

A Community Celebration

By Father Richard Vosko
NC News Service

The couple said to the priest, "We would like to give a gift to the Church. Is there something you can suggest?"

The priest answered, "You are the best gift of all."

A marriage links man to woman; it joins one family to another; it is a bond which strengthens the Church at large.

Marriage celebrates a commitment. The contract is not just between two people but between two people and a community. So it is celebrated publicly and planned carefully.

A parish may have many weddings every year. But each is special because each couple is unique.

Here I offer some reflections on celebrating a wedding as a community event. I hope they prove helpful.

A gathering of the community is something special. So it is heartwarming when people are welcomed at the church entrance, especially when the bride and groom are there to express the greetings. Oh, I know it is considered bad luck for the bride to be seen at this point. But could this hospitable gesture come to be seen as a sign of good luck? It is an opportunity for the couple to say, "We are so glad that you are here to celebrate with us." (The music at this point is festive, serving to get people into the mood for the celebration.)

wedding processions really marches for women only? Where are the men? Tradition, right? But maybe everybody in the wedding party could come in together. Whose wedding is it anyway? (The minister for the wedding is often part of the procession.)

And why is the bride given away to the groom if everyone is created equally? Maybe both sets of parents or representatives from each family could exchange greetings at the end of the procession and gesture to the bride and groom to go ahead together.

Everyone sits for the readings from scripture. Yet many churches still use kneelers for the bride and groom. Why do they have to kneel when everyone sits? The gown. You cannot wrinkle the gown.

But at this time of the wedding festival, it makes little sense to kneel, even in terms of adoration. When family and friends sit together with the bride and groom, the community nature of the event is seen more clearly.

Now is a time to listen to scripture. There are other times during the wedding rite for contemporary readings or poetry. All this takes practice, but can be quite pleasing in the context of the community at prayer.

After the homily, the invitation is made to the bride and groom to stand and share their consent with each other publicly.

exchanged: a ring, a kiss, a hug. Joyful music is played and everyone breaks into song. The couple is embraced by family and friends before they pause to pray. They pray together not for themselves but for the community and its needs.

The Liturgy of the Word is completed now and gifts are brought to the altar table if the Eucharist is to be celebrated.

Bread baked by human hands and the luscious fruit of the vine are brought forward, perhaps by family and friends, to be offered to the creator. Music and song can accompany this procession and preparation of the altar (perhaps also done by family and friends). The wedding party and all other guests are now ready for the Eucharistic Prayer.

I think care should be taken so that the location of the wedding party does not exclude anyone from the notion of gathering around the table of the Lord.

The shared communion is a sign of the covenant between God and human creatures. A marriage is a beautiful witness to that covenant.

In fact, the marriage contract is linked to a contract with God to work hard to bring peace and harmony to the world.

Finally, a thankful prayer, a blessing for good health and prosperous days and a festive walk together — forever. A new husband and wife — a new gift to the community.

Then, I wonder: are Signs of the contract are

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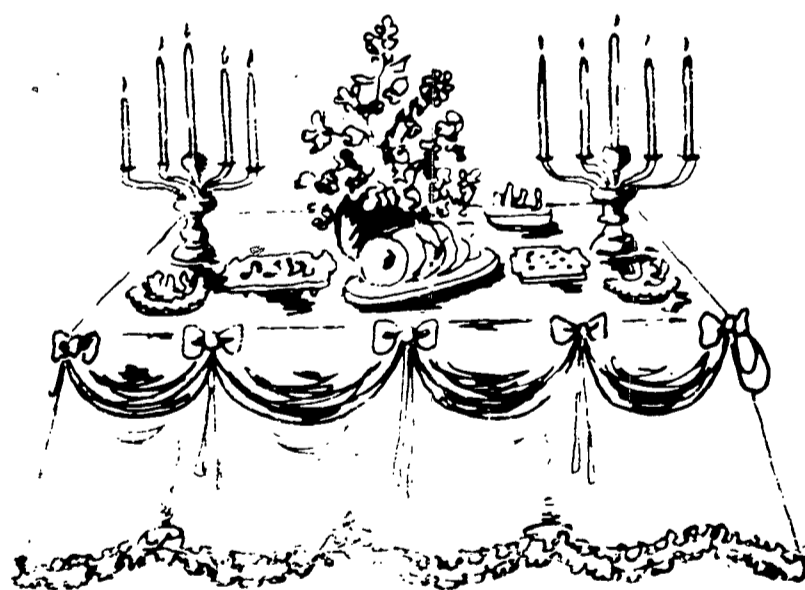
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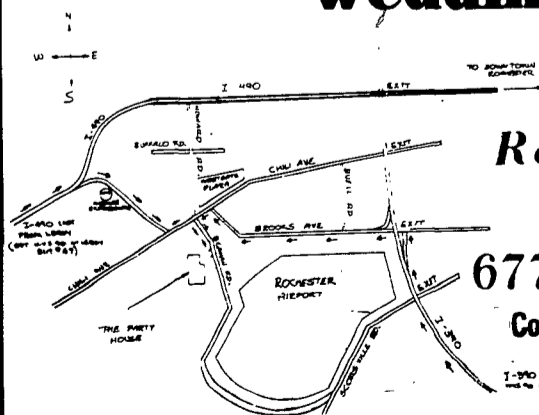
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