



Photo by Susan McKinney

## A Bishop's Work

Fifth grade students at Good Shepherd school find out first hand from Bishop Joseph L. Hogan about his work. The bishop's June 2 visit was arranged by fifth grade teacher Dennis Sewar, a Becket Hall graduate who will be entering St. Bernard's in the fall.

## Insights in Liturgy

By FATHER BENEDICT EHMANN

### Catholic Wedding Music

There is no reason why the choice of music for Catholic weddings may be guided by any different standard from that of other liturgies. The plea that "it is the bride's one big day" and so "allow her what she asks for" is a cop-out for priests who let themselves be cowed by tearful brides and irate mothers. The priest is the custodian of liturgy. He is responsible for maintaining its standards and providing the right environment for its celebration. If he disregards these things, he allows the liturgy to be debased into a rhapsody of sentimental, trivial knick-knacks which are about as far from the true liturgy as Pepsi-Cola from vintage wine. It wasn't Pepsi which the servants poured into the great jars at Jesus' word during the wedding feast at Cana.

The United States bishops give us this principle:

Great care should be taken, especially at marriages, that all the people are involved at the important moments of the celebration; that the same general principles of planning worship and judging music are employed as at other liturgies; and above all; that the liturgy is a prayer for all who are present, not a theatrical production. (Paragraph 82, Music in Catholic Worship, BCL)

This says a great deal and would answer many questions if only it were heeded. Here then are the basic agenda to be carefully planned and

faithfully worked out at a Catholic wedding.

1) Because liturgy is prayer, and a Christian wedding is liturgy, the wedding music should be prayer music, reflecting a prayerful spirit in the singers and players, inspiring a prayerful response in the congregation. This standard should ex-communicate some songs which are currently being included in Catholic weddings. Attractive as some of these are, they express merely human experience. They polarize the spouses in the romance of their love. They are self-serving, self-idolizing. Surely at this critical moment of their nuptial vows and Eucharist, the spouses ought not to need such songs to engender their love. What they do need, there in church before the altar of God, is what the liturgy aims to do, to lift up their hearts to the Lord, to integrate their human experience into a religious one. In the liturgy Jesus is present, doing something unique and special, incarnating our human aspirations and loves and energies into His, making of them an offering with Himself to the Father. This is what Eucharist means and does. This is the dimension and dynamic of each of the sacraments — of marriage too, in which the spouses find not themselves only, but God too, as God in Jesus finds them and knits them together, as He is knit to His Church, and the Church to Him.

2) Because Christian liturgy is communitarian, engaging the participation of the people, wedding music planning should give top priority to when, what and how much the congregation of guests will sing. Thoughtful Catholic spouses will be

more concerned with this than with having a soloist. A choral group is preferable to a soloist, not to do all the singing, however, since the congregation is not to be cheated of its part. But if a soloist is wanted, let's stand by a few criteria: a) a good voice, adequately trained, not operatic, or coloratura, or rock-and-roll style; b) not for entertainment, but for inspiration of faith and prayer; c) not at any indiscriminate time of the liturgy, but only at compatible moments and with compatible selections relating to those moments. It is really preferable that a soloist sing before than during the liturgy. If an Ave Maria is urgently desired, there is no right place for it within the liturgy. It could be sung before the bridal entrance, or before the recessional while the bride places flowers at the shrine of Our Lady.

If you insist on the Schubert or Gounod settings of Ave Maria, they are difficult pieces both for the singer and the accompanist. They should not be performed except by at least adequate artists. Otherwise, forget it, please.

In all of this, I realize that good taste, so important in every respect, cannot be legislated. It is thankless toil to compile a list of "acceptable" titles for wedding music. The Church Music document of the U.S. bishops seconds this statement. It says: "The preparation of such a list, with all the difficulties of subjective judgements and decisions, would canonize certain texts and music, much of which would be only adequate and not truly commendable."

I wish for all brides and grooms a prayerful wedding, resounding with celebrative music to the praise of God and the joy for all His people who are there.

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