

# The Holy Sacrament of Marriage

Marriage is a sacrament of the Orthodox Church. This means that our Lord Jesus Christ is invisibly present to bless a marriage, through the hands of the priest and the participation of the faithful. The blessing is expressed by the Church through ancient and meaningful prayers and rituals.

## The Rings

Among other meanings, a ring has been a symbol of position, responsibility, and commitment from ancient times. Commitment is a prerequisite for true and eternal Christian love, as exemplified by the sacrificial life of Christ. Thus, each partner, by receiving a ring from Christ, through His Church, enters into a commitment with Christ regarding their marriage. They also enter into a commitment with each other. They commit themselves to follow Christ's example of selfless love in their marriage.

*The servant of God, (N), is betrothed to the servant of God, (N), in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. O You now, O Master, bless this putting on of rings with a heavenly blessing; and may an Angel of the Lord go before them all the days of their lives.*

## The Joining of the Right Hands

The right hands of the couple are joined during the following prayer. This prayer expresses the fact that it is God, through His love for humanity, who joins a husband and a wife to each other, and bestows upon them the fruit of this union. The hands of the couple are kept joined throughout the rest of the Service.

*Do You now, O Master, stretch out Your hand from Your holy dwelling place, and join Your servant (N) and Your servant (N), for by You is woman joined to man. Join them in oneness of mind; crown them into one flesh; grant them the fruit of the womb, and the joy of fair children.*

## The Crowning

The ancient rite of Crowning reflects the couple's new *status* before God, and within the Church. The crowns express the glory and honour bestowed upon the couple by God as they enter into this most blessed relationship. They are crowned as king and queen of their own kingdom, ie. their new household, over which they are to rule with love, wisdom and mercy.

Some interpret the crowns to refer to the crowns of martyrdom, since every true marriage involves immeasurable self-sacrifice from both partners.

*The servant of God, (N), is crowned to the servant of God, (N), in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honour. Psalm 8:5*

## The Epistle Reading (St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 5:20-33)

The Epistle reading expresses the unique relationship that is Christian marriage. The couple are called to serve each other in love; the wife serving her husband, and the husband serving his wife, even unto self-sacrifice, as did Christ for the Church.

*Brethren, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Saviour. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.*

*Husbands, love yours wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself; and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

## The Gospel Reading (The Holy Gospel according to St. John 2:1-11)

The Gospel reading recalls Christ's presence at a wedding at Cana of Galilee. The Lord's presence at that wedding sanctified marriage, as He will sanctify this couple's marriage by His continued presence in it.

*At that time there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with His disciples. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." So they took it. When the steward of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.*

## The Common Cup

The sharing of wine from the common cup serves to impress upon the couple that from that moment on they will share everything in life; the joys as well as the sorrows. Their joys will be doubled and their sorrows will be shared.

*O God, who made all things by Your power, and established the universe, and adorned the crown of everything that You made: Bless with a spiritual blessing this common cup, which You offer to those joined in marriage.*

## The Procession

The husband and wife take their first steps as a married couple being led by a vested priest, a living icon of Christ. This expresses the prayer that all their steps follow the way of Jesus Christ.

During the procession, three hymns are chanted. The first expresses Isaiah's joy at the coming of the Messiah. It is the same joy that the couple feels in each other's presence.

*O Isaiah, dance for joy, for the Virgin was indeed with child, and bore a Son called Emmanuel, both perfect God and man; Daybreak is His Name; whom as we glorify, we bless the Virgin Mother.*

The second hymn praises the sacrifice of the martyrs, for sacrifice is a necessary part of marriage and the Christian life.

*O Holy Martyrs, who have fought the good fight and received your crowns of victory; intercede with Christ our God, that He may have mercy on our souls.*

The third hymn praises and glorifies God, for the couple's marriage is to be dedicated to the glory of God.

*Glory to You, Christ our God, Your apostles' proudest boast, joy of the martyrs, whose message is: the Trinity, one is essence.*

## Final Blessings

*Be magnified, O bridegroom, like Abraham, and be blessed like Isaac, and multiply like Jacob, walking in peace and fulfilling in righteousness the commandments of God.*

*And you, O bride, be glorified like Sarah, and be glad like Rebecca, and multiply like Rachel, rejoicing in your own husband, and observing the paths of the law, for so God is well pleased.*

## Your Presence

We ask that you join your prayers with those of the Church, to call upon Almighty God to bless this marriage.

In an Orthodox Christian place of worship, respectful and quiet behaviour is expected. The clapping of hands, yelling, or other boisterous noise is considered rude. The throwing of confetti, rice, etc., while inside the Church is prohibited. Please conduct yourself respectfully while in this House of God.

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