

MUSIC FOR THE WEDDING LITURGY

A well-chosen program of music has the potential to draw people into the celebration, and transform the congregation into willing participants, rather than mere spectators. “Music in Catholic Worship”, a document prepared by the United States’ Committee on the Liturgy notes the important role music plays in liturgy:

Among the many signs and symbols used by the Church to celebrate its faith, music is of preeminent importance. The function of music is ministerial; it must serve and never dominate..... It imparts a sense of unity to the congregation and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration.
(Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983, 23-24)

THE MUSIC MINISTER

The first step in planning the music for your wedding is to contact the parish Music minister. You can get the name and contact information from the priest, parish secretary, or the bulletin. Contact the musician as soon as you book the church. You do not have to select the music at this point, but you do want to get the date and time on the musician’s calendar.

INSTRUMENTALISTS

Music at weddings can be accompanied by any combination of instruments. The parish musician can make suggestions, depending on the tone you wish to set at the wedding. The music minister can make arrangements with the particular instrumentalists needed . The music should serve, never dominate. Let’s remember why we’re here today.

THE LEADER OF SONG

Leader of song, or cantor, is an important member of the music team at the wedding. This person motivates the singing of the assembly. The cantor’s role is different from the soloist who usually performs for the assembly. Again, the parish musician can suggest some names of leaders of song who trained for this ministry and who are available to serve at weddings.

If you are thinking of asking a friend to sing at the wedding, be sure that he or she knows how to be a leader of song at Catholic worship. If not, your friend might function better as a soloist.

These details can be discussed when you meet with the music minister.

Last, but not least, the real question with “guest soloist” is whether or not they should sing at the wedding liturgy at all. You certainly don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings, but in certain situations, it might be more advisable to invite them to sing at the reception instead of the liturgy. Perhaps begin the wedding dinner with a special song as part of the blessing before the meal. It could add a touching note to the moment....

SHOULD WE SING? WHAT SHALL WE SING? WHEN SHALL WE SING?

PPROPRIATENESS: The music should be appropriate for worship. We must remember that there are pastoral, liturgical and musical considerations which determine this. Although congregational singing is not often employed, it is something to take into consideration when you are planning. After all, the assembly is not an audience; they are celebrators. Music in the liturgy is an expression of the whole assembly’s prayer and praise to God for this wonderful occasion. For this reason, love songs that do not include God’s love are inappropriate and better appreciated at the wedding reception which has its own set of musical criteria.

ACCESSIBILITY: Liturgy is, first of all, the public worship of our Divine Creator. Because a wedding is liturgy, wedding music should allow and enable the assembly to give praise to God. It should also allow the people an opportunity to thank God for bringing you two together. Because we want to encourage the whole church to sing, you should look for a hymn that is probably familiar to all (perhaps, one of your favorite hymns). If one of you is not Catholic or many of your guests are non-Catholic, you might choose a more ecumenical song. Contrary to what you may have heard, there is not a special

collection of “wedding music”. The music that you might sing at Sunday’s Mass might suite the weeding liturgy very well. But remember that using all of your favorite music doesn’t necessarily guarantee a better celebration; it only guarantees a longer one. Again, work with the music minister.

INVITATION: Just as a cheerful greeting at the door makes you feel welcomed, a gracious invitation to join in song may encourage the assembly to feel welcomed and included as an important part of this celebration. That’s the cantor’s job.

GATHERING SONG: A perfect way to invite the congregation to respond to the powerful moment of the procession is to sing a song together. A favorite hymn just following the procession can be a joyful expression of praise and thanksgiving for God’s love showered on us all and the especially the both of you, as the personification of His love.

THE RESPONSORIAL PSALM: The sung psalm is the response to the Old Testament scripture of the first reading. This is not a place for a favorite hymn or song. Any psalm can be used, but the following are some suggestions (the music minister can suggest some beautiful musical settings):

Psalm 33 emphasizes God’s kindness

Psalm 103 focuses on God’s mercy

Psalm 145 focuses on God’s compassion

Psalm 148 praises God in all aspects of creation

Psalm 112 & 128 makes reference to those who put the Lord first in all things

Psalm 34 speaks of our confidence in the Lord; He will always be there when we call upon Him.

THE GOSPEL ACCLAMATION: The proclamation of the Gospel is preceded by a joyful “Alleluia”. This is not an entire song, but rather an Alleluia refrain with one verse. Again, the music minister can help you. Do not fear, you are not expected to know all of these resources...

THE MARRIAGE RITE: Your exchange of vows and rings is the focus of the marriage rite. No music is necessary.

(If the wedding is not taking place within a Mass, the liturgy concludes soon after the marriage rite. If you would like to have a solo song following the marriage rite, it might be a good time for the both a you to “collect” your thoughts.)

PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS: Instrumental music or a short solo is appropriate, but the music should not delay the liturgy.

EUCCHARISTIC ACCLAMATIONS: Your music minister can suggest commonly used acclamations.

THE SIGN OF PEACE: The “sign of peace” is not a receiving line. Singing is not recommended.

BREAKING OF THE BREAD: The cantor may lead the congregation in singing the “Lamb of God”.

COMMUNION SONG: Singing together is a real sign of our communion with God. Try to choose a familiar refrain that everyone knows.

DISMISSAL SONG: When a festive instrumental recessional is used, a dismissal song is not needed.

KEEP IN MIND The music at your wedding liturgy is an expression of your faith. It should reflect the love that God has for us, and that you have for Him through your life together. You stand before the world as witness that God lives and that God loves. Let the music of the liturgy reflect this.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

THE PROCESSIONAL: The entrance procession is an inspirational highlight for ALL assembled. It is a ceremonial movement that involves both the bride and groom and the liturgical ministers. The bridal party is the symbolic representative of the whole congregation, and by moving together they express their willingness to go forward with the bride and groom in continued friendship, support, and love. The procession is the symbolic action of moving into a new life. This is the reason why many parishes and diocese discourage the composition commonly know as “Here Comes The Bride”. The procession is much bigger than just the bride.

THE RECESSIONAL: There are many possibilities... anything joyful, festive, with a good walking beat.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

Processional

Canon in D (Pachelbel)
Trumpet Voluntary (Clarke)
Jesu, Joy Of Man’s Desiring (Bach)
Prelude In C (Bach)

Recessional

Trumpet Tune (Purcell)
Finale from Water Music (Handel)
Lord Of The Dance

FINAL NOTES

FEES: Music Minister (\$200.00)

Singer/Instrumentalist (approximately \$125.00; cost depends on the individual musician)

Please save the musician the embarrassment of having to ask for money at the wedding. Payment is appreciated ten days prior to the ceremony.

A NOTE TO PARENTS: Hopefully, you will not be upset or feel “left out” when we ask that the bride and groom plan the music for the wedding. It is one way to get to know the couple and understand the tone they would like to set for this wonderful day.