

FRANCISCO INSA (EDITOR)

Along the
MARRIAGE
JOURNEY



PASTORAL CARE
for Modern Families

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Midwest Theological Forum
Downers Grove, Illinois



Published in the United States of America by



MIDWEST THEOLOGICAL FORUM

4340 Cross Street, Suite 1
Downers Grove, IL 60515 USA
Tel: 630-541-8519 • Fax: 331-777-5819
www.theologicalforum.org

First Edition

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ISBN 978-1-948139-93-9

Editor:	Francisco Javier Insa Gómez
Original Title:	<i>Accompagnare nel cammino matrimoniale. La pastorale familiare alla luce di Amoris letitia</i> . Rome: Edusc, 2021 ³ .
Translator:	Mel Cusi
Managing Editor:	Stephen J. Chojnicki
Cover design:	Jesus Cardenas

Acknowledgments

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Cover: *The Marriage of the Virgin* (detail), alternate title *The Engagement of Virgin Mary*, Raphael; Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, Italy.

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Abbreviations Used for the Books of the Bible

<i>Old Testament</i>		<i>New Testament</i>	
Gn	Genesis	Sg	Song of Songs
Ex	Exodus	Mt	Matthew
Lv	Leviticus	Mk	Mark
Nm	Numbers	Lk	Luke
Dt	Deuteronomy	Jn	John
Jos	Joshua	Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Jgs	Judges	Rom	Romans
Ru	Ruth	1 Cor	1 Corinthians
1 Sm	1 Samuel	2 Cor	2 Corinthians
2 Sm	2 Samuel	Gal	Galatians
1 Kgs	1 Kings	Eph	Ephesians
2 Kgs	2 Kings	Phil	Philippians
1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Col	Colossians
2 Chr	2 Chronicles	1 Thes	1 Thessalonians
Ezr	Ezra	2 Thes	2 Thessalonians
Neh	Nehemiah	1 Tm	1 Timothy
Tb	Tobit	2 Tm	2 Timothy
Jdt	Judith	Ti	Titus
Est	Esther	Phlm	Philemon
Jb	Job	Heb	Hebrews
Ps	Psalms	Jas	James
Prv	Proverbs	1 Pt	1 Peter
Eccl	Ecclesiastes	2 Pt	2 Peter
		1 Jn	1 John
		2 Jn	2 John
		3 Jn	3 John
		Jude	Jude
		Rev	Revelation

Abbreviations Used for Magisterial and Other Documents

- AAS *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. Vatican City.
- AL Pope FRANCIS, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. March 19, 2016.
- APCR Pope BENEDICT XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*. June 11, 2007.
- ARA MELONI, E., “Ascoltare nelle relazioni di aiuto. Competenze, condizioni, pratiche,” in *Consultori familiari oggi* 25 (2017¹): 108–124.
- ARI RINGSTROM, P.A., “L’approccio relazionale intersoggettivo al trattamento congiunto,” in *Interazioni* 2 (2008): 30–54.
- ASL Pope FRANCIS, *Address to Seminarians from Lombardy*. October 13, 2018.
- CaC Pope PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Marriage *Casti Connubii*. December 31, 1930.
- CCC *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for the United States of America. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994; *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1997.
- CCS RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, A., E. COLOM COSTA, “Chosen in Christ to Be Saints: III: Moral Virtues and Bioethics,” in *www.eticaepolitica.net/corsodimorale/Chosen_III.pdf* [accessed August 7, 2022].
- CIC *Code of Canon Law, Latin/English Edition* for the United States of America. Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983.
- CPB ESCRIVÁ, St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*. New York: Scepter, 1974.
- CR GÜNTHÖR, Anselm, *Chiamata e risposta. Una nuova teologia morale*, Vol. 2: *Morale speciale: le relazioni del cristiano verso Dio*. Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1998⁶.
- DCE Pope BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter on Christian Love *Deus Caritas Est*. December 25, 2005.

- EAM THIBON, G., *Entre el amor y la muerte. Conversaciones con Christian Chabanis*. Madrid: Rialp, 1977.
- EG Pope FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World *Evangelii Gaudium*. November 22, 2013.
- EJC ORTIZ,, M.A., "Las exigencias de justicia como clave de interpretación de la pastoral matrimonial. El capítulo VIII de Amoris Laetitia," in *Anuario Canónico* 5 (2019): 101–116.
- FC St.JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio*. November 22, 1981.
- FCV PIEPER, J., *The Four Cardinal Virtues*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966.
- FPIL MOSCONI, M., "La fase previa all'introduzione del libello e la consulenza tecnica," in H. FRANCESCHI, M.A. ORTIZ (eds.), *Ius et matrimonium II. Temi processuali e sostanziali alla luce del Motu Proprio « Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus »*. Rome: Edusc, 2017.
- GA Pope FRANCIS, *General Audience*. May 27, 2015.
- GrS St.JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*. February 2, 1994.
- GeS SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*. December 7, 1965.
- HV St.PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter on the Regulation of Birth *Humanae Vitae*. July 25, 1968.
- IPF SPADARO, Rev.Antonio, *Interview with Pope Francis*. August 19, 2013.
- LIM HERVADA, Javier, "La identidad del matrimonio," in *Persona y Derecho* 8 (1981).
- LSLF ROCCHETTA, C., "Luci di speranza per i legami feriti," in *Famiglia oggi* 36 (2014⁵): 28–33.
- MCC St.AUGUSTINE, "Of the Morals of the Catholic Church," in SCHAFF, P. (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 4. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887.

- MIDI* Pope FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter *Motu Proprio* by Which the Canons of the Code of Canon Law Pertaining to Cases Regarding the Nullity of Marriage Are Reformed *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus*. August 15, 2015.
- MJO* ERRÁZURIZ M., C.J., “*Matrimonio y justicia objetiva en la comunión eclesial: un aspecto del discernimiento pastoral propiciado por ‘Amoris laetitia,’*” in *Ius Canonicum* 56 (2016).
- OCM* *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*. New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2016.
- PA* ZANETTI, E., *Porte aperte*. Milan: Ancora, 2016.
- PDJI* ERRÁZURIZ M., C.J., “*La perspectiva del derecho y la justicia intraeclesial ante los desafíos actuales sobre el matrimonio y la familia,*” in *Ius Canonicum* 55 (2015).
- RF* XIV ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Relatio Finalis: The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World*. October 24, 2015.
- RS* III EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, *Relatio Synodi: The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization*. October 18, 2014.
- SAc* Pope BENEDICT XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church’s Life and Mission *Sacramentum Caritatis*. February 22, 2007.
- STh* AQUINAS, St. Thomas, *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Second and Revised Ed. 1920.

V

THE WEDDING CELEBRATION

Giovanni Zaccaria,¹ Francisco Insa²

1. INTRODUCTION

Fiancées usually look on the wedding day with great expectation but also with some degree of apprehension. They want it to be the happiest day of their lives and try to cover every single detail. It is not an easy task because there are lots of things to be settled: invitation lists, printing the invitations, dresses, flowers and songs for the church, the reception, seating arrangements, etc.

All these aspects need to be taken care of, but they should not obscure the main event: the celebration of the Sacrament. The priest who will perform the wedding has the joyful responsibility to help bride and groom make it happen.

Meeting with the fiancées to explain the different parts of the rite is very useful. It can be done easily within the marriage preparation course. It is an excellent opportunity to expand the catechesis on the Sacrament.

2. SHOULD THE WEDDING BE CELEBRATED DURING THE MASS OR WITHOUT MASS?

The Ritual is divided into four chapters in response to a key idea: a marriage can be celebrated during the Mass or within a Liturgy of the Word, taking into account the circumstances of the spouses. It may look obvious, but it is important to avoid that the couple request a wedding Mass simply for aesthetic reasons or to keep up family tradition, let alone how inappropriate it might be

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to have a Eucharistic celebration where one or both spouses would not receive communion.

After the Introduction,³ the first chapter of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony*⁴ covers of *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony within Mass*, the second covers *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass*, the third includes *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony between a Catholic and a Catechumen or a Non-Christian* and the fourth offers *Various Texts to Be Used in the Rite of Marriage and in the Mass For the Celebration of Marriage*.⁵

a) Marriage within a Eucharistic Celebration

i. The Covenant Category

The idea of covenant plays a key role in Sacred Scripture. It describes the relationship that God wants to establish with his people; indeed, the history of salvation can be defined as the history of the covenant between God and his chosen people.

This covenant is outlined throughout the books of the Old Testament in various ways, and the image of the wedding is a key idea: God is described as the groom, and Israel the bride. We have the example of Hosea, who is called to show the love of God in his vocation as a prophet. God commands him to marry Gomer the prostitute: "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits great harlotry by forsaking the LORD."⁶ This passage has a symbolic value: It illustrates the history of the people of Israel's unfaithfulness, but it also shows the unwavering love of God and describes it with great tenderness.

Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her...
There she shall answer as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt...

3. The Introduction is an excellent synthesis of the theological content of the Sacrament of Marriage and can also be a point of reference for catechesis in marriage preparation courses.

4. We refer to the US version of OCM. It is the English translation according to the Second Latin Typical Edition of 1991 (2008 reprint) for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America.

5. In addition, there are three Appendices. The first includes Examples of the Universal Prayer, the second the Order of Blessing an Engaged Couple, and the third the Order of Blessing a Married Couple within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage.

6. Hos 1:2.

I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.⁷

We find similar images in Jeremiah,⁸ Ezekiel,⁹ and Isaiah.¹⁰

In these passages the prophets aim to highlight the relationship between God and Israel, and they describe it specifically as a covenant. The very fact of using the image of a spousal relationship indirectly suggests that the union between husband and wife is also a covenant.¹¹

If we turn to the Prophet Malachi and the Book of Proverbs, we find that marriage itself is presented as a covenant:

This again you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor at your hand. You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.¹²

These verses emphasize two ideas: one, that the union with the woman is a covenant, and two, that God is a witness to this covenant. Therefore, we are not looking at a simple business deal but at a different kind of covenant where God himself is called to be a witness.

It is worth mentioning that the term used in the Old Testament to designate the establishment of a covenant is *karat berith* (literally, "to cut a deal"). It recalls an ancient Eastern rite by which the covenant was established: One or more animals were cut in half and the two halves placed in front of each other. The person who made the covenant had to go through the middle saying: "As these animals are cut in pieces and the birds feed on them, may the same happen to me if I do not keep what I have committed myself to do."

It is obviously a very demanding promise, particularly when God is called upon to bear witness to fidelity to this promise, as we have seen in the quote from Malachi. Indeed, in the Old Testament

7. Hos 2:14–15, 19–20.

8. Cf. Jer 3:1–13.

9. Cf. Ez 16.

10. Cf. Is 54.

11. Cf. A. MIRALLES, "Teologia liturgica dei sacramenti. 7. Matrimonio" (Rome, 2011), 4–8; www.liturgiaetsacramenta.info/texts/tl_matrimonio.pdf [accessed August 7, 2023].

12. Mal 2:13–14.

marriage is precisely one of those covenants between men that are called at the same time God's covenants because he is the guarantor. Breaking this covenant was considered an infidelity against God.¹³

This is important because the term (*berît*) that describes this relationship is translated into Greek as *diathêke* and into Latin as *testamentum*. These terms are used in the Scriptures to describe the Old Covenant,¹⁴ and Jesus uses them to indicate the work he accomplished: his Passion, Death, and Resurrection, which make up the Paschal Mystery. They are strictly speaking the New and eternal Covenant in his Blood,¹⁵ foretold by the prophets¹⁶ and realized by Christ in his Flesh.

ii. The Mass is the Memorial of the New and Everlasting Covenant

The Paschal Mystery is not a fact of the past but an event that informs the entire existence of the Church and of every Christian, and indeed of every human being, because Christ died and rose again for all, and in no other name can salvation be found except in the name of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

The presence of the Paschal Mystery in the life of the faithful and in the life of the Church is guaranteed by the Mass, which is the *memorial* of the New and eternal Covenant.

The word *memorial* brings to mind the term *memory*, and thus it runs the risk of leading people to believe that it simply means a remembrance. The Eucharist would simply be a way of not forgetting the extraordinary event of Christ's passage on earth, a kind of feast in which Christians gather to remember the Founder of their religion. This would be a lot, but in fact it is very little.

Memorial is a technical term that indicates the very nature of the Mass. It derives from the Hebrew verb *zakir*, which in the Old Testament was used to refer to the celebration of the Jewish Passover. At Passover, the people of Israel relived their liberation from

13. See, for example, Jonathan's covenant with David, which is called a *berît* of YHWH (cf. 1 Sm 18:3; 20:8), and Zedekiah's covenant with Nebuchadnezzar, which is called an oath and *covenant* of YHWH, probably because his name had been invoked (cf. Ez 17:12–20).

14. Cf. Ex 24:8.

15. Cf. Lk 22:20 and parallels.

16. Cf. for example, Ez 16:60; Jer 31:31–34.

17. Cf. Acts 4:12.

Egypt, a decisive event for the establishment of the chosen people as a nation. In the Passover the event is not just remembered, it is re-lived. Thanks to the rite, it becomes present again for those who celebrate the rite itself. The rabbis say that not only were their ancestors liberated from Egypt but every Jew was liberated. That is why the liberation is made present again through the rite.

Memorial is therefore not a simple remembrance of something that happened in the past but a special celebration that makes that event present again.

The Paschal Mystery of Christ brought to fulfillment the pre-figurations of the Old Testament, the liberation from Egypt first of all. This was a figure of the Christian Passover: the liberation from the slavery of sin and death, which Jesus Christ achieved by dying for us once and for all on the Cross.

Indeed, that extraordinary event of our salvation—the sacrifice that Christ offered to the Father for our sake once and for all on the Cross—becomes present again through the Mass. The Mass is in fact a memorial of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, when we celebrate the Eucharist, we are inserted into the Paschal Mystery; we participate in it and renew the covenant in his Body and Blood to the point that the priest says: “This is the chalice of my Blood, / the Blood of the new and eternal covenant.”¹⁸

iii. Marriage, the Image of the Covenant Between God and His People

The Eucharist is thus the wellspring of marriage. The Eucharistic Sacrifice really makes Christ’s covenant of love with the Church present once again. It is sealed with his Blood on the Cross, and it is precisely this Sacrifice of the New and eternal Covenant that configures and animates the spousal covenant.¹⁹ The marriage of Christians is a sign and participation in the spousal union of Christ with the Church.

This is what St. Paul said in the Letter to the Ephesians, when he speaks precisely of the relationship between spouses:

18. *Roman Missal*, Third Edition (Downers Grove, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2010), The Order of Mass: Eucharistic Prayer I, no. 90.

19. Cf. FC 57.

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.²⁰

It is a very rich passage that needs to be explored; we will only address two points.

The first makes reference to the Christological-ecclesiological considerations contained in this parenthetical discourse on marriage. St. Paul speaks to Christian husbands and wives, and he puts them before the greatness of their vocation: They are called to show the world a relationship similar to that between Christ and the Church. Just as Christ gave himself for the Church, so husbands are to love their wives to the point of giving themselves for their sake. And just as the Church is subject to Christ, which means he made her the foundation of the life of every believer, so, too, wives are called to be the foundation of the Christian life of the family. Obviously, the topic of subjection demands some serious thought because it is often simplistically explained as a mere reference to the male chauvinist views of the time in history when the Apostle lived. However, this oversimplification does not take into account verse 21 where he specifically states that husband and wife must be subject to each other. This is even more so when he talks of the relationship between Christ and the Church: The idea cannot be inspired by the mindset of the time or related to the social rules of a particular social group.

The second point I would like to make concerns verse 32, which is crucial for a correct understanding of marriage. St. Paul states that

20. Eph 5:21–33.

marriage is a great mystery. He uses a noun that in Pauline theology refers to the plan of salvation hidden in God. And he has revealed it in his Son Jesus throughout his earthly life, from the moment of the Incarnation to his glorification at the right hand of the Father. We have already had the chance to stress that this term refers particularly to the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. These make up the Paschal Mystery, the supreme Revelation of the infinite love of the Father. Marriage is therefore part of this plan of salvation, the Revelation of God's plan of his love for mankind.

We could say that when we look at a family that lives grafted in Christ and receives the saving influence of the Spirit for its daily life, we see the image of intra-Trinitarian love. At the same time, we see the outpouring of divine love on each person.

The logic of celebrating a marriage within the Mass becomes evident: In this way the relationship established between the spouses, which St. Paul describes in his Letter to the Ephesians, is highlighted. If marriage is the covenant between husband and wife—with God as their witness—and the Eucharist is the celebration of the New and eternal Covenant that God has established with each man and woman through the Body and Blood of Christ, then it is obvious that there is no better place than the Mass to establish this new relationship between the spouses.

Therefore, celebrating a marriage within the Mass is not an external matter, linked to family tradition, the aesthetics of the rite, or the solemnity of the moment. It is a strictly theological event: It speaks to us of God and of the relationship established between the spouses and God.

b) Marriage in the Liturgy of the Word

In the event that it is better to celebrate the marriage outside of Mass, the Ritual provides for it to take place within a Liturgy of the Word.

There are several reasons that can make this choice wise. In the first place, there may be no priest who can celebrate the Eucharist; in this case a deacon or—in some special cases and under specific conditions—a lay person can receive the mutual consent of the spouses.

Another very important reason would be that the spouses, or at least one of them, are unable to receive sacramental Communion for whatever reason. In any case, this matter should be thoroughly assessed before the celebration: It would be very unfortunate for spouses to be somehow separated at the moment of Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ when they celebrate the Sacrament that makes them one flesh. We are not speaking of aesthetic reasons but of the intrinsic value of the covenant that we have just described.

Another reason would be that they usually do not receive the Sacraments: It can happen that the bride and groom ask to be married in the Church because of family tradition or other similar reasons even though they do not practice the faith. In this case it would be difficult for them to make a real conversion in a short period of time. For this reason, the parish priest can suggest that they celebrate their marriage within a Liturgy of the Word.

However, it is important to remember that the request to celebrate a marriage can be a great opportunity for the future spouses to rediscover the greatness and beauty of their baptismal vocation. In these cases, it is very helpful for the priest to act with understanding and openness, to get really close to the couple and to try, as far as possible, to build a relationship of sincere friendship with them. This approach can help many to transform a request made for reasons of family tradition into a good chance to return to practicing the faith.

In a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized person who is not a Catholic, *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass* (chapter II) shall be used. The approval of the diocesan bishop should be obtained if the circumstances warranted otherwise.²¹ This is even more relevant if the marriage is between a Catholic and a catechumen or a non-Christian. In the latter case the ritual contains a specific Rite (in chapter III) in the context of a Liturgy of the Word.

Lastly, we note that the Rite *without Mass* is shorter, which may sometimes influence the final choice.

21. Cf. OCM 36; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (March 25, 1993), 159.

3. ELEMENTS OF THE CELEBRATION

We will now look at the theological meaning of the various parts of the celebration. In this section we will start from the premise that we are dealing with a marriage celebrated during the Mass and we will not consider the parts common to any other Eucharistic celebration.

a) The Introductory Rites

The Ritual includes two different forms for the Entrance Rite:

- In the first (cf. nos. 45–47) the priest goes with the servers to the door of the church, receives the bridal party, warmly greets them, and then they all go to their places.
- In the second (cf. nos. 48–50) the priest goes with the ministers to the place prepared for the couple or to his chair, and he receives and greets them there.

In both cases he then greets the altar and proceeds to the chair.

It is important to take into account and to respect the customs of the various communities unless they contain elements contrary to the faith or customs. For example, it is common for the groom to wait in the church for the bride, who is walked to the altar by her father.

After the initial greetings, two formulas are proposed for the Opening Prayer (cf. nos. 52–53).

A special feature of this celebration is that the Penitential Act is omitted. The *Glory to God in the highest* is said except during Advent and Lent.

b) The Collect Prayer

The Ritual²² offers six different possible texts for the Collect prayer (cf. nos. 188–193).²³ The preparation of the booklet for the Mass can be an opportunity for them to read these texts as well as see their content and the different aspects highlighted in each prayer. It would have been decided together with the spouses.

For example, the first choice offered (no. 188) says:²⁴

O God, who consecrated the bond of Marriage
by so great a mystery
that in the wedding covenant you foreshadow
the Sacrament of Christ and his Church,
grant, we pray, to these your servants,
that what they receive in faith
they may live out in deeds.

The content of this text is very deep. With the synthetic nature proper to the liturgy, it reviews the great elements of marriage that we have seen so far. The expression “wedding covenant” recalls God’s covenant with the people of Israel and thus the relationship between God and the spouses, established through the celebration. The reference to the meaning of the Sacrament of Christ and his Church is a reference to Ephesians 5:32 and therefore to all the Pauline doctrine contained therein and discussed earlier. It also highlights the vocation of the spouses themselves to reveal the mystery of Christ and the Church in their union not by virtue of their own abilities but as part of the plan of salvation that God has conceived from the beginning. Finally, God’s help is requested to communicate divine life so the spouses can show this extraordinary gift with their own lives.

The second option in the Ritual (no. 189) has many references to texts of the Old Testament:

22. The numbers of the relevant paragraphs have been included in the body of the text to facilitate its access.

23. These texts can be used for the celebration of the Ritual Mass “For the Celebration of Marriage.” However, on those days listed in nos. 1–4 of the Table of Liturgical Days (Easter, Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, and other Solemnity), the Mass of the day is used, retaining the Nuptial Blessing in the Mass and, if appropriate, the proper formula for the final blessing. If, however, during Christmas and Ordinary Time the parish community participates in a Sunday Mass during which Marriage is celebrated, the Mass of the Sunday is used; in these cases one of the readings may be taken from the texts provided for the celebration of Marriage (cf. OCM 34, 54–56).

24. This Collect may not be used in the same celebration as the first Nuptial Blessing.

O God, who in creating the human race
willed that man and wife should be one,
join, we pray, in a bond of inseparable love
these your servants who are united
in the covenant of Marriage,
so that, as you make their love fruitful,
they may become, by your grace,
witnesses to charity itself.

Together with the creation of man, this option refers to God's call for man and woman to unite as one flesh²⁵ and links the natural bond of love between husband and wife to the covenant between God and his people. In a similar way, through divine charity, it connects this same fruitful love with supernatural charity, which will embed their mutual relationship within the relationship they have with God.

Other texts are simpler and easier to understand. They can suit people with limited formation. The text of the third Collect prayer (no. 190) is an example:

Be attentive to our prayers, O Lord
and in your kindness
pour out your grace on these servants (N. and N.),
that, coming together before your altar,
they may be confirmed in love for one another.

At first glance we simply ask God to pour out his grace on his two servants to confirm them in their love for each other. The emphasis is that this love is not the result of the efforts of bride and groom but the acceptance of God's love, which is poured out in the Sacraments. It can then be used to impress upon the spouses that for their marriage to be successful, they need to live united to the grace of God. It is also worth mentioning that there is a subtle reference to the Sacrifice of Christ: The altar is the place where bride and groom give and receive each other. It links marriage with the Paschal Mystery.

Finally, the fourth formula (no. 191) highlights the faith of the spouses rather than their love. With that faith the Sacrament of Marriage will enrich the Church with new faithful.

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that these your servants,
now to be joined in the Sacrament of Matrimony,

25. Cf. Gn 2:24.

may grow in the faith they profess
and enrich your Church with faithful offspring.

c) The Readings

The Liturgy of the Word is one of the most important parts of the celebration because it can help the spouses and those present to better understand the mystery of God reflected in the Sacrament of Marriage. We should remember that...

There may be three readings, of which the First Reading should be from the Old Testament, but, during Easter Time, from the Book of Revelation (nos. 144–187). At least one reading that explicitly speaks of Marriage must always be chosen.²⁶

The first essential point is to help the spouses understand why the readings are chosen from Sacred Scripture and not from other literary passages that may be more or less relevant. The Liturgy of the Word is not the presentation of a literary passage to which the spouses or those present are particularly attached; it is not reading the passage of a book that speaks of love in a more or less poetic way. The Liturgy of the Word is God speaking to man in the Church: God has something to say to those present, and he says it through the proclamation of his Word.

For example, reading passages from the Old Testament helps us understand that what is taking place in that church belongs to the history of salvation. In other words, God's plan for mankind takes into account the life of every human being. In this way the spouses can understand that their love is not left at the mercy of events and circumstances of life because it is embedded in the eternal love of the Father.

This helps us understand the Word of God has an infinitely greater scope than any human text. The Liturgy of the Word does not speak of love in general but of the importance of marriage in the history of salvation, of how God sees marriage, and how he wishes Christian families to be. Therefore, we can read the theological criterion that should be used to choose the readings in the Introduction of the Ritual:

The Liturgy of the Word, in which are expressed the importance of Christian Marriage in the history of salvation and the

26. OCM 55.

responsibilities and duties of Marriage to be attended to for the sanctification of the spouses and of their children.²⁷

Having many texts to choose from is very helpful, but it can create a bit of confusion, especially among people who are not familiar with the Bible. For this reason it is important to guide the wedding couple in their choice because it is an opportunity to pray with Scripture and to dialogue with each other. Therefore, it is not a good idea to wait to the eleventh hour, only days before the wedding, to decide on which to use.

The following guiding criteria should be useful. First of all, the date the couple has chosen for their wedding will fall on a specific day of the liturgical calendar, which allows for an initial selection of texts. For instance, during Easter Time the Ritual provides a selection appropriate for that period.²⁸ The same applies to days 1–4 of the table of liturgical days, as noted earlier. However, one of the readings can be taken from the Ritual of Marriage (cf. nos. 34 and 56).

Secondly, the Ritual itself offers several passages that refer specifically to Marriage (cf. no. 56): the creation of man and woman and the invitation to be fruitful,²⁹ the inclusion of marriage in the mystery of Christ and the Church,³⁰ and the call to indissolubility in Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees.³¹ It would appear that these readings should be preferred. When other texts are chosen from the many contained in chapter IV (cf. nos. 144–187), at least one of the readings should speak directly of marriage (they are marked with a * sign).

We should also remember that every reading is introduced by a title that indicates the heart of the theological content of that passage. Knowing this helps the spouses better understand the meaning of the passage and choose what passages they wish to use in the celebration.

Finally, before the celebration, the spouses-to-be should explain to the priest their reasons for choosing these specific readings so

27. OCM 35; cf. no. 56.

28. Traditionally, passages from the Acts of the Apostles, the Book of Revelation, and the Gospel of St. John are read at Easter.

29. Cf. Gn 1:26–28, 31a.

30. Cf. Eph 5:2a, 25–32.

31. Cf. Mt 19:3–6.

the priest can guide their choice and the preacher of the Homily can make use of them.

d) The Homily

After the Gospel has been proclaimed, within the Mass or outside it:

The Priest in the Homily uses the sacred text to expound the mystery of Christian Marriage, the dignity of conjugal love, the grace of the Sacrament, and the responsibilities of married people, keeping in mind, however, the various circumstances of individuals.”³²

In this section we will refer to practical indications made by the last two Popes on preaching in general and on the liturgical celebration of marriage.³³

The Homily is “part of the Liturgy itself,”³⁴ and therefore it is always preached by the priest or deacon. It is a privileged catechetical occasion both for the spouses and for the other faithful. Moreover, it is perhaps necessary to think more of the latter because the spouses have done the premarital courses and are therefore already familiar with the contents already mentioned; moreover, in their logical state of emotion they may not be in a position to pay full attention. For the guests, on the other hand, the Homily will be an opportunity to recall the basic elements of Christian marriage. Which elements? Here the priest’s personal knowledge of the situation of the spouses and their guests is very important.

We saw earlier that the choice of the passages will be useful to work out the aspects of marriage that are most important for the future spouses, both for the personal meaning they give to their marriage and for what they want to transmit to their loved ones. It will also be an opportunity to gauge their faith life and the level of their Christian formation, which will make it possible to adapt the contents to the listeners’ possibilities:

The preacher must know the heart of his community, in order to realize where its desire for God is alive and ardent, as well as

32. OCM 57.

33. It is worthwhile to read again the suggestions that Pope Francis made regarding the Homily in EG 135–159.

34. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963), 52.

where that dialogue, once loving, has been thwarted and is now barren.³⁵

The Homily should try to touch to everyone to a certain degree. Logically it should be addressed mainly to a specific group of people (other married couples; young, engaged couples; family members who have a varying degree of practice of the faith; etc.). But all should be able to understand it, and it should be relevant to everyone present despite age differences and their status regarding the Church. Making statements or comments that draw the attention of those who are not the main target will be useful in this regard. In all preaching, the key point for a Homily to bear fruit is that priests “prepare for the homily by meditation and prayer, so as to preach with conviction and passion.”³⁶ Thus, starting from their own personal experience of faith, they will be able to touch not only the minds but also the hearts of their listeners, the ultimate goal of all preaching.³⁷

It should always take a positive approach because “positive preaching always offers hope, points to the future.”³⁸ This means not stressing the duties and difficulties of marriage but, rather, the beauty of marriage as a path of holiness that the spouses walk toward God, the fact that it is a true divine vocation,³⁹ a love-filled self-giving for life, support in the happy times and also through the challenges of life. It also means pointing out that the new life together is the beginning of a journey where love between the spouses must be preserved and matured: They do not marry because they love each other but because they want to grow in this love. We can possibly mention the joy of the children with which God will enrich their love and the grace with which he will help them face the difficulties they will most certainly encounter.

Pope Francis’s preaching model can be useful. It is usually based on three points that he clearly identifies at the beginning and at the end, so at least those *keywords* will remain etched in the hearts and minds of the listeners. In this way he avoids touching on too many

35. EG 137.

36. Pope BENEDICT XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (September 30, 2010), 59; cf. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *Homiletic Directory* (June 29, 2014), 26–36.

37. Cf. ASL.

38. EG 159.

39. Cf. AL 57, 69, 72, 85, 88, 211.

topics, which could result in the listeners being confused, without a clear idea of the message contained in the Homily.

Pope Francis mentioned another feature of a good Homily, learned from one of his old teachers: It "should have 'an idea, a sentiment, an image.'"⁴⁰ An anecdote, a real case (of the spouses themselves or someone else, without revealing the identity of the subjects), can illustrate an idea.

Finally, something that Pope Francis has insisted on many times: the Homily should not last more than eight to ten minutes⁴¹ to ensure that the faithful pay attention and to prevent that the celebration becomes too lengthy and reduces the effectiveness of the intended message. A good preparation is not only to think about the topics to be covered but to work out whether they can be delivered in a reasonable time.

The faithful always appreciate a mention of those who have not been able to participate due to illness, distance, etc., and especially of deceased relatives (parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters) who would have enjoyed the day so much. It is not just about nostalgic memories but of placing the liturgical celebration in the context of the Communion of Saints, in which the whole Church, especially those closest to us, are present in an exchange of prayer and affection.

e) The Rite of Marriage

After the Homily it is a good idea to pause a little before moving on to next part of the celebration. It allows the Holy Spirit to act in the souls of everyone there and provides a chance to realize that we have reached the moment of the Sacrament. The Celebration of Matrimony begins now. It contains several elements.

i. The Questions Before the Consent

This part of the celebration begins with an introduction (cf.no.59): the priest addresses the couple and stresses the baptismal consecration, the role of the Church and of the community in

40. EG 57.

41. Cf. for example, Pope FRANCIS, *General Audience* (February 7, 2018); Pope FRANCIS, *Encounter with the Faithful in Piazza Europa During the Pastoral Visit to the Diocese of Piazza Armerina* (September 15, 2018); ASL.

marriage, and finally faithful love and the duties of marriage, which are regarded as the end and the outcome of the Sacrament.

This is followed by the Questions (cf. no. 60). The couple are invited to declare they are free to marry, committed to being faithful, and open to life.⁴² Bride and groom have had the chance to speak with each other and with the priest during the marriage preparation. But it is a good thing that their will be made known before the liturgical assembly at the time of the celebration. Freedom, commitment to fidelity, and acceptance of children are essential elements of the marriage bond; hence, it is important that these questions be answered sincerely. In each of the questions the priest interrogates the spouses, and they answer, "I have," or, "I am."

ii. The Consent

We come to the main part of the Rite: The bride and groom will be husband and wife when they have declared it because it is the consent that gives rise to the marriage.

The declaration takes place as the two hold each other's right hands. It is a very ancient gesture, going back to traditions that predate Christianity, which we also find in the Old Testament.⁴³ It conveys the desire for union and marital fidelity.

There are four different ways to declare consent:

- In the first two (cf. no. 62) the groom addresses the bride and pronounces a formula that stresses mutual acceptance, fidelity in the different circumstances of life, and faithful love; the same formula is used by the bride as she addresses the groom. These are the best known options, and they end with the following word: "all the days of my life" and "until death do us part," respectively.
- The third and fourth options (cf. no. 63) require the priest to address first the groom and then the bride, asking them a question similar to that of the first two formulas, to which the bride and groom respond with "I do." This formula is generally reserved for particular situations, for example, if either of them has difficulty reading, lacks the faculty of speech, etc.

42. The Rite foresees that the question about welcoming children can be omitted if circumstances make it wise, for example, if the bride and groom are of mature age.

43. Cf. Tb 7:13.

The bride and groom should choose the formula they will use, taking into account the circumstances, their way of being, and the moment. Although the text can be given to them at the ceremony, they should be clear about what they will have to say in order to prevent confusion at the crucial point of the celebration.

The consent is received by the priest, who recites a formula (again, two different formulas are available) emphasizing God's intervention in this mutual giving and receiving, God's blessing on the new spouses, and the indissolubility of the marriage bond: "What God joins together, let no one put asunder."⁴⁴

*iii. Blessing and Presentation
of the Rings and Arras (Coins)*

The Blessing and Giving of Rings follows. It is a kind of instructional rite (cf. nos. 66–67A, 194–195). The ring is the outward manifestation of what has taken place in the souls of the two spouses; it is a sign of reciprocal love and mutual fidelity. As the formula emphasizes, it is received "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, / and of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁵ This last reference to the Trinity is not a minor detail. It shows that both have inserted their mutual love into the Trinitarian love, the source of all love.

Then, if the occasion so suggests, The Blessing and Giving of the Arras (coins) may be performed (cf. no. 67B). This is a set of thirteen coins (one for each month of the year and another one for the poor) that the bride and groom exchange. They signify that, from then on, they will share all their material goods. Therefore, it is not comparable to the ancient custom of the dowry, although its origin may be found in it: The dowry was given by the husband to the wife, whereas here the two spouses give the coins to each other.

Like with the rings, the priest first blesses the *arras*, and then each spouse gives them to the other while saying the corresponding formula.

The Celebration of Matrimony concludes with the Universal Prayer, or the Prayer of the Faithful or Bidding Prayers. Four options are available.

44. OCM 64.

45. Ibid., 67A.

f) Other Alternatives for the Mass

The Eucharistic liturgy begins at the end of the Universal Prayer (cf. nos. 216–217). Some specific elements are added to it. We will mention them briefly.

The Prayer over the Offerings is specific, and the Ritual provides three options (cf. nos. 196–198). In addition to asking the Father to accept the gifts that have been presented, we ask for the new spouses.

The Preface is also specific for the occasion. Three options are available (cf. nos. 199–201). They highlight in turn the mystery of matrimony (a new mention of God's covenant with his people, signified in the marriage covenant), the greatness of the marriage covenant, and marriage as a sign of divine love, of which the love of the spouse is an image.

According to the local customs, the Blessing and Placing of the *Lazo* or the Veil — a *lazo* is a wedding garland — may take place before the Nuptial Blessing, both symbolizing the bond that unites them (cf. no. 71B).

The Nuptial Blessing will be studied in the next section.

In the Communion Rite the Ritual specifies that the bride and the bridegroom, their parents, witnesses, and relatives may receive Communion under both species (cf. no. 76).

There are also several options for the Prayer after Communion (cf. nos. 210–212) to ask for the divine protection for the new spouses.

The Solemn Blessing of the spouses and the congregation takes place at the end of the celebration. Again, there are three options in the Ritual (cf. nos. 77, 213–215). God is asked to grant the spouses that they love each other and walk together the path of this life until they reach the joy of heaven.

There are many small variations on the normal Mass, which would require having both the Missal and the Ritual on the altar so the priest switches from one to the other at the appropriate times. There is a risk of forgetting something. For this reason, we think it is a good idea for the priest to use a booklet prepared for the occasion throughout the Eucharistic celebration. We will discuss the booklet later.

g) The Nuptial Blessing

The Nuptial Blessing is the most distinctive element of the Roman liturgy of the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage, and it should be given always. It takes place after the *Our Father*, and replaces the prayer *Deliver us* (cf. no. 72). This is most appropriate because it follows on from the intercessions of the Eucharistic Prayer and the Sunday prayer. It makes us ready for Communion, the moment when Christ becomes present and the work of our redemption is accomplished through his Death and Resurrection. Thus, the context of the prayer of blessing is the most intense: In this celebratory section the Church reveals herself united to her Bridegroom and intercedes for the spouses who have just established their spousal union, which is thus born steeped in the mystery of the unity and love between Christ and the Church.⁴⁶

The Nuptial Blessing begins with an invitation to prayer: The priest asks all to turn to the Lord, invoking his grace for the spouses. This is followed by the actual blessing, which the spouses receive on their knees.

There are three different formulas, each accompanied by one or more invitations to prayer (cf. nos. 73–74, 205–209). These are rather long passages, structured in different parts, which are very useful for a thorough catechesis on the meaning of marriage in the history of salvation and can open up interesting insights into married life as a path to holiness.⁴⁷ At the same time, precisely because they are complex, they should be read carefully and, as far as possible, they should be the topic of meditation so they do not remain just words.

All formulas highlight important marriage topics such as the work of creation, where God's plan for the family, understood as a covenant, holds a very significant place; the spousal unity based on the teaching of Christ; the mystery of the spousal union between Christ and the Church, that the new couple shares in; etc. In addition, all the formulas ask to consecrate the conjugal covenant, that is, to insert it into the divine realm, to pour the Holy Spirit upon the spouses so they may live their union in accordance with the vocation they have received. They also include references to receiving the Eucharist and to offspring, which are omitted if one of the spouses

46. Cf. MIRALLES, *Il matrimonio*, 109–110.

47. For a thorough examination of each formula, cf. *ibid.*, 110–129.

will not receive Communion or is advanced in years. All the formulas conclude with an eschatological reference.

Regarding the specific features of each formula, we can highlight the following:

- There are more references to the Old Testament in the first formula (cf. no. 74). The language is very rich. It requires a good formation to understand it fully.
- The second formula (cf. no. 207) is similar to the first regarding the language it uses. It is more centered on the mystery of Christ and the Church
- The third (cf. no. 209) is shorter and simpler. It can be a better option for couples whose Christian formation is only basic because it is easier to understand. It refers to the spouses beginning their life together and pleads for divine assistance to help them fulfill their duties as spouses and parents.

4. SOME PRACTICAL MATTERS

a) The Booklet

A little booklet with the whole ceremony, or at least the most important parts of the Rite, are a useful tool for the spouses and for the whole congregation to improve their participation in the celebration.

The Ritual offers many options. The bride and groom will have to choose among the different options with the assistance of the priest. Preparing the booklet can be an excellent opportunity to teach the future spouses about the reality of marriage and the symbolic and theological content of the various parts of the ceremony. These sessions will help them to focus on the importance of the occasion. The future spouses will also be invited to pray and meditate together on the different options proposed.

It is important that the priest review the booklet before sending it to the printer to make sure that all parts are included correctly. It may also be helpful to include the elements that pertain only to the priest as well as some rubrics. This will make it easier for the participants to follow the ceremony and, on the other hand, the priest himself will be able to refer to the booklet throughout

the celebration, including the Eucharistic liturgy. This will avoid the inconvenience of going from the Missal to the Ritual or from the Lectionary to the Ritual several times during the ceremony. In addition, the presence of some rubrics can be helpful in explaining the meaning of the various gestures even to those who do not often go to church, as often happens in weddings.

Finally, a complete booklet reduces the risk of forgetting a part of the Rite, for example, the Nuptial Blessing after the *Lord's Prayer*.

b) Preparing the Church

The festive nature of the wedding becomes evident with the appropriate decoration of the church, but this must be balanced with the sobriety of the liturgical celebrations. In this matter it is very important to talk to the bride, who usually takes care of all the organizational matters, and help her understand that beauty is compatible with simplicity and sobriety.

For example, it is important to know where to have *flowers* (on the altar, in the pews, in the rest of the church, etc.) to ensure that the church does not become a *flower show* or that the altar loses its significance as a table of Sacrifice. In many places it is common to have a white carpet along the central nave; care should be taken that this or similar customs do not become an occasion for ostentation and that the various decorations are in harmony with the rest of the sacred building.

Ideally a wireless *microphone* should be available so bride and groom can be heard when answering questions or when consent is exchanged.

Attention should be paid to the *rings*. It is crucial that they are not forgotten at home or that nobody knows who brought them to the church, etc. These small things will be the cause of much merriment years later, but at the time they would be the source of great anxiety besides breaking up the tone of recollection and the solemn nature of the ceremony. Who should bring them should be clear (often the task is given to a child) and measures be taken lest they fall to the ground. A good solution is to place them on a small cushion, held with a ribbon that is easy to untie.

It may be a good idea to ask the bride about her choice of *wedding dress*. It should be done well ahead of time, in a sensitive way,

and whenever possible through another woman. The purpose is to ensure that it is both elegant and modest.

Another matter is the *seating arrangements* for those who will play a role in the ceremony: first of all, bride and groom, but also those who will accompany them, the witnesses (see section d), bridesmaids, groomsmen, etc. Usually the bride and groom are in front of the presbytery on dignified chairs and kneelers, and those who will accompany them are seated next to them. Witnesses, bridesmaids, etc., may be seated in other special places in the nave, not far from the bride and groom, or in the front pews with other members of the family.

Usually there is a professional *photographer*, although sometimes a friend of the family is chosen, to keep a beautiful memory of the ceremony. If he or she is not a person you are familiar with, it is also worth talking to him or her in order to prevent him or her from distracting those present, for example, not to obstruct the vision of the faithful, not to cross in front of the altar, or not to take pictures during the Eucharistic Prayer. The same applies to videotaping. It is increasingly common to stream the ceremony to those who will not be able to attend. This requires an electronic installation and choosing the placement of the camera(s) so they do not distract the participants or obstruct the recording.

c) Singing

Singing deserves specific consideration, as it is part of the celebration. It is wise to make sure they are sacred songs, not songs that are more or less popular in a particular venue. The couple may be particularly attached to a singer or a song (“our song”) for reasons related to their courtship or the time when they first met. This kind of repertoire is not appropriate in church because the Paschal Mystery of Christ and the sharing in Christ’s spousal love with the Church is being celebrated. Therefore, the songs chosen should be in keeping with the significance of the celebration.

This is an important point to discuss with them in the weeks or months leading up to the celebration. A good moment is the preparation of the booklet since it is a good idea to include the score or at least the texts of the songs in order to facilitate the participation of all the faithful.

d) Some Canonical Requirements

Marriage is not just a private arrangement; it has social and ecclesial relevance. Therefore, it is logical that the Church should set the conditions for a valid celebration. One of them is the need to observe the canonical form, that is, to marry in the Church (in common language).⁴⁸

To ensure that the established requirements are met, the *Code of Canon Law* has established,

Only those marriages are valid which are contracted before the local ordinary, pastor, or a priest or deacon delegated by either of them, who assist, and before two witnesses.⁴⁹

The *Code of Canon Law* does not require the presence of godparents at the ceremony, unlike the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. This should be made clear to all concerned. However, there is nothing to prevent the two signing witnesses from being called godparents at the wedding, which is the custom in many countries. A different matter is that the groom is brought forward by his mother and the bride by her father because when the figure of the godfather and the godmother is used, it will not be the parents who make the introduction. Generally, this role—which in any case is not necessary—is played by a relative or friend chosen by each of the spouses. By analogy with the godparents of Baptism and Confirmation, it is better that the designated godparents be persons with a life of integrity and consistent with what they witness, that is, the truth of the marriage.

The *Code* provides no guidelines on the matter of witnesses. It is understood that the aim is to ensure the presence of at least two persons who can confirm that consent has been validly given. Therefore, it can be said that in a common marriage, all those who participate in it are witnesses. So much so that even if no one signs the register, the marriage would be absolutely valid because it would be obvious that several witnesses have been present.

We have already seen that the *Code* attributes the faculty to celebrate the wedding principally to the local ordinary or parish priest. If, on the other hand, the assistant is another priest or deacon

48. Cf. CIC, can. 1108.

49. *Ibid.*, § 1. The canon makes reference to exceptional situations, when a priest or deacon is not available. They are covered in cann. 144, 1112§1, 1116, 1127§§2–3.

(or even a bishop other than the local one), then he needs a delegation.⁵⁰ This is a condition of validity, i.e., if the celebrant has not requested the delegation, the marriage is null and void (therefore, when he realizes it, he will need to seek a *sanatio in radice* [convallation of an invalid marriage without the renewal of consent before a competent authority; cf. cann. 1161–1165]).⁵¹

For a single marriage it is sufficient that the delegation be given to the celebrant priest or deacon by word of mouth. On the other hand, a general delegation must be granted in writing.⁵² It is generally prudent to request the delegation in writing in all cases (it can be done digitally) and to keep it.

Moreover, “the names of the spouses, the person who assisted, and the witnesses, and the place and date of the celebration of the marriage according to the method prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop”⁵³ must be entered in the parish register of marriages, and a marginal note should also be made in the register of baptisms.⁵⁴

Lastly, the priest should be familiar with the legal procedures required by the civil authorities of the country and the State to enter the relevant data in the civil registry (when required).

50. Cf. *ibid.*, cann. 1108, 1111.

51. Cf. *ibid.*, cann. 1161–1165.

52. Cf. *ibid.*, can. 1111 §2.

53. *Ibid.*, can. 1121 §1.

54. Cf. *ibid.*, can. 1122 §1.