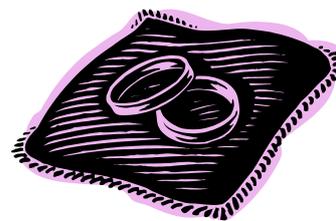


## *Celebrant's Guides (England & Wales)*

### The Nuptial Liturgy



#### SOURCES FOR THE LITURGICAL RITE

The post-Vatican II Rite of Marriage was promulgated as a text with three chapters:

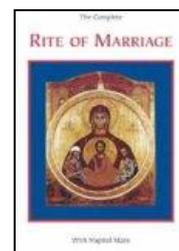
Rite of Marriage: Introduction

- I. Rite For Celebrating Marriage During Mass
- II. Rite For Celebrating Marriage Outside Mass
- III. Rite For Celebrating Marriage Between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person

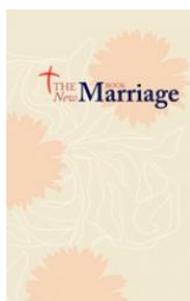
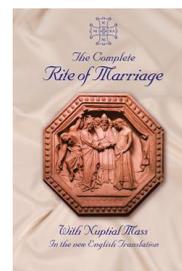
Because specific words might be needed for legal validity in different countries, the Rite of Marriage varies slightly in each jurisdiction. The ritual book officially issued for use in England and Wales has long been out of print; it was [published](#) in 1971 as “The rite of marriage: for use in the dioceses of England and Wales” by Geoffrey Chapman, ISBN 0225659360.

Various publishers subsequently produced “Congregation Aid” booklets containing excerpts from the rite.

In 2004, the Catholic Truth Society (CTS) published “The Complete Rite of Marriage with Nuptial Mass”, with a cover as pictured above right. This is now obsolete following the revision of the English translation of the Roman Missal.



In 2012, CTS issued a [revised edition](#), pictured right, with the following note: “Only suitable for use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Includes the full rite of marriage plus readings and gospels, attractively laid out in two colours. Includes the new English translation of the Mass (2011). An ideal resource for all parishes.”



Redemptorist Publications also publish a [congregation booklet](#):

“Fully revised and redesigned, this new edition contains the Rite of Marriage during Mass together with a selection of suitable hymns and an appendix of Bidding Prayers. Unfortunately we were unable to print the texts for the celebration outside Mass as we have in previous editions, because they have not yet been approved.”

Neither of these editions contain the liturgical instructions present in the official Ritual Book for Marriage. The liturgy office website now carries a [PDF](#) of the *Rite of Marriage: Introduction*.

The 1971 ritual book also contained an Appendix setting out special rules applicable only to England and Wales; this does not seem to be available anywhere on line so I have scanned the document and made this text [available](#).

Presiders are therefore well-served with resources to enable them to celebrate Nuptial Masses, but less for the two forms of the “Wedding outside Mass.” The previous edition of *The New Marriage Book* (Redemptorist) contained some texts, but only one collect, one nuptial blessing and one final blessing from the options available in the official Ritual Book.

In 2013 the Redemptorists issued an 8-page [laminated card](#) for *The Rite of Marriage Outside Mass*: “These are elegant booklets, printed on 300gsm gloss with a protective laminated coat applied after printing. It is easy to read and contains all that is necessary for both the priest and the congregation. The spacious layout of the text and the eye-catching design makes it a joy to use. There are clear indications of posture, offering the congregation helpful instructions on when to stand, sit or kneel.” These contain two possible opening collects, the introductory words for the Rite of Marriage for the unbaptised spouse case as well as the baptised case, the two legal forms of marriage vows, one nuptial blessing text and one form of final blessing. There is a sample set of bidding prayers on the back page,

Since the texts from Chapters II and III of the 1971 rite are not readily available, I have taken the liberty of preparing [Word documents](#) for the use of Presiders, which they can readily customise for particular celebrations, by deleting the unwanted texts and running a search-and-replace to insert the names of bride and groom quickly.

Celebrants conducting Catholic weddings in Scotland can find the Scottish customised version of the rites available [online](#).

The rite for a [Wedding Mass in the Republic of Ireland](#) is published by Veritas, ISBN 978 1 84730 328 6, updated 2011 for the New Missal.

There is also a study web-page with the [USA version](#) of the full Rite of Marriage.

## **READINGS**

The full selection of recommended readings for weddings is included in Volume III of the Lectionary, and also in the CTS booklet. There are also websites offering the readings, or summaries of them:

- [Full readings, including psalms](#) (plain layout) – Portsmouth’s Catholic Cathedral
- [Full readings, excluding psalms](#) (elegant layout) – St John’s Wood Parish
- [One-paragraph summary](#) of each reading (by the present author)
- [Selection of Psalm Settings](#) (compiled by the present author)
- [List of References](#) to readings (Liturgy Office for England & Wales)

## **BIDDING PRAYERS**

A sample set of [Bidding Prayers](#) are available.

## **CHOOSING TEXTS FOR A NUPTIAL MASS**

Most of the marriage texts can be found in the 2011 Roman Missal in use in England and Wales, on pp. 1235 thru 1244; here you will find collects and the nuptial blessing, but not the rite of exchange of consent or blessing of rings. So it is possible to use the Missal for most of the service, and use the CTS or Redemptorist book (or perhaps a nicely-bound photocopy of the [texts](#)) only for the rite around the exchange of vows.

The Missal actually provides three sets of prayers which focus on different themes. Each formula further enriched by two possible opening collects. A<sup>1</sup> highlights God as the creator and sustainer of the marital union, while A<sup>2</sup> speaks of the couple becoming one flesh, and being fruitful. Formula A keeps emphasising the childbearing aspect of marriage, and is not very suitable when reasons of age or health make it unlikely that the couple will conceive.

Formula B often uses the motif of ‘two people united’ and emphasises how our *salvation* is symbolised in marriage.

Formula C, which is evidently the most suitable for a more elderly couple, focuses on marriage as a *sacrament* and on Christ’s unselfish love which we are to reflect; the collects, however, do refer to offspring, so for an older couple one of the collects from B combined with material from C may be the best option.

## **CHOOSING TEXTS FOR A WEDDING WITHOUT MASS**

At some point in the future, a new English Translation of the full Rite of Marriage will become available. Until then, celebrants must make pragmatic choices. Should they use existing texts and worship aids, complete with “...and also with you”? Or should they mix and match material from the new Missal with the old rites?

If conducting a marriage where one party is unbaptised, remember that the marriage will be a ‘natural bond’, not a sacrament. In the texts from the PRE-2011 translation, Rite B avoids speaking of marriage as a sacrament except in the Nuptial Blessing, so the prayers of Rite B combined with Nuptial Blessing A would be a suitable combination; collect A<sup>2</sup> also seems suitable. Most of the texts of rite C would be inappropriate as this rite focuses strongly on marriage as a sacrament. The words of instruction at the start of the marriage rite would certainly need to be adjusted, too.

If using texts from the 2011 Missal with an unbaptised spouse, avoid collects B<sup>2</sup> and C<sup>1</sup>; other collects and final blessings do not speak of marriage as a sacrament. Retain the special nuptial blessing for use with an unbaptised spouse from Chapter III of the Rite of Marriage.

The 1971 Rite contained a rubric saying that the celebrant could choose only one of the first three paragraphs of Nuptial Blessing A or the first two of Nuptial Blessing B, dropping those which do not correspond to the First Reading. There is no equivalent rubric in the 2011 Missal.

## **BEFORE THE FORMAL BEGINNING**

Think: Where are the bride and groom going to be throughout the service? Most couples will feel somewhat intimidated if they are made to face the congregation, though it is ill-fitting for them to make their vows with their backs to those who have come to witness the occasion. Usually a side-on solution with use of a microphone to amplify the vows will be the best compromise. Issues of where they will stand for the vows and where to put their chairs or kneelers will usually be resolved in a rehearsal.

Be ready to direct the family to the right actions whenever they seem 'lost' – the celebrant usually has to be his own 'MC' at weddings! Be reassuring to all parties, but firm and clear. Encourage grandparents to look after junior pages and bridesmaids. You may need to encourage the whole congregation to stand at the most solemn moments.

### *You will need*

A tray or cushion for the rings, and holy water to bless them with.

The legal NAMES of the couple where you can check them in a moment of panic!

Lectionary or other dignified source for readings ready on ambo – with desired text clearly marked, e.g. using a post-it note!

Copies of the Bidding Prayers for the Reader and Celebrant.

Appropriate vestments (white or gold).

Any other symbols to be used in the liturgy – with Paschal candle lit, and taper on a pole to take a light from it, if needed for a 'unity candle' rite.

The right certificate books to hand, and an Authorised Person if it's not you.

Also, know who has the rings, and any other symbols to be used

### *Celebrant could sing*

The Eucharistic Prayer

The Nuptial Blessing

You will probably welcome the congregation informally before the ritual beginning. This is a good time to invite people to turn off mobile phones, and to make clear your expectations about where and when photography would be intrusive. Know what booklets/hymnbooks the congregation have – announce page and song numbers as needed.

## THE NUPTIAL LITURGY STEP-BY-STEP

0. Before the formal start of the liturgy, the bride arrives! A professional photographer will usually ambush the bride on arrival; allow this to take its course before the formal beginning of the service. Note that brides are often sensitive to having the camera thrust too close to their face. Take time to calm the bride, and encourage her and her groom to walk *slowly* down the aisle. Make sure the organist knows what the starting 'cue' will be for the entrance music. The liturgical norm is that bride and groom process *together*, after the presiding minister, as the final and most important members of the entrance procession, although culturally, most brides will expect to walk down the aisle to meet their groom at the sanctuary end.

1a. Common custom is for the celebrant to meet the bride and groom at the door of the Church. In this case the rubrics indicate that entrance procession is followed immediately by the opening prayer; it is not made clear in the ceremony outside Mass how much formal liturgy (Sign of the cross? *The Lord be with you?* Penitential rite?) is involved in this 'greeting' at the door. The celebrant should therefore use his discretion to decide how much to say, depending on audibility and visibility at the door; but he should give the congregation a sense that a formal start to a liturgical act has taken place. A hymn or one of the antiphons in the Missal may be sung as the procession comes in, in this order: servers, the celebrant, the bride and groom, those guests who waited in the porch for the greeting.

1b. Alternatively, the bride and groom may be already seated in church, and the celebrant's entrance is the normal form of entrance for Mass with greeting; the Penitential Rite is omitted but the *Gloria* is sung or said. There is no explicit requirement for a penitential rite and Gloria in a non-Mass service.

2. All forms of the opening collect mention the bride and groom by name. The position chosen for this prayer by the celebrant (chair? altar? front of sanctuary?) should be a suitable place to address the couple as primary members of the congregation.

3. The readings duly take place with the celebrant seated at the Chair, until the Gospel. It may be appropriate to announce each reading, perhaps welcoming by name the family member who is reading, perhaps putting the scripture into context.

4. A homily follows; as with the opening collect, this needs to be given from a place that is particularly fitting for addressing the couple. The rubrics direct that the celebrant should speak about 'the mystery of Christian marriage, the dignity of wedded love, the grace of the sacrament and the responsibilities of married people'. It would be wise to pick only ONE theme within marriage for your homily: intimacy (with God and one another); commitment; mutual support; openness to Christ, children and the needs of others; marriage as a path to holiness. It may be good to remind people that the couple, not the priest, are the ministers of this sacrament. Don't be afraid to admit that marriage will include times of trial, and the mundane finding of God among the pots and pans (*pace* St Teresa of Avila). Be wary of reinforcing the stereotype that the Catholic Church is obsessed with sex, so be careful if you choose to draw out the theology of marital intimacy.

5. For the marriage rite itself, the celebrant needs to stand close enough to the bride and groom to whisper discreet directives as well as speaking words for the whole congregation. Do make sure the couple are positioned so that the congregation can have some sense of what is taking place, and call forward the two official witnesses to stand by them for the vows. Discuss beforehand with the couple whether they want to memorise the vows (be ready to prompt them!), repeat them after you, or read them from a card.

6. The blessing of rings should be visible to the congregation. It is traditional, but not necessary, for each spouse (or only the husband, if only one ring is given) to place the ring on the index and middle fingers as they give it “in the name of the Father [thumb], and of the Son [index] and of the Holy [middle finger] Spirit. Amen! [ring finger.]” Alternatively, the ring can be pushed a little further down the ring finger as each Person of the Blessed Trinity is named.

7. At this point, if the couple has requested another symbol of marriage (such as the joint lighting of a candle), this is the fitting moment to include it in the liturgy – an exception might be made for the blessing of a crucifix immediately after the homily, if a couple (usually influenced by Medjugorje) ask for the Croatian custom of making their wedding vows with their hands joined around a cross. Further details of common ethnic customs are given in the Appendices, below.

8. Bidding prayers are said at this point, and will need to be custom-written for the occasion; it is appropriate for the celebrant to stay standing with the couple.

9. What happens next depends on whether the Liturgy of the Eucharist is to follow, and whether the couple are going to sign the civil register now or at the end.

- ▶ If they are going to sign now, AND the wedding is within a Mass which requires the Creed (because it is a Sunday or Solemnity), then say the Creed first with the couple still in position, then dismiss them to sign the register.
- ▶ If they are going to sign now, but the Creed is not required, dismiss them immediately.
- ▶ If they are going to sign at the end of the ceremony, invite them to resume their place with the congregation. Then, if the Creed is required, they will fittingly say it from the front of the worshipping assembly.

10a. If Mass follows, but the couple have gone to sign the civil register, it may be wise to refrain from preparing the altar until the couple have completed what is required and returned. A simple rite of preparing the altar might be completed with dignity while music continues, but a solemn one has difficulties... the incensing of the people is an integral part which shouldn't be distanced from the other rites, but since it provokes the people to stand, it shouldn't be done until the couple are ready. Note that Roman Missal page 1239 has [special inserts](#) for Eucharistic Prayers I, II and III. After the Doxology, the celebrant should move to a suitable place to pray over the newlyweds: the Nuptial Blessing is given immediately after the 'deliver us from evil' in the Lord's Prayer, and the conclusion of the Lord's Prayer is dropped. The *Prayer After Communion* might appropriately be given from the same place where you will give the solemn blessing.

10b. If Communion from the reserved sacrament follows, there should be no need for the couple to sign the civil register at this point – the service will end shortly. In this case, the Nuptial Blessing [with adjustment of bracketed lines in Rites A and B referring to receiving the body *and blood* of Christ] is the formal conclusion to the Bidding Prayers. Then the newlyweds should go to a place where they can kneel: they remain standing as the celebrant leads the Lord's Prayer, then kneel as the Blessed Sacrament is brought to the altar. The *Prayer After Communion* should be that from Rite B, as the others refer explicitly to Eucharist or sacrifice; once again, it might appropriately be delivered from the same place where you will give the solemn blessing.

10c. If neither Mass nor Holy Communion are to follow, the ceremony will end soon, so there is clearly no need for the couple to sign the civil register at this point.

The Nuptial Blessing [omitting bracketed lines in Rites A and B referring to receiving the Eucharist] follows immediately as the formal conclusion to the Bidding Prayers. The couple remain in position for the solemn blessing.

11. The Roman Missal provides three possible threefold solemn blessings, of which A and B have optional lines mentioning the blessing of bearing children. Rite A focuses the blessing on the couple's relationship with God, their family and the world. Rite B invokes each person of the Trinity in turn. Rite C refers to the wedding at Cana, and like the rest of rite C may feel very apt for more elderly couples. A fourth alternative is a [Prayer over the People](#) authorised for use in England and Wales.

12. The Roman Rite does not specify an exit procession. If the couple have already signed the civil register, it seems fitting for them to process out to a hymn or organ voluntary, while the sanctuary party leaves discretely to disrobe (unless required, vested, for photographs). If the couple are to sign the civil register now, they should go and do this, with the sanctuary party departing with little solemnity a few moments later. Music may be required to cover the time until the civil formalities have been completed, especially if the reception is not on the site of the Church.

## Wedding Liturgy: Planner & Checklist

Couple: \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

### Personnel (tick when attendance confirmed)

Concelebrants: \_\_\_\_\_

Best Man: \_\_\_\_\_ Chief Bridesmaid: \_\_\_\_\_

Server(s): \_\_\_\_\_

ExMins for Holy Communion: \_\_\_\_\_

Registrar: \_\_\_\_\_

Musicians: \_\_\_\_\_

Florist: \_\_\_\_\_ Photographer: \_\_\_\_\_

Special Needs Considerations: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Liturgy [Hymn Numbers]

Rite: A B C **Mass** / Blessing Symbols: \_\_\_\_\_

Start at Porch / Sanctuary?

Special opening comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Where to place couple? \_\_\_\_\_

Processional music? \_\_\_\_\_

Opening Hymn? \_\_\_\_\_ [\_\_\_\_\_]

*Kyrie:* \_\_\_\_\_ [\_\_\_\_\_] *Cantor:* \_\_\_\_\_

***Gloria:*** \_\_\_\_\_ [\_\_\_\_\_] ***Cantor:*** \_\_\_\_\_

1st Reading: \_\_\_\_\_ Reader: \_\_\_\_\_

Psalm: \_\_\_\_\_ [\_\_\_\_\_] *Cantor:* \_\_\_\_\_

2nd Reading: \_\_\_\_\_ Reader: \_\_\_\_\_

Gospel Acclamation: \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] Cantor: \_\_\_\_\_

Gospel: \_\_\_\_\_ Cleric: \_\_\_\_\_

Homily points: \_\_\_\_\_ Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Rings: 1 / 2      Other symbols: \_\_\_\_\_

Prayers of Faithful by: \_\_\_\_\_ Reader: \_\_\_\_\_

Response: \_\_\_\_\_ Special Intentions? \_\_\_\_\_

**Creed? Yes / No      Eucharistic Prayer: I / II / III / VNO-B / VNO-C**

**Register:** Now / End of Service    Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Witnesses: \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
if not Best Man & Chief Bridesmaid

Covering music: \_\_\_\_\_

**Procession of Gifts: What:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Who:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Hymn?** \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

**Sanctus:** \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] **Cantor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acclamation:** \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] **Cantor:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Amen:** \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] **Cantor:** \_\_\_\_\_

Nuptial Blessing: A / B / C    Place: \_\_\_\_\_

**Sign of peace details:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Agnus Dei:** \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] **Cantor:** \_\_\_\_\_

Communion: No / Reserved / **Mass: Host Only / Both Kinds**

**Hymn During?** \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

**Hymn After?** \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

Solemn Blessing: A / B / C / E&W    Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Music? \_\_\_\_\_ [ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

**Annex I: The Croatian Marriage Custom, from**  
**<http://www.childrenofmedjugorje.org.uk/com53/newsfrom.shtml>**

The Croatian marriage tradition is so beautiful that it is beginning to take hold in Europe and America!

When a young couple is preparing for marriage, they are not told that they have found the ideal partner. No! What does the priest say?

"You have found your cross. And it is a cross to be loved, to be carried, a cross not to be thrown away, but to be cherished."

If the fiancés were told this in France, they would be struck dumb! But in Herzegovina, the Cross represents the greatest love and the crucifix is the treasure of the home.

When the bride and groom set off for the church, they bring a crucifix with them. The priest blesses the crucifix, which takes on a central role during the exchange of vows. The bride places her right hand on the crucifix and the groom places his hand over hers. Thus the two hands are bound together on the cross. The priest covers their hands with his stole as they proclaim their vows to be faithful, according to the rites of the Church. Fr. Jozo explains that the bride and groom do not then kiss each other, they rather kiss the cross. They know that they are kissing the source of love. Anyone close enough to see their two hands joined over the cross understands clearly that if the husband abandons his wife or if the wife abandons her husband, they let go of the cross. And if they abandon the cross, they have nothing left. They have lost everything for they have abandoned Jesus. They have lost Jesus.

After the ceremony, the newlyweds bring the crucifix back and give it a place of honour in their home. It becomes the focal point of family prayer, for the young couple believes deeply that the family is born of the Cross. When a trouble arises, or if a conflict breaks out, it is before this cross that they will seek help. They will not go to a lawyer, they will not consult a fortune-teller or an astrologer, they will not rely on a psychologist to solve the problem. No, they will go straight before their Jesus, before the cross. They'll get on their knees there and in front of Jesus, they will weep their tears and pour out their hearts, and above all exchange their forgiveness. They will not go to sleep with a heavy heart because they will have turned to their Jesus, the only One who has the power to save.

They will teach their children to kiss the cross every day and not to go to sleep like pagans without having thanked Jesus first. As for the children, as far back as they can remember, Jesus has always been the friend of the family, respected and embraced. They say "nighty-night" to Jesus and kiss the cross. (As Fr. Jozo says, "They go to sleep with Jesus, not with a teddy bear!"). They know that Jesus is holding them in his arms and that there is nothing to be afraid of, and their fears melt away in their kiss to Jesus.

## **Annex II: Additional Symbolic Rituals, from a survey of Diocesan Policies in the US**

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/marriage-preparation/mpanalysis.cfm>

### *Unity Candle*

Although lighting a “unity candle” is not part of the Rite of Marriage it has become very popular as an additional ritual. Most policies do not prohibit this custom but many suggest that it be done at the reception since the Rite of Marriage already has abundant symbols of unity. Cincinnati’s *Celebrating Marriage* booklet has a pastoral explanation for this. If the unity candle is used, the couple should light their individual candles from the paschal candle, the individual candles should not be extinguished, and the candle should not be placed on the altar. The Sioux City policy reinterprets the unity candle as the “Christ candle.” Liturgists continue to discuss the use and conflicting meanings of the unity candle.

### *Placing flowers before a statue of Mary*

“Some couples may wish to dedicate their marriage to the Blessed Mother. Before the dismissal, the couple takes a flower or bouquet to the statue or altar of Mary and places it there. They remain there for a time of prayer and then return to their places.” (Sioux City) This custom reflects a personal devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and is not part of the Rite of Marriage. Most policies suggest that couples who have a particular Marian devotion make this gesture at the rehearsal or after the final blessing.

### *Lazo*

A *lazo* is generally a double looped rosary that rests on the shoulders of the couple as a sign of the unity in the vows they have professed.

### *Exchange of Arras (coins)*

The exchange of *arras*, or coins, in the Spanish-speaking community expresses mutual sharing. While this ritual is authorized for use in the liturgical books of other national episcopal conferences, it is not a part of the rite that is approved for use in the United States.

### *Velo*

The *velo* or veil is most often used by families of Filipino heritage. The *velo* is extended over the shoulders of the bride and groom after the vows have been spoken, and the *lazo* holds it in place. For fuller explanations of these last three customs see the Allentown policy.

## **Annex III: Ideas in the 1990 Draft Rites for England & Wales**

The Liturgy Commission of the Bishops’ Conference of England & Wales issued a consultative text for marriage rites in 1990. This has never been authorised for use by the Vatican, but it is interesting to note the customs which are included:

- ▶ Use of a unity candle is envisaged as an optional but integral part of the rite.
- ▶ ‘Gold and silver or other tokens of shared life’ may be exchanged by the couple at the same time as the ring(s) are given.
- ▶ A gift from the parish community – a Bible or crucifix for the new family’s home – may be formally presented after the exchange of rings.
- ▶ A collection for a worthy charity agreed by the couple and celebrant might be taken during the preparation of gifts.