

Wedding Liturgy

Overview of the Roman Catholic Wedding Rite

The Roman Catholic Wedding liturgy is a treasure trove of expression of the theology of the sacrament of marriage. From the opening procession, to the Liturgy of the Word with its Scripture readings of God's love, to the exchange of the marriage vows and rings, to the ancient nuptial blessing pronounced by the priest, the liturgy is rich in beauty and meaning.

Of all your wedding preparations, this is the most important, far overshadowing the design of invitations, the menu for the reception, etc., for it is in the liturgy that the action really begins! It is in the liturgy that the bride and groom administer the sacrament to each other; it is not administered by the priest. Your vows of love and commitment to each other, proclaimed publicly before God and his Church, are sacred and sacramental.

Your planning of the liturgy is a golden opportunity to share with your loved ones an expression of your faith in God as the center of your marriage. Your choice of Scripture readings, prayers, and songs communicate a great deal about you as a couple and should be chosen together with care and prayer. Your options for these readings and prayers are found in the book *Together for Life* by Fr. Joseph Champlin (Ave Maria Press), which is available in the parish office.

If both bride and groom are practicing Catholics in good standing, you are strongly encouraged to celebrate the sacrament in the context of the Mass. What better way to begin your life in Christ together than in the supreme prayer of the Church?

If one of the parties is not Catholic, our diocese directs that Mass should not be celebrated with the wedding. The reason for this is that Communion at Mass is the ultimate expression of our oneness in Christ, and if one of the spouses cannot partake of that Communion, the power of the symbol of the sacrament is compromised. Besides, it would be both awkward and inhospitable to be unable to offer communion to one of the spouses. Therefore, if one of the parties is not Catholic, the wedding ceremony will be done in the context of the Liturgy of the Word, followed by the Marriage Rite.

Scripture Readings

You will need to choose 4 scripture readings from the options offered by the Church for weddings (see the book *Together for Life*). All these passages can be found in the translation used for liturgy at uscgb.org

- I. First Reading from the Old Testament (Section B of *Together for Life*)
 - Genesis 1:26-28, 31a
 - Genesis 2:18-24
 - Genesis 24:48-51; 58-67

- Tobit 7:9c-10, 11c-17
- Tobit 8:4-9
- Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a
- Sirach 26:16-21
- Jeremiah 31:31-32a, 33-34a

2. Responsorial Psalm (usually sung by the cantor) (Section C of Together for Life)

- Psalm 33:12, 18, 20-21, 22
- Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9
- Psalm 103:1-2, 8, 13, 17-18a
- Psalm 112:12, 3-4, 5-7a, 7bc-8, 9
- Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
- Psalm 145:8-9, 10, 15, 17-18
- Psalm 148:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12ab, 12c-14a

3. Second Reading from the New Testament Epistles or Revelation (Section D of Together for Life)

- Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39
- Romans 12:1-2, 9-18 (or shorter version: Rom 12: 1-2, 9-13)
- 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20
- 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8a
- Ephesians 5:2a, 21-33 (or shorter version: Eph 5:2a, 25-32)
- Colossians 3:12-17
- 1 Peter 3:1-9
- 1 John 3:18-24
- 1 John 4:7-12
- Revelation 19:1, 5-9a

4. Gospel Reading (read by the priest or deacon only) (Section F of Together for Life)

- Matthew 5:1-12a
- Matthew 5:13-16
- Matthew 7:21, 24-29 (or shorter version: Matt 7:21, 24-25)
- Matthew 19:3-6
- Matthew 22:35-40
- Mark 10:6-9
- John 2:1-11
- John 15:9-12
- John 15:12-16
- John 17:20-26 (or shorter version: John 17:20-23)

Readers

The first and second readings may be proclaimed by a family member, member of the wedding party, or another guest. These readers must be Catholics in good standing, and they should have a good grasp of the principles of proclaiming the Word of God in public.

Be sure to give them a copy of the reading in advance of the wedding and encourage them to practice the reading at the ambo (lectern) in church to get the feel of the acoustics and the microphone.

The responsorial psalm should preferably be sung, but it can be recited if necessary.

Music

The music for your wedding can be both a source of great beauty and a strong unifying force to draw your guests together in prayer and celebration. Your wedding music is governed by the liturgical guidelines of the church.

Wedding Programs

The wedding program for a Catholic wedding should do the following:

1. Help your guests participate in your wedding liturgy
2. Act as an historical document (believe it or not, you may not remember your 2nd reading choice 20 years from now).
3. Act as a "cast of characters." This may seem frivolous, but it is not. There is value in letting your guests know that the 5th groomsman is a cousin of the bride's best friend. Believe it or not, 20 years from now you may not remember who your 5th groomsman was!

Most wedding programs do a good job with points #2 and #3 above, but most (including virtually all bridal shop models) fail miserably with goal #1. Remember: Catholic liturgy calls for the "full, conscious, and active participation" of all the members of the Assembly. They are not expected to simply behave themselves, sit back, and watch the show! They are to get involved in the prayer, and you can help them do that with a good program.

The Wedding Coordinator and Music Director can show you some samples of effective wedding programs that achieve all three goals above. Here are some things you can include to help your guests participate:

1. A specific invitation to participate in the prayers, responses, and songs
2. Write in the people's responses: (e.g. Priest: The Lord be with you. ALL: And with your spirit, or Reader: The Word of the Lord. ALL: Thanks be to God.)

3. Include the entire text of the readings, not just a Scripture reference
4. Include musical notation for responses, antiphons, and songs. The music director can help you with this and help you to correctly acknowledge all copyrights.
5. Include directions on when to sit, stand, and kneel.
6. Include a brief summary of communion guidelines (if you are celebrating Mass)

If planned and designed properly, your program can do a great deal to draw your guests into the liturgical prayer