
CELEBRATING CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE (2)



In last week's *Journal* entry I wrote about the changes which were brought to the celebration of Christian marriage. In the last thirty years new marriage rituals have been published which take into greater account the individual situation of couples and of Christian communities. What is paramount in all this is to discover the loving presence of God at the heart of the couple's commitment. In discovering the greatness of human love there is a good chance of also discovering the grandeur of divine love of which it is the sacrament.

AN ENLIGHTENING WORD

It was an altogether new experience to give to engaged couples the possibility of choosing from twenty-six scripture readings divided in three categories: those referring to marriage itself (fruitfulness, love, fidelity, mutual respect); those referring to the union of God with humankind, in marriage (symbolic themes); and those referring to Christian living in general (charity, beatitude, divine indwelling). Such a choice makes for a richer liturgy. Henceforth several months prior to the wedding couples can be given the marriage lectionary, meditate on the readings, and choose those texts they wish to retain for the wedding. In this way the liturgy of the Word is more adequate to the couple's mentality. The selection also helps one discover Holy Scripture and its place in our lives; it should also be the occasion of fruitful dialogue between the priest and the couple. As they are led to reflect on the meaning and the import of the texts chosen, the couple could discuss them with the priest and together they could share their reactions to the readings. In this way, the choice of readings could give rise to a marriage catechesis to the couple. It is highly recommended that the choice of readings be left to the couple themselves; the priest's role is to guide, to shed light on the meaning of the readings and at times, initiate a profound discussion. This biblical renewal shows us a richer vision of the meaning of marriage.

A TRUE REVELATION

It is also desirable that marriage preparation be an occasion not only for choosing and sharing on relevant liturgical texts, but also to reflect together on the altogether new meaning conferred to their marriage by the Christian Revelation: what is at stake is the significance they want to give to their love; as a matter of fact, Christian marriage introduces them into the great mystery of the faith. If they remain open and listen, the Holy Spirit will gradually lead the couple, through the often disconcerting unfolding of their lives, to a fuller discovery of God-with-us. This discovery of the Emmanuel at the heart of their lives is at the basis of the sense of celebration which the couple now want to experience: the discovery that Jesus so greatly respected human love between man and woman. He has made it a sign of God's love and presence in the midst of humankind.

MEANINGFUL SONGS

Once the scripture texts have been chosen which reflect the greatness and dignity of Christian marriage, it is possible to pick appropriate liturgical songs. To this effect, guidelines have been adopted by the Diocesan Commission on Liturgy and Culture. In liturgical celebrations, every song must have a spiritual meaning as well as poetic and musical value. It must be prayerful and bear a Christian message, be conducive to reflection and to meeting Jesus in the sacrament; it must also be expressive of the couple's joy, fidelity, commitment, peace, and mutual gift. We must aim at a unified and prayerful liturgy. It is not necessary to have many songs:

time must also be given to periods of silence; also recommended are organ pieces. The use of psalms must also be given greater pride of place, and particular songs must be maintained: entrance or gathering songs, responsorial psalm, communion song. It is not sufficient to choose a song or a particular piece of music simply because we like it: we must ask whether it is a liturgical song or whether it is suitable to the occasion. Only liturgical songs may be used for weddings. Songs referring to God or to love are not all liturgical. In concert with the archdiocese of Moncton and the diocese of Bathurst, our diocesan liturgy commission is in the process of revising its list of authorised liturgical songs, with indication regarding their appropriateness for a particular part of the liturgy.

WITH OR WITHOUT THE EUCHARIST

It is the couple's choice to decide on the format of marriage celebration, within Church norms. Their choice will take into account diocesan regulations as well as reflect on local deanery circumstances. The choice will be made according to their own personal convictions. If the Eucharist is a major value to them, they will most surely want to have their marriage take place within the Mass: the Covenant of the Lord sealed in his Body and Blood reveals the special dimension of Christian marriage. However, one must not believe that there must be a mass at every marriage. One must not have less esteem for the Liturgy of the Word where God is present to the couple and the community. As with the celebration of Confirmation, a number of parishes are trying to highlight the greatness of one sacrament at a time and do so within the context of a Word liturgy. In like manner, the importance of Christian marriage can be highlighted in a liturgy of the Word. Besides, the main reason for gathering for a wedding is to celebrate the marriage commitment. a well-prepared Word liturgy raises the assembled community's level of celebration: there is a greater sense of the Presence of God, prayer, and meditation; there is praise, but especially an exchange of consent enlightened by the Word of God.

A WISH

I hope that this reflection on the celebration of Christian marriage contributes in its own way to remind our people of the grandeur of Christian marriage. In the words of the Little Prince I would tell engaged couples: «It is the time you will have spent loving the rose which will make your flower even more beautiful. We see well only with the heart.» The time which the couple will have put in carefully preparing their wedding celebration will be rewarded a hundredfold: in its simplicity and truth, the celebration will reveal to them and their guests an unforgettable aspect of their love.

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (390) (27 June 2001)