marked 'variable' in both lists above are where you can make choices regarding appropriate music selections. The following is a list of suggestions:

Processional

Canon in D, Pachelbel
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring, Bach
Trumpet Voluntary, Clark
Arioso, Bach
Voluntary on THAXTED (O God beyond All Praising), Holst
Andante from Sonata III, Mendelssohn
Air from Water Music, Handel
Air, Bach

Recessional

Rondeau, Mouret
Ode to Joy, Beethoven
Hornpipe, Handel
Voluntary on THAXTED (O God beyond All Praising), Holst

Congregational Hymns

Love Divine All Loves Excelling
For the Beauty of the Earth
All Creatures of Our God and King
Lord of All Hopefulness
Be Thou My Vision
The King of Love My Shepherd Is
Praise My Soul the King of Heaven
Praise to the Lord the Almighty
Holy God We Praise Thy Name
O God beyond All Praising
Ubi Caritas
Adoro te Devote

Solos

Ave Maria, Schubert
Ave maria, Bach/Gounod
Panis Angelicus, Franck