

Wedding ceremony at Sunday Mass creates community

By Father David Monahan
NC News Service

Bob Niles and Terri Bates planned their wedding for Jan. 19 at the 11 a.m. Mass, a regularly scheduled Sunday eucharistic liturgy at St. James Church in Oklahoma City.

At the least, it would be a conversation piece for the people of St. James.

At best, it would be a community builder for the parish as a whole and especially for the young couple daring enough to ask that their wedding be a true parish celebration.

"I had mentioned it in one setting and Bob and Terri had heard about it," said Father James Kastner, the quiet but astute pastor of St. James.

The couple communicated their desire to be wed on a Sunday and finally chose the third Sunday of January because the gospel reading for that day is the story of the wedding feast at Cana.

"Basically it's a Sunday parish Mass at which some members of the parish are getting married," Father Kastner said. "We don't adjust the readings. We relate the wedding to the readings."

Father Kastner explained that the community emphasis at Bob and Terri's wedding would be enhanced by announcements in the parish bulletin some weeks before the event, inviting the members of the parish to attend.

Following the wedding Mass, a simple reception, open to all, would be held in the parish hall.

Father Kastner's 25 years as a parish priest leave him with no illusions that all engaged couples arriving at his rectory door to discuss their impending marriage are eager to celebrate their wedding with the whole parish.

They often have preconceived notions, he said. "'This wedding is mine,' they say. 'This wedding is ours. Our wedding is going to be a very private thing.' There is not a high level of awareness of marriage as a sacrament, a celebration of the church."

In the planning between couple and pastor for the marriage liturgy, tensions often surface in different ways, Father Kastner said. The most frequent conflicts occur about music and seasonal decorations.

A young woman who has fantasized for years about gliding down the aisle to the strains of the Lohengrin wedding march is not about to click her heels gleefully at the suggestion of a more liturgically correct composition, the pastor indicated.

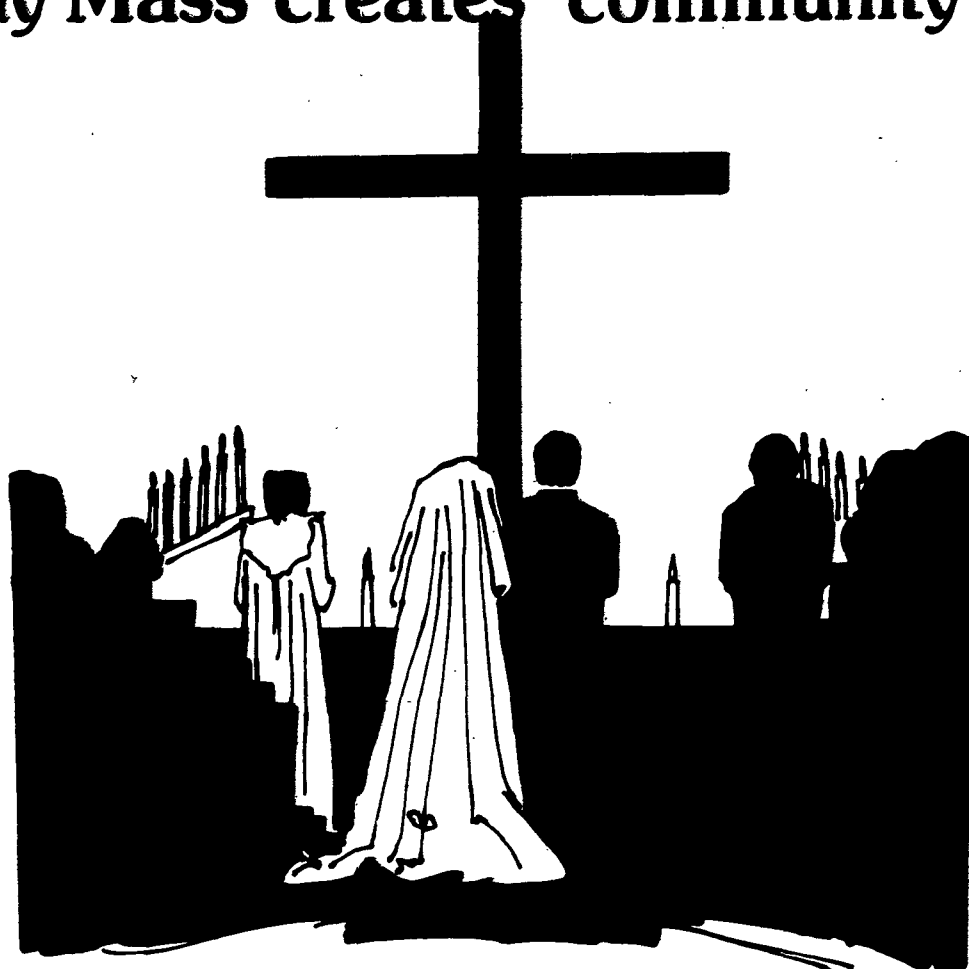
But at least in some cases, the Sunday parish Mass wedding can be a strike for freedom from bondage to the popular but culturally ephemeral, Father Kastner indicated.

We have baptisms at Mass and we have anointings of the sick at Mass, he said. And today we gather for the sacrament of reconciliation in a communal rite.

"Most of the sacraments are celebrated when some portion of the parish community can be present," he said. "It seems to me that, now and then, if you can have a wedding take place at a Sunday Mass, it is a healthy thing for all."

Father Kastner cautioned that the wedding-at-Sunday-Mass approach should only be used when the couple is well known in the parish.

The pastor said other effective means for creating some community involvement at a marriage ceremony include publishing in the



Sunday bulletin a general invitation to the people of the parish to take part in a wedding no matter when it is celebrated, and asking

many people ordinarily involved in the Sunday liturgies — for example, music groups, servers and lectors — to participate.

Book offers tips on testing marriage decision

"For most people the decision to marry is as drastic and life-shaping as any decision they ever make," writes Holy Cross Father James Tumstead Burtchaeil, in his new book, "For Better — For Worse: Sober Thoughts on Passionate Promises." The Notre Dame University theologian adds that the vision of marriage he is presenting in the book comes from "the very center of the

Catholic tradition of marital fidelity."

Noting that, as an educator, he deals mostly with young people on the road to marriage, Father Burtchaeil says he advises testing the decision to marry. Here are some ways he suggests for testing the decision:

- "To face life together a couple must have experienced forgiveness and reconciliation. They must have given and taken enough

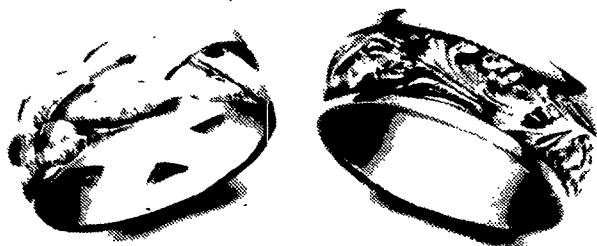
offense to see how each copes with serious anger and humiliation and stubbornness."

- Before marrying couples should, see each other "in their native habitats... The age at which most people marry is a time when some have pulled about as far away from the values of their upbringing as they will ever go." But, after marriage, he continues, when they begin to face the issues and re-

sponsibilities their parents faced before them, it is remarkable how many "will home in on the very things that were held in high regard in their parents' homes."

"For Better — For Worse: Sober Thoughts on Passionate Promises" is published by Paulist Press, 997 MacArthur Blvd., Mahwah, N.J. 07430. The 1985 issue costs \$4.95.

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