

Traditions

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red carnation, symbolic of her passage from the single to the married state.

At Croatian, Bohemian and Hungarian unveilings, mothers give their daughters aprons and babushkas as signs of their vocation as wife, mother and homemaker.

Hispanics in the United States have no uniform culture because they trace their roots to different countries, each reflecting the cultural differences of missionaries from different parts of Spain.

However, the Spanish custom of the blessing of the coins is followed by Americans of Hispanic ancestry from various countries, and provision is made for it in the church's wedding ritual.

Praying together

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bed, others sit together on a sofa, and others pray over coffee at the breakfast table. Several said they held hands or touched one another during the prayers.

Almost all preferred to pray in the morning. Unlike those who may join in prayer only during a crisis, their shared prayers were a daily habit.

In addition to using the couples as models, the book teaches couples how to pray together by presenting some ordinary family events (including fretting about kids, worrying, and making up) and "looking at them through a scriptural lens."

The O'Briens wrote: "Our emphasis is on listening-to-learn from God, about God."

In addition to the benefits resulting from shared prayer, Mrs. O'Brien said spiritual growth also occurs "in smiling at one another, being courteous, and looking at each other during conversation."

Mrs. O'Brien believes that prayer enhances the communication which is so necessary for marital harmony, and readily admits that poor communication has created tension in her own home.

In her marriage to O'Brien, a widower, she became a step-mother to his five children.

"It was very difficult for the youngest daughter to have a woman in the house — it was painful for both of us. One day I told Gene that I wanted to go away. He understood me to say that I wanted to leave, but I never meant that. Rather, I meant that at that moment, I wanted to get out of the house."

Because the O'Briens know how to pray, and are good communicators, a family crisis was averted.

In her counseling position, Mrs. O'Brien said she admires couples who seek help in "learning to talk better to one another."

A decision to go to a marriage counselor, she said, takes "real humility, and is an indication of spiritual growth."

She noted, too, that "marriage is not just a private circumstance of two people," but that the relationship spills over to their children and to society.

Asked to comment on the fact that one in two marriages in the United States ends in divorce, Mrs. O'Brien said she believes that in many cases "friendship isn't deep enough, either before or after marriage."

She explained: "Some people don't have the skills to make clear what they want, or know how to affirm one another, or to reveal themselves in communication. Those things are precisely what happens when we pray together."

After the exchange of vows, the priest blesses 12 dimes, and the groom drops them one by one into the hands of the bride as he pledges: "I am willing to share with you the material goods that the Lord will grant us together."

Another Hispanic custom, seen less often, involves the use of an ornately decorated rope draped or wrapped around the couple as a sign that their marriage has bound them together. A huge rosary is sometimes substituted for the rope.

At Hungarian weddings, the hands of the bride and groom are bound together by a stole to symbolize the marriage bond. Afterward, in a ceremony emphasizing the place of Christ as head of the family, the couple places their hands on a cross and pledge their love and fidelity.

Bread and salt — signs of welcome to guests — play a role in Croatian and Polish weddings.

At Polish receptions, the couple is given bread and salt upon their arrival as a sign that they will never go hungry. It is customary for Croatians to give bread and salt to guests as they file out of church.

Nationality customs even govern the wedding procession. In an effort to

assert their independence from outside influence, German and Polish couples walk down the aisle together. At Hungarian weddings, the bride and groom are each flanked by their parents, as a sign that marriage is a family event.

Those who attend Italian weddings usually can't find any distinctive custom. Receptions are a different story. It has been said that you always can tell you are at an Italian wedding reception because of the extraordinary amount of hugging and kissing. It's not unusual for men to embrace men, and kiss one another on both cheeks.

The Polish couple customarily goes to the home of one of their parents, and kneels and receives their parents' blessing before going to church together.

For Croatians, the party begins before the wedding, when family members and close friends go to the home of the bride's parents for food, drink and music. The day after the wedding, the group returns there for a dinner, usually consisting of leftovers from the reception.

All of the ethnic groups accent fun at the wedding celebrations.

Outside the church after the ceremony, Polish couples have been saluted with the release of helium-filled

balloons.

There's a bit of tomfoolery at Hungarian receptions, when the best man, ushers and other male guests "steal the bride" and hide her until the groom meets their ransom demands.

"I'll buy her a new dress," the groom pledges.

"That's not enough," comes the response.

"I'll do the dishes," the groom adds, and gets the same response.

After a dozen or so extraordinary promises are extracted from the groom, the bride is "freed."

One unusual Croatian custom has faded away. Until about 25 years ago, the bride's father would open congratulatory cards and announce at the reception the exact amount of each guest's monetary gift. The practice often swelled the couple's coffers which they sorely needed to start a household.

But the disclosure, more often than not, caused embarrassment and hard feelings among friends and relatives who tried to outdo each other in generosity. Now, guests drop their envelopes into a box at the wedding reception.

"Some envelopes are empty," a Croatian neighbor observed, "but it's a lot better than the old way."

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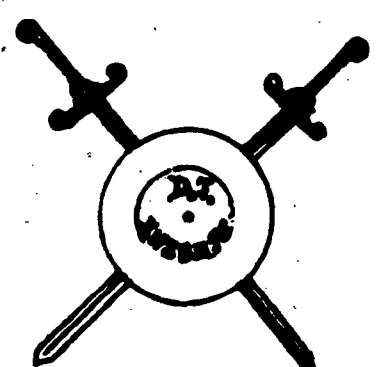
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