

Music for the Wedding Liturgy

The directives for the liturgical music at a wedding liturgy are the same ones that are applicable for Sunday Mass. The music selections must be appropriate for the location within the liturgy and the particular ritual action taking place. The texts of the musical elements in most parts of the liturgy are given in the rite itself. In the locations where options are permitted, the texts should be taken from liturgical music sources and judged by their appropriateness to the scripture readings of the day and the prayer texts of the wedding liturgy.

Instrumental Music

Instrumental music is usually selected for the time period 1) before the wedding liturgy when the assembly is gathering and 2) during the opening and concluding processions of the liturgical ministers and the wedding party. This music sets the tone for the celebration and enhances the ritual actions.

Since the assembly will want to watch the procession, it is best if instrumental music accompanies the entrance procession. It is important to remember that the Sacrament of Marriage is a relationship of two equal parties. One person is not given to the other nor put on display for the other. The bride and groom are making a public commitment of their love for one another. It is important to avoid setting just the bride apart by special music or by having the assembly stand for just her entrance. This practice reflects a skewed understanding of the role that each person has in the marriage covenant relationship.

When the bride and groom have taken their places, the entrance song, an opening song for the celebration may be sung or the Entrance Antiphon is sung or said by the presider.

Note: Recorded music may never be used in place of live music ministry and musicians.

Primary Musical Elements

The most important musical elements of the wedding liturgy are:

- **The opening song**

The opening song is one of the most important elements of the introductory rite. It serves to set the focus for the celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. It unifies this group of individuals from two different families, different parishes/communities, even different parts of the country, in a way no other action can do. Since the assembly's focus is on the people in the procession it works best to sing the opening song after the bride and groom have reached their places. Alternately, an Entrance Antiphon may be sung by the cantor / choir or simply recited by the presider.

- **Responsorial Psalm**

The responsorial psalm is sung after the first scripture reading. The psalm response/refrain offers the assembly the opportunity to express their faith and trust in God. The cantor sings the verses of the psalm and after each verse the assembly sings the refrain.

- **Gospel Acclamation**

This acclamation precedes the proclamation of the Gospel and is always sung. It is usually in the form of an Alleluia, except during Lent, when another acclamation of praise is sung. The assembly sings the acclamation and a verse is usually sung by the cantor.

- **Eucharistic Acclamations and Lamb of God**

When the wedding liturgy takes place within the Mass, the acclamations within the Eucharistic Prayer (Holy, Holy; Memorial Acclamation and Great Amen) are sung, as is the Lamb of God. These acclamations are always sung if there is any singing at the liturgy. The setting chosen should be one that is most familiar in the archdiocese. The parish music minister can assist with this decision.

- **Communion Song**

The song during the Communion procession expresses the assembly's joy and unity in receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. A song with a short or familiar refrain allows the assembly to participate in the Communion song while they are moving in procession. The cantor usually sings the verses of this song.

- **Glory to God**

The Glory to God is required for the nuptial Mass. It is only omitted if the wedding rite is inserted into a feast or solemnity where the Glory to God is not said, such as a Sunday of Advent or Lent. The dialogical form, with the assembly singing the refrain and the cantor the verses, works best.

Secondary Musical Elements

Intercessions

The intercessions or prayers of the faithful, may be recited or sung. The presider introduces this prayer, either spoken or sung. The deacon, cantor or other person may sing or recite the intentions with the assembly giving the sung or spoken response.

Lord's Prayer

If the decision is made to sing the Lord's Prayer, the setting should be one that the whole assembly can sing. A soloist may not sing the Lord's Prayer in place of the assembly.

Musicians for the Wedding Liturgy

The Director of Music Ministry in the parish where the wedding liturgy will be celebrated is the first person to contact regarding the music for the wedding liturgy. This individual can provide a list of qualified liturgical musicians and offer guidance in making the appropriate musical selections for the wedding liturgy.

Instrumentalists (organist, other keyboardist, ensemble)

Liturgical instrumentalists have training not only in their particular instrument but also in the ministry of music. The primary role of the instrumentalist is to lead the assembly in song, to accompany the cantor's individual verses and to provide appropriate instrumental selections to enhance the celebration.

Cantor

The primary role of the cantor is to sing the verses of the responsorial psalm after the first scripture reading, to support the assembly's song and to offer hospitality and assurance of when to sing. The cantor is a ministerial role and dialogical in nature. A cantor must be someone who is properly formed in Catholic liturgy and takes this role regularly in his/her parish. A soloist without such training is not appropriate for this ministry.

Worship Aid

Some type of program, including the order of service, sung and spoken responses/songs, and any other information needed for full participation, is given to each person as they enter the church. Most parishes have someone who can advise or assist in the preparation of the worship aid.

To reprint any music selection, words only or words and musical notation, requires a copyright permission from the publisher or copyright holder. The parish may have a copyright license for a particular publisher's music to be used for liturgies in their parish. The parish director of music can advise on this. The worship aid could also refer to page numbers in the parish hymnal eliminating the need to include the music selections in the program.

General Information on Selecting Music

The preparation of the Liturgy must concern not only those involved but also the norms of the ritual itself (RM 28-32). The marriage Liturgy presents particular challenges and opportunities to planners. Both musicians and pastors should make every effort to assist couples to understand and share in the planning of their marriage Liturgy. Since oftentimes the only music familiar to the couple is not necessarily

suitable to the sacrament, the pastoral musician will make an effort to demonstrate a wide range of music appropriate for the Liturgy (SL 218).

It is helpful for a diocese or a parish to have a definite but flexible policy that provides clear guidance and also allows for pastoral sensitivity regarding wedding music. This policy should be communicated early to couples as a normal part of their preparation in order to avoid last minute crises and misunderstandings (SL 219).

Particular decisions about choice and placement of wedding music should be based on the three judgments: the liturgical judgment, the pastoral judgment, and the musical judgment. As indicated previously, all three of these judgments must be taken into account, since they are aspects of a single judgment. Additionally, music should reflect the truth that all the sacraments celebrate the Paschal Mystery of Christ (Cf. SC 61; CCC 1621). Secular music, even though it may emphasize the love of the spouses for one another, is not appropriate for the Sacred Liturgy. Songs that are chosen for the Liturgy should be appropriate for the celebration and express the faith of the Church (Cf. RM 30; SC 118, 121).

If vocal soloists are to be employed in the celebration of the sacrament, they should be instructed on the nature of the Liturgy and trained in the unique aspects of singing in a liturgical context. Either the soloist should be trained to carry out the ministry of psalmist and cantor, or else another singer should be secured for this liturgically important role. In all cases, soloists should be aware that their talents are offered at the service of the Liturgy. Vocalists may sing alone during the Preparation of the Gifts or after Communion, provided the music and their manner of singing does not call attention to themselves but rather assists in the contemplation of the sacred mysteries being celebrated. Soloists should not usurp parts of the Mass designated for congregational participation (SL 221).

If the Rite of Marriage is celebrated within Mass, the norms for music within Mass as described in SL 137-199 apply. The entrance procession --- consisting of the ministers, attendants, witnesses, bride, and groom--- is accompanied by a suitable song or instrumental music. If instrumental music is played, the assembly may join in a song once all have taken their places. The Liturgy of the Word proceeds as usual with a Responsorial Psalm, which may be sung. Following the homily, the sacrament is celebrated with the exchange of consent and the Church's reception of consent. After the blessing and exchanging of rings, a song or hymn of praise may be sung (RM 64). Depending on the local custom and the culture of the families, after the exchange of rings, the veiling of the bride and groom and other customary actions may be added, during which an appropriate psalm or song may be sung (SL 222).

When for pastoral reasons, the sacrament is celebrated outside of Mass, the Liturgy should begin with an entrance song or instrumental piece (RM 78-79). If instrumental music is played, the assembly may join in a song once all have taken their places. The Liturgy of the Word takes place in the usual manner, with the possibility of singing a Responsorial Psalm (RM 83). Following the homily, the sacrament is

celebrated with the exchange of consent and the Church's reception of consent. After the blessing and exchanging of rings, a song or hymn of praise may be sung . . . (RM 94; SL 223).

Since the celebration of marriage is a communal celebration, participation aids should be provided to the congregation so that they might follow the ritual with understanding. This, in turn, allows them to have full and active participation in the celebration. Participation aids should include especially those elements of the Liturgy unique to the marriage rite, as well as translation of any song not sung in the vernacular. Such participation aids should also include proper copyright notices for permission to use copyrighted music in the program (SL 224).