

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 visible 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 this of you, Lord Jesus, who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Immediately following the blessing, one of the attendants continues the prayer while the lighting of the wedding candle takes place 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 keep N. and N. close 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. A toast may be offered and the reception continues.