

Archdiocese of Santa Fe Rite of Marriage Cultural Adaptations

1. **Unity Candle** – This is not a part of the Catholic Marriage Rite. Many parishes do not allow a Unity Candle as part of the Marriage Rite. It seems to be a duplication of the main liturgical symbols of the consent of the couple and exchange of rings. It would be better done at the wedding reception before the dinner or festivities begin.

If your parish does allow for this action, it is best done after the exchange of rings, before the General Intercessions. It should be brief and if music is used to accompany the action, it should also be brief, only accompanying the action, and not prolong the ceremony.

Another way to reinterpret this action in accordance with Catholic tradition is for the presider to make mention of the light of Christ that the bride and groom received at baptism, and how this light will continue to burn brightly in their married life. Of course, this interpretation could only be used if both were baptized in a Christian tradition that used the Paschal Candle as part of the Rite of Baptism.

2. **Flowers to the Blessed Mother** – This is not part of the Catholic Marriage Rite. It is a devotion that was inserted into Catholic weddings many years ago. The devotion gave the bride an opportunity to pray for Mary's protection in the new marriage. In the midst of a celebration of unity, it seems out of place for the bride to go to Mary alone. Today, if this devotion is used, the couple often goes to the Blessed Mother together.

If this is done in your parish, it should be inserted after the prayer after communion in a Mass, or after the Lord's Prayer, before the Solemn Blessing in the Rite outside Mass. The music used during this devotion should accompany the action and not extend beyond it.

3. **Hispanic Wedding Rituals*** – These are not part of the Catholic Marriage Rite in the United States, but are often inserted when requested by couples of Hispanic heritage.

- a. **Arras (coins)** – Before there was an exchange of rings, the exchange of arras symbolized the exchange of vows. When the Roman Rite became established in Spain, the rings took the place of the arras.

If this symbol is used today, it duplicates the exchange of rings. There is usually a dialogue that takes place between the bride and groom. This dialogue may need to be adapted so that it is meaningful in today's age.

Typically, this exchange takes place after the exchange of rings. There is no need for music to accompany this action since there is dialogue that accompanies it.

- b. **Lazo** – This is most often a double-looped rosary that is placed over the shoulders of the couple. It symbolizes the sacramental union that has taken place. It is usually placed on the couple after the arras are given.
- c. **Veil** – This veil or mantilla can be placed on the couple's shoulders before the lazo is given, and so be held in place by the lazo. It has become known as a symbol of chastity, and is fitting placed around the shoulders of both the bride and groom.
- d. **Book and Rosary** – This symbolizes the role of prayer in the married family, and the instruction of children in prayer. While a small missal and rosary have in the past been only given to the bride, it would be appropriate that the groom also receive these symbols, since he too is called to be a man of prayer and teacher of their children. It is also appropriate that a Bible be given instead of a missal, since missals are no longer used by the assembly at Mass, because Mass is celebrated in the vernacular.

The giving of these symbols could be incorporated into the General Intercessions. So when an intercession about the couple being strengthened by prayer is read, the two symbols could be presented.

Other cultural symbols from various traditions (Native American, Filipino, Vietnamese, African American, etc.) are not part of the Marriage Rite of the United States, but may be used at the discretion of the pastor, providing they are not tied to superstition, and support the values of Catholic marriage.

Note that a revised Marriage Rite for the United States is currently being prepared by the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. When it is approved by the US Bishops and recognized by Rome, it will replace the current Rite of Marriage. There is no timetable for when this new rite will be approved and implemented. The Office of Worship will prepare and implement appropriate catechesis when a new rite is promulgated.

** To gain more insight into Hispanic wedding rituals, read the bi-lingual book, Gift and Promise, Don y Promesa, published by Oregon Catholic Press. It can be ordered by calling 1-800-548-8749.*