

CHOICE OF RITE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Parish

The celebration of marriage in the Roman Catholic faith is a truly joyous occasion, as this sacramental celebration reveals the love of Jesus Christ to the world through the selfless commitment of spouses to one another no matter what the future may bring.

The Church provides two Rites or ritual ways of celebrating the presence of God in the freely-given consent of man and woman. Both Rites are equally valid in the eyes of the Church, revealing the presence of Christ to the couple and their loved ones and are equally recognized as a sacramental union. Both Rites begin with the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, which invites the grace of God into the hearts of the couple and their friends/family. Both Rites use the same ritual for declaring freely-given consent and proclamation of vows (the marriage proper). Each of the two Rites is prescribed for different circumstances, which depend on the faith of the bride and groom, and also take into consideration the gathering of those invited to share in the holy occasion.

The Rite of Marriage outside Mass

“In a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized person who is not a Catholic, the rite of marriage outside Mass shall be used.” – The Rite of Marriage of the Roman Catholic Church, No. 8.

The Church teaching on the use of the Rite of Marriage outside Mass is very clear, as seen above in the general instruction from the ritual itself. This form of celebration is meant to highlight what the bride and groom share in common, the God-given ability to respond to grace and choose one another selflessly, just as Christ laid down his life for the salvation of all. This celebration does not contain the liturgy of the Eucharist, for only a Catholic in good standing with the Church is able to receive communion, which would exclude one of the spouses from sharing in this additional Sacrament. Further, when one of the spouses is not a Catholic, there are also likely many family and friends who are not Catholic and would not experience well the meaning of the Eucharistic celebration. The Rite of Marriage outside Mass is also notably shorter and more flexible, capable of involving other rituals or music to further symbolize the marriage bond. This is the preferred ritual in most circumstances, as it is welcoming and accessible to all.

The Rite of Marriage during Mass

“In the celebration of marriage... the reception of holy communion by the groom and the bride and by others present, which above all is the source of love... lifts us up into communion with our Lord and with one another.” – The Rite of Marriage of the Roman Catholic Church, No. 6.

When two practicing Catholics in good standing with the Church who are fully initiated (have celebrated the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) seek to celebrate the sacrament of Marriage, it should normally take place during Mass. In this case, the source and summit of both spouses lives is the Eucharistic celebration of Christ, and so it is appropriate to celebrate the sacrament of Marriage in the context of the Eucharist. The general law does not allow those who are not Catholic to receive communion, so this ritual is only appropriate when both the bride and groom are practicing Catholics. The Rite of Marriage during Mass is slightly longer (about 1 hour), and is less flexible, typically not allowing rituals such as a unity candle or additional songs. The ritual observed at St. Thomas is based on the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist.