

Catholic Weddings and Liturgical Music

Diocese of San José

“Good celebrations foster and nourish faith.
Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it.”
Music in Catholic Worship, 6

Preparing your wedding music

Where to Begin

When planning your wedding music, put down that CD of the “Titanic” soundtrack, and rush instead to the next Sunday Mass at your church. Everything you need to know to prepare appropriate music is there. “But I want a memorable ceremony, and that song on the radio is so beautiful.” Yes it is. But there’s a more unique way to make your wedding liturgy memorable and beautiful.

Every liturgy is prepared using this principle: “[The] full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else. For it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.” This comes from the Catholic

Church’s primary liturgy document, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (paragraph 14). When everyone who

attends your wedding is actively involved, it will be more than memorable. It will be transformational. Good liturgy that gives praise for God’s love changes us and changes the world. For how can anyone experience such wondrous love and not want to share that with another person? No movie soundtrack can do that; only the full and active participation of all in the liturgy can. Here are some suggestions for preparing your wedding music so that everyone can enter into that transformational love.

♥ Discuss with your partner your best experience of Sunday Mass. What made it so good?

Gathering

Observe how the church gathers at Mass on Sunday. The ministers and community members greet you. Ushers give you a worship aid and help you find a seat close to the altar. There is a feeling of hospitality and eagerness to begin the important work of praising God. The cantor teaches the psalm that everyone sings easily. All stand and begin the celebration singing as the cross and the Word of God enter the assembly. The song unites and focuses everyone’s thoughts toward the celebration.

How does this Sunday Mass description differ from what happens at the weddings you’ve attended? Did these weddings put

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above all else “the full and active participation by all”? I would guess that you’d say no. So why not use the good qualities from Sunday

Mass to make your wedding a liturgy no one will forget. Here’s what your wedding gathering might look like.

The cantor encourages everyone to sing by teaching the assembly some of the music for your liturgy. The words and music of all the songs (along with the copyright information) is in your worship aid to help your assembly participate. Instead of an instrumental or solo piece, everyone sings as the ministers, the wedding party, and the bride and groom walk down the aisle. To use song and instrumental for the procession, have everyone stand and sing two verses. The same music continues instrumentally as the wedding procession begins. Once the procession has ended, the music builds and everyone sings the rest of the song. If you still want the big organ fanfare, save it for the closing procession.

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Words to know:

acclamation: a short sung statement

assembly: all who gather for a liturgy

cantor: one who leads the assembly in song

liturgy: a set structure of prayers, readings, songs, and symbolic actions that is celebrated by a group of people together

Gathering Rite: the beginning of a liturgy that helps the assembly unite and focus on the liturgy

Liturgy of the Eucharist: the prayers and songs around the altar, and the sharing of consecrated bread and wine during the Mass

Liturgy of the Word: the proclamation of Scripture and songs from the Bible followed by a reflection and prayers

Mass: one of the liturgies of the Church that consists of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist

psalm: a song from the book of Psalms found in the Bible

worship aid: a booklet given to the assembly that includes the music, prayers, and other information to help them participate in the liturgy

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Psalm Response and Acclamations

The whole assembly led by a cantor sings the psalm response after the first reading. The psalm is one way the assembly proclaims and responds to the Word of God, and so it is sung by everyone, not just a soloist. Listen to the psalms at

- ♥ With your partner list some of your favorite gathering songs that you sing at Mass. Why do you like those gathering songs?

Mass. Which texts reflect your response to God for the love you share? Which are easy to sing? List these psalms and ask your music director for help selecting the most appropriate one for your wedding. There are also several acclamations that the assembly sings throughout the Mass. These are short texts, like the “Alleluia” or the “Holy.” Which musical settings are easy to sing? Your music director may know settings that are “cantor/echo,” a simple way to sing unfamiliar music.

Ritual Music

Communion is when the assembly’s unity is most evident, and so it is not a time for a soloist or an instrumental, but for the assembly to sing together. Ask your music director if you can take a hymnal home to look at the communion songs. Which songs express the significance of your “communion”—your common union—as husband and wife?

- ♥ With your partner list some of your favorite communion songs that you sing at Mass. How do these songs speak about your union with God, with each other, and with the whole community?

Other moments for ritual music are at the preparation of gifts, after communion, and at any other cultural rituals such as a presentation to the Virgin Mary or a lighting of candles. The music at these moments needs to fit the action. A four-minute piece for a 30-second action doesn’t work. Instead use a short acclamation, like the “Alleluia” or the refrain of a song. An appropriate place for a solo or instrumental would be at the preparation of gifts. But music for this very short rite shouldn’t stall your liturgy. After communion, you’ll often hear a “meditation” song sung by a soloist. This is a misunderstanding of the communion rite itself. Having been united by the sharing of one bread and one cup, the assembly after communion gives praise to God together either through silent prayer or with a song of praise that all sing. Appropriate songs heighten the meaning of ritual acts. Poorly chosen songs distract. Your music must never dominate but serve the liturgy.

Why It Matters

How you celebrate your wedding will have great effect on all who participate. It can either help them bring God’s love to the world or simply make for a nice video. The Sunday Mass is your model. Pray together for the Spirit to guide your choices. May your wedding be memorable and beautiful, and may it transform us so that we can be God’s love for the world.

- ♥ Reading the psalms each day is an ancient and traditional way of praying at home. If you read one psalm a day, you would finish the whole book of Psalms in three months. Try doing this with your partner as your daily prayer during your engagement. Which psalms do you as a couple relate to most? Why?

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When to sing (italics show appropriate places for assembly song)

[omit bracketed sections for weddings outside of Mass]

Gathering Rite

Gathering Song and Processional
Sign of the Cross and Greeting
Opening Prayer

Liturgy of the Word

First Reading
Psalm Response
Second Reading (optional)
Gospel Acclamation
Gospel Reading
Homily

Rite of Marriage

Questioning of Couple
Exchange of Consent (vows)
Blessing of Rings
Exchange of Rings
General Intercessions

[Liturgy of the Eucharist]

[Preparation of Gifts]
[Eucharistic Prayer]
- *[Holy]*
- *[Memorial Acclamation]*

- *[Great Amen]*

Lord’s Prayer
Nuptial Blessing
[Sign of Peace]
[Fraction Rite (Lamb of God)]
[Communion]
[Silence or *Song of Praise*]

Dismissal Rite

Blessing and Dismissal
Closing Song or Instrumental