

PART SIX

SACRAMENT OF HOLY MATRIMONY



"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh,
So then, they are no longer two but one flesh.
Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Matt 19: 5,6

HIS GRACE BISHOP METTAOUS,
Abbott of El Syrian Monastery

Matrimony is a holy sacrament, officiated by a priest, of uniting a man to a woman. Through this holy sacrament, the man and woman become one, for as the Lord Jesus said, ***“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate”*** (Matthew 19:5,6).

St. Paul expressed the sanctity of the Sacrament of Christian Matrimony, saying, ***“This is a great mystery”*** (Ephesians 5:32), and, ***“Marriage is honourable among all and the bed undefiled”*** (Hebrews 13:4).

THE THREE GOALS OF CHRISTIAN MATRIMONY

1. Cooperation between man and woman;
2. Procreation;
3. Protection against adultery and fornication.

† Cooperation between man and woman:

The Lord God said: ***“It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper comparable to him”*** (Genesis 2:18), ***“Woman was created for the man”*** (Corinthians 11:9).

‘Comparable to him’ meaning similar to him and equal to him, helping him and supporting him in all things.

† Procreation:

To preserve humankind from extinction. Bearing children makes the couple rejoice, and fills the house with joy and strengthens the marital relationship. David says in the Psalm, “***Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward. Like arrows in the hand of warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them***” (Psalm 127:3-5), and, “***Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine, in the very heart of your house, behold thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord***” (Psalm 128:3-6).

Children are a heritage from the Lord and the fruit of the womb is His reward, but if it happens that the Lord God has not given children to a married couple, they should not grieve, but say, ‘Let it be Your will Lord’, in complete surrender to Him. Christianity does not make reproduction the main aim of marriage, but the second aim after cooperation between the married couple.

The church does not permit divorce when one of the partners is barren, but rather advises them to continue together, without destroying their happiness over a matter that is not necessary.

† Immunity against Adultery and Fornication:

St. Paul mentioned: “***It is good for a man not to touch a woman, not to marry. Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality let each man have his own wife, and let each***

woman has her own husband ... For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Corinthians 7). Marriage is the remedy for human weakness, for keeping oneself virtuous, and preventing sexual immorality, which God detests.

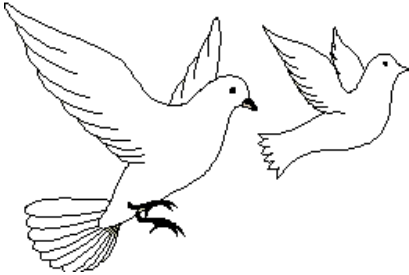
Christian Marriage elevates the bodily union to become a spiritual union, through the Holy Spirit, just as the Holy Spirit works in the Baptismal water to make humans a new creation, and works through the Sacrament of Confirmation to ordain a person to become a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also works in the couple during the marital ceremony, through prayers and faith to unite them in the Lord. Through the commitments made by the bride and groom in fulfilling the commandments of marriage, and the work of the Holy Spirit, the two partners become one.

The Christian marriage is distinguished by certain characteristics, some of which are:

✠ Unity

Christianity believes and insists on the law of monogamy, for in the beginning God created male and female; one Adam and one Eve. Through Matrimony the two become one in Christ. Hence, they are no longer two but one body.

† Continuity



The purpose of Matrimony is continuance, without divorce, except in the case of adultery. This is because a strange person has entered and corrupted the holy unity of Matrimony, an profaned

its holiness. However, if the person who sinned repented, and the partner forgave them, then the Church permits the continuation of the marriage.

The second situation in which divorce may occur, is due to the spiritual immorality or denial of faith and abandonment of Christianity by one of the partners. The matter of annulment of Matrimony, is a matter authorised by the church, in the case where a partner had deceived or cheated the other, and even issues in regards to sexual impotence.

† Bearing fruits

Through the Holy Spirit, the Christian family bears many fruits...

- Christian virtues in the life of its members
- Children, for when the Lord grants blessed children, the family must bring them up in the fear of God and in the Church.

- Service and good deeds that glorify our Father in heaven.
They should deal with all people in true Christian love, living a life of service and self sacrificing. Hence, the many fruits that a Christian family bears are not only children, but love, virtues, and service.

It is advisable that the Sacrament of Matrimony take place in Church, for it is the house of God and the house of angels. Before the altar, the groom receives his bride, committing himself while standing before the altar to love her like himself and treat her as an equal not any less, and she also promises to obey him, as Sarah did with Abraham.

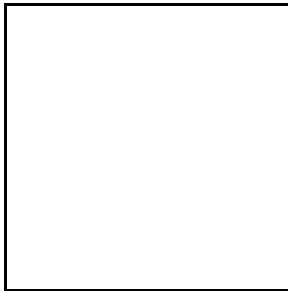
It is not permitted that the Sacrament of Matrimony take place in houses, except in the situation of persecutions, where the lives of the bride and groom are at risk, during the processions. It is also necessary that the houses be big enough for such an occasion.

It is also not permitted that the sacrament of Matrimony take place during seasons of fasting, or times just before fasting begins, for it would not be possible for the newly married couple to abide by the commandment of fasting, both from a food and marital relation perspective.

The Matrimonial Rite is performed for virgin couples, however, if one of the partners is widowed, for example, then there is another prayer called 'The Prayer of Forgiveness'.

It is preferable for the couple to have one confession father, after marriage, who will care for them and help them in their problems, with a fatherly spirit.

The Coptic Church believes strongly in the principle of one wife, and adopts its principle from the holy Gospels, which always alludes to man having only one wife : ***“Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her”*** (Mark 10:11), and as our teacher St. Paul says, ***“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and rejoined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”*** (Ephesians 5:31).



The Matrimonial Rite is divided into three parts

...

- (1) Betrothal
- (2) Ceremony of Marriage
- (3) Holy Matrimony

✠ Betrothal (Engagement)

It precedes the Sacrament of Matrimony, but is not one of the Church's Sacraments. Betrothal is a voluntary agreement resulting from a pure and holy love between a man and a

woman, who accept to marry each other willingly and by their own choice. The man is called the 'fiance', and the woman is too the 'fiancee', being an engaged couple.

The word 'betrothal' is derived from the word 'oratory'; a public declaration whereby the man's folks speak to the woman's family to propose marriage. Discussions are open and honest, concerning issues relating to the matter of betrothal, and the wedding and dowry, and the roles and responsibilities of each family in regards to ensuring the agreement of both man and woman about the marriage. The betrothal must be legal as it is accomplished between a Christian, Orthodox, adult male and female. The minimum age for marriage is 18 years for the male and 16 years for the female.

If one of the partners is unknown to the priest, being from another diocese/country, they must provide a certificate of Recommendation for Marriage from their local parish priest or father of confession, to prove no previous marriages had taken place. The priest must be completely sure of this information, and so write and sign an official Certificate of Betrothal in the presence of the couple, and, witnesses, who also countersign. Information contained on the Certificate of Betrothal, may include the name, address, and the timing for the wedding, together with any other relevant information.

Period of Betrothal: Begins from the time when an official agreement for marriage was declared, and confirmed publicly on the Certificate of Betrothal. The Engagement period concludes with marriage. The period of betrothal is important, for it is the time when the partners should get to know each other better, and grow together in Christian love. During this period, both

partners have a common feeling of spending the rest of their lives together, establishing a happy and successful marriage, and cooperate with each other, without selfish thoughts and desires. During this period, both families become acquainted and cooperate to establish a happy house for the new family. The minimum period for betrothal is a fortnight, and although there is no maximum period, we suggest that it should not exceed a year, so that problems might not arise, resulting in the engagement breakup.

The Rite of Betrothal

- ✠ The official Certificate of Betrothal is written, containing the name, age, (gift) and proposed timing of the Matrimony. The certificate is then signed by the engaged couple, the witnesses, and finally approved by the priest.

- ✠ The deacons proceed the couple into the church, chanting the hymn ‘O King of Peace’. The woman stands on the right side of her man, and together they proceed to the place assigned for the prayers, whether it be in church, or in the woman’s house. The positioning of the woman on the right of the man is in accordance with the Psalm which says, “*At your right hand stands the queen*” (Psalm 45:9). Also, Eve was created from the right side of Adam.

- ✠ The priest holds the two rings, (and any jewellery which may be offered, such as necklaces, bracelets, earrings) in his left hand in a red silk ribbon or in a handkerchief and says the following prayers together with three signs of the cross ...

On the First Sign of the Cross

The priest prays, “*In the name of our Lord, our God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, the founder of the laws of perfection, we ¹declare at this ²Orthodox ceremony the betrothal of the blessed Orthodox son (...name) to the blessed Orthodox daughter (...name).*”

(The priest makes the sign of the cross on himself, then the couple, and then the rings, (and jewellery) saying, “*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen. Blessed be God, the Pantocrator. Amen.*” Then the congregation prays the ‘Our Father’.

On the Second Sign of the Cross

The priest prays, “*In the name of our Lord, our God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, the founder of the laws of perfection we declare at this Orthodox ceremony the betrothal of the blessed Orthodox daughter (...name) to the blessed Orthodox son (...name),*” (The priest makes the sign of the cross on the couple and the rings), “*Blessed be the only begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*” Then the congregation prays the ‘Our Father’.

¹In the betrothal the priest says: We declare, as betrothal is just a declaration, but as in Matrimony the priest says: We join, as Matrimony is an agreement that is never disunited or united.

²If the betrothal is at church, this statement is added: “before the altar of the Lord of hosts”.

On the Third Sign of the Cross

The priest prays, “*In the name of our Lord, our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, the founder of the laws of perfection, we complete at this Orthodox Ceremony the betrothal of the blessed Orthodox son (...name) to the blessed Orthodox daughter (...name),*” (Then the priest makes the sign the cross on the couple and rings saying), “*Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (Comforter) Amen.*” The deacons respond, ‘Amen’, followed by the congregation praying the ‘Our Father’.

✠ The priest then prays the Prayer of Thanksgiving. All the tunes and hymns are in joyful tunes. Following the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the deacons sing, ‘Worthy’, and during this hymn, the rings are placed on the fingers of the couple as follows:

✠ The priest gives the fiancée’s ring to her fiancée, and he places it on her right ring finger.

NOTES:

- As soon as the fiancée stretches out her hand for her fiancée to place the ring on her finger, she is giving her consent and confirmation regarding the engagement to marry.
- The fiancée wears the ring which has engraved her fiancée’s name, on her right hand ring finger, as a sign that her fiancée has become the ornament of her life, and the reason for her joy, “***I will make you as a signet ring, for I have chosen you***” (Haggai 2:23). Then the same process takes place with

the fiance stretching out his hand for his fiancee to place the ring on his finger.

- Being the officiator of God's sacraments, the priest does not place the rings on the fiances' fingers himself, for whatever work the priest does cannot be undone, for his work is from God. However, the engaged couple place the rings on each others fingers as a symbol of agreement and acceptance, so that even if the betrothal is undone, it is considered not sinful.
- The fiance wears the ring onto which is written the name of the fiancee, in his right hand as a sign that his fiancee will be his right hand, "*as a signet on my right hand*" and will help him and support him honestly and truthfully, in mutual co-operation, after marriage.
- Finally, if there are any gifts, such as jewellery which is offered, then the priest gives the fiance piece by piece for him to place on his fiancee's wrist, ears or neck.

The two rings (and jewellery) are always gold, as gold is the purest of metals, the most beautiful and expensive, and does not rust, just like the bond of holy Matrimony which is invaluable and precious, unperishable and incorruptible. And even if it encounters hardships, it survives, for the relationship is founded on true Christian love and fidelity. The value of the marriage increases over time, through time spent in companionship and love, and in the Lord Jesus Christ, being the founder of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

The bride in the Book of Songs says, ***“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is as strong as death ... Many waters cannot quench love, nor can floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised”*** (Songs 8: 6,7).

✠ Afterwards the priest says a supplication, composed of four parts. At the end of each part, the deacons respond, *“Amen.”*

1. The priest asks God to grant the betrothed couple His acceptance and grace, and to bless the planned - for wedding to result in happiness and in peace.
2. The priest asks that their betrothal be kept pure and legitimate, making them one in mind and soul, and granting them a peaceful and spiritual happiness, shepherd by God.
3. The priest asks God to accomplish and accept the betrothal, and to grant the couple a happy life and to preserve them in His obedience, to adhere to the principles of Orthodox faith and virtues, and to keep them from all division and vices so that their joy will be fulfilled by the blessed Matrimony.
4. The priest asks God to keep in peace the leadership of the Church: His Holiness the Pope, and the Bishops, and the Bishop if there is a diocese, and to bless the attendants in this blessed happy ceremony.

✠ All pray the Lord’s Prayer, then the concluding Prayer, followed by the blessing. The priest prays to bless the

betrothed couple by placing the cross over their bowed heads. They then kiss the cross and the priest's hand. The priest says, "*Pekhristos Pennooti*" (that is, 'Christ our Lord'), and as the people make the sign of the cross, they respond saying, "*Amen, Let it be.*"

- ✠ Finally, the priest says, "*O King of peace, grant us Your peace ...*" followed by the 'Our Father', and then he says the dismissal, "*The peace of the Lord be with you all.*"
- ✠ The deacons then lead the procession of the engaged couple to the church door, where they stand to receive the congratulations of the attendants.

The Betrothal Rite is hence concluded in peace.

Aims of the Betrothal

- For the partners to be better acquainted with each other in terms of their thoughts, motivations, personality and character, style of life, and even level of spirituality.
- For the partners to grow in holy, spiritual unity, away from lusts and physical intimacy, for they are only betrothed and not married.
- For the families of the partners to become better acquainted with love, understanding and cooperation.
- For all concerned, partners and their families, to co-operate in aspects relating to the matrimonial celebration, and helping

prepare a house for the couple to live in a Christian spirit, away from extravagance, pretence, misery or failure to commit matters agreed about.

Renouncing the Betrothal

If problems arise during the betrothal that makes it impossible to accomplish the wedding, both must renounce the betrothal correctly. As they were united in love, they should likewise leave each other peacefully, and without trouble.

These are the basis of renouncing the betrothal :

1. Contact the priest for him to organise a certificate of renunciation.
2. The rejecting partner returns all the gold and the unconsumed gifts and money. The consumed gifts are now irrelevant.
3. The priest writes an official Certificate of Renunciation, signed by the two partners in the presence of witnesses, it is then countersigned by the priest, and each partner receives a copy.
4. If the betrothed couple disagree about materialistic matters, and cannot agree on finalising certain points, then the betrothal must be broken ecclesiastically (through the Church), through the Theological Council of the diocese, a Reconciliation Council, or even Court if necessary, so that each partner maintains their civil rights.

The Ceremony of Marriage

Originally, the time of celebrating the Rite of Matrimony was Sunday morning after the 'Matins' (the raising of morning incense), which took place just before the Mass. Just as the Rite of Monasticism (the consecrating of a monk) takes place after Matins, for he is being joined to the Lord in a holy, spiritual life, in the same way, the bride and groom are being joined together in the Lord by Matrimony, and the sacrament took place at this time in the Liturgy to prepare them for receiving the Holy Eucharist through their attendance in the holy Mass, which takes place directly after the sacrament of Matrimony.



In the past, there was a tradition whereby on the eve of the wedding, the bride and groom, together with their family and friends, would spend vigil in the church hall praying and praising, and thereby making them ready for receiving the Holy Communion the following morning. In the morning, after the morning raising of incense, the deacons proceed the couple into the church singing the appropriate hymns, depending on the church season, in order for the Sacrament of Matrimony to take place.

Such a hall, where the family and friends of the bride and groom meet and spend the night in vigil, exists in St. George's Cathedral in Old Cairo.

This tradition which was kept by the older generations, is derived from the Book of Tobit, (in the Deutrocanonical Books). It tells how the couple spend the first three days of their marriage in prayers and spiritual readings, thus transcending the bodily lusts to spiritual love, in order to be united with God. Hence, they start their marital life with a holy beginning, as a strong foundation like the person who built his house on rock and, ***“The rain descended, the floods came and the winds tribulations and troubles) blew, and beat on that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock”*** (Matthew 7: 24,25).

When the righteous man Tobit married Sarah, he said to her, ***“Rise up my sister, let us pray to God today, tomorrow and after tomorrow. As in those three days we join God. After the third night we consummate our marriage, as we are children of saints and cannot marry like Gentiles who do not know God.’ So both rose up, and prayed fervently for God to bless them”*** (Tobit 8:4-6).

In the past, some priests performed an engagement/betrothal ceremony called ‘Partial Matrimony’. However, this is a grave mistake because such a betrothal cannot be broken, whereas, the Engagement is a period of acquaintance, and so may continue or discontinue, depending on the partners.

Marriage implies that both bride and groom belong to each other, and are united in spiritual love and physical unity, as our teacher St. Paul says: ***“The wife does not have authority over her own body but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does”*** (1 Corinthians 7:4). As each partner’s body

belongs to the other, they cannot defile themselves through committing adultery or fornication. Our teacher St Paul says: ***“Marriage is honourable among all and the bed undefiled”*** (Hebrews 13:4). Commitment to this principle keeps the spiritual life pure and honest and so the relationship will continue in happiness.

The Rite of the Marriage Ceremony

The priest prepares a Certificate of Marriage and contracts of official documentation, in the Church’s office where all the personal information relating to the name, age, date of birth and denomination of the bride and groom, are kept (they must be of the same denomination). The couple sign the documentation, together with the witnesses, and finally the priest. This must all take place before the Marriage ceremony. The priest must also take care to record information correctly on these documents, so that no problems may arise later that might place him in a legal situation.

The priest should wear the full priestly vestment, or at least the ‘Epitrachelion’ (stole), for he will be officiating a great ecclesiastical Sacrament.

The deacons proceed the bride and groom into the Church while chanting the hymn ‘O King of Peace’. The bride, holding the groom’s hand, is on his right side. They proceed down the aisle, and stand in front of the two adjacent seats placed before the altar, facing the south. The bride sits on the right of the groom according to the Psalm, ***“At your right hand stands the***

queen” (Psalm 45:9), and, as mentioned previously, for Eve was created from the rib on the right side of Adam.

Those attending the ceremony take their places quietly and reverently, for they are in attendance of the great Sacrament of Matrimony, and not just attending a common prayer. Just as the Holy Spirit is present during the holy Liturgy, so too is the Holy Spirit present during the ceremony of Matrimony, and dwelling on the couple.

Those who are in the bridal party must take care to dress reverently and modestly, for they are in the house of God. Therefore, indecent and inappropriate clothing and excessive cosmetics, must be abandoned, for they are an insult to the house of God. In the Psalm is written, “***Holiness adorns Your house, O Lord, for ever***” (Psalm 93:5).

Inappropriate dressing also degrades our appearance as Christians before our guests, for instead of looking with the children of God, we give the impression of being mockers who profane God’s house.

The priest must only start the prayers once he feels that all those in attendance are quiet and attending in reverence, and hence are respectful towards the holy Sacrament of Matrimony.

The bride and groom present their rings to the priest, which were originally placed on their right hands, and the priest then places them in a red silk handkerchief, and then begins the prayers for the ceremony of Matrimony.

NOTES:

Tying the two rings in a red handkerchief, symbolises the bond that is being made between the couple to the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the third partner in every Christian family. The handkerchief, or veil is silk, because silk is an expensive fibre, signifying that Matrimony is invaluable and precious, and so should be a strong and unbreakable relationship: ***“What God has joined, let no man separate”*** (Matthew 19:6).

The priest opens the curtains of the sanctuary, and the lights therein are lit.

Standing close by the couple, the priest begins by making the sign of the cross on the rings and the couple three times ...

✠ The First Sign of the Cross

The priest prays, *“In the name of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the founder of the laws of perfection, in this Orthodox ceremony and before the altar of the Lord of hosts, we declare the marriage of the blessed Orthodox son (...name) to the blessed Orthodox daughter (...name),”*

With the cross in his right, the priest makes the sign of the cross on the couple, and the rings, saying, *“In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen. Blessed be God, the Pantocrator, Amen.”* Then he ties the first knot in the handkerchief containing the rings. The deacons respond chanting, *“Amen,”* followed by all praying the Lord’s Prayer.

NOTES:

The prayers of Matrimony always begin with, “*In the name of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ,*” as the name of Christ blesses everything and every work. This Matrimony is founded on faith in Christ, for Christian believers must be an example of the unity of Christ to the Church, which He purchased with His own precious Blood. The Lord still loves, cares and keeps the church, His bride, even after He sacrificed Himself for her, and in return, she obeys and submits to Him.

✠ The Second Sign of the Cross

The priest prays, “*In the name of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the founder of the laws of perfection, and in this Orthodox ceremony, and before the altar of the Lord of hosts, we declare the marriage of the blessed Orthodox daughter (...name) to the blessed Orthodox son (...name)*”, the priest makes the sign of the cross on the couple and the rings saying, “*Blessed be the only Begotten Son Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*” The deacons respond chanting, “*Amen,*” followed by all praying the Lord’s Prayer.

✠ The Third Sign of the Cross

The priest prays, “*In the name of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the founder of the laws of perfection and in this Orthodox ceremony and before the altar of the Lord of Hosts, we complete the marriage of the blessed Orthodox son (...name), to the blessed Orthodox daughter (...name),*”

the priest makes the sign of the cross on the couple and the rings saying, “*Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete the Comforter, Amen.*” The priest then says the following prayer silently: “*Glory and honour, honour and glory to the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit One God, Amen.*”

The priest then ties the third knot while praying, “***What God has joined, let no man separate***” (Matthew 19:6).

Many people refer to the Christian marriage as, ‘the Nazarene knot’; a knot which cannot be untied easily. A Christian Marriage cannot be separated, except in the following circumstances: death, adultery or apostasy.

The deacons respond chanting, “*Amen,*” followed by all praying the Lord’s Prayer.

The priest prays the Thanksgiving Prayer, with the deacons and congregation saying the appropriate responses in joyful tunes. After the Thanksgiving Prayer, the priest places five spoonfuls of incense in the censer, then raises the incense for the Pauline Epistle, after saying silently, the Prayer of Incense of the Pauline Epistle: “*O God the Great and the Eternal, without beginning and without end, great in His counsel...*” and he places his hand with the cross on the couple’s head to bless them.

Meanwhile, the deacons chant the hymn ‘Censer of Pure Gold’, which is a beautiful hymn about St Mary, whom the bride should emulate in terms of her purity, modesty, spirituality and virtues.

Facing west towards the congregation, a deacon then reads from the first Pauline Epistle to the Corinthians, where he addresses those in the ceremony saying, ***“God is faithful by whom you were called to the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord”*** (1:1-10).

Although marriage is a companionship between man and woman, St Paul warns, ***“Waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,”*** by these words, St Paul is saying, expect the second coming of Christ, and do not let any worldly matters, whether it be marriage, children, or otherwise, allow you to forget your goal and your eternity. Hence, wait for the coming of the Lord with vigilance and repentance.

St Paul then address the bride and groom, asking them to always be of the same mind and intentions, so that there be no divisions among them: ***“Now I plea with you, brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement”***, and, ***“endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit”*** (Ephesians 4: 3,4).

The deacons sing the Trisagon of glorification, in joyful tunes, followed by the priest saying the Prayer of the Gospel, while raising incense.

Facing the congregation, a deacon reads the following: ***“Mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other”*** (Psalm 84:10,11), in the same way that the

bride and groom meet and live together, and share intimacy in love, peace, and holy union, both physically and spiritually.

The Gospel reading is from St John, which tells of Christ being the Word and incarnate God, called ‘Emmanuel’, meaning ‘God is with us’, who descended from heaven and united Himself with the Church, His bride, and sacrificed Himself for her. In the same way, this holy unity, which is accomplished through the Sacrament of Matrimony, must be present between the bride and groom. Christ then prays a deep and heartfelt intercession: ***”Holy Father keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are”*** (John 17:11).

The priest prays the three Major Litanies for Peace, the Fathers and for the Congregations. The congregation say the Orthodox Creed, confirming that it is upon this Orthodox faith that the holy Sacrament of Matrimony is to be accomplished, and the faith in which the couple will live by, abide by, and pass on to their children.

✠ **First Prayer**: The priest prays for peace, for the Matrimony, saying, *“Peace be with the groom and his helper.”* He then makes the sign of the cross on their foreheads by his finger. In this prayer he asks God to grant them peace and unity of love through the companionship of holy Matrimony.

The deacons respond, *“O Christ the Word of the Father, the only begotten God, give us Your peace, that is filled with all happiness.”*

† **Second Prayer** : The priest prays, “*Make them worthy of the blessing, and complete their unity without blemish, and make them please Your living will ... Now O Lord bless Your servants ... with wisdom, purity and righteousness...*”

The deacons respond, “*As You gave Your peace to Your saintly apostles ...*”

† **Third Prayer** : The priest prays, “*Bless them and keep their pledge ... assist them in their youth ... As You gave the woman to the man to be a helper for him, and for her to give birth...*”

The deacons respond, “*My peace that I have received from My Father, I leave with you, now and forever.*”

† **Fourth Prayer** : The priest prays the following prayer of thanksgiving, “*We thank You our Lord God ... You gathered the dispersed as one, and united two into one ... grant them an undivided love. Establish them on the foundation of Your holy Church.*”

The deacons respond, “*May God bless us, let us continually praise His holy name...*” (Psalm 67), for His holy name bestows blessing and the compassion of God upon His people. The Church here pleads for the happiness of the couple, and offers thanks and praises unto God.

† **Fifth Prayer** : The priest prays on the vestments saying, “*We ask You Lord to bless these vestments (making the sign of*

the cross on them), so that they may become for Your two servants who are wearing them, through Your goodness, vestments of glory and salvation, vestments of joy and happiness. Preserve them both pure in the soul, body and spirit through acts of righteousness. Grant them both heavenly and earthly comfort. Fill their houses and stores with all blessings ...”

NOTES:

This is a deep, spiritual prayer which asks for health and peace, which arise from acts of righteousness, whereas evil deeds, such as drugs and alcohol, destroy the body. Whilst the church prays for their comfort and joys, they should not forget the true heavenly comfort which God provides with His saints.

The deacons chant the hymn of ‘The Spiritual Vestment’ in the joyful tunes of Psalm Sunday, whilst the priest places the priestly cloak on the groom, and the red ribbons on both the bride and groom.

The red ribbons signify them as being soldiers for Christ, struggling in good faith unto eternity (1 Timothy 6:12).

The cloak is a priestly vestment. The groom wears it to symbolise him becoming head of the house, for he will lead his family in prayers at the family altar. He offers with his family, praises, and thanks unto the Lord, for he takes the place of the family priest, responsible before God.

In Old testament times, it was the father who always offered sacrifices to God and lead his family in prayers, just like Noah (Genesis 8), Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job and many others, and it pleased the Lord (Genesis 8:20).

Prayer of the Holy Matrimony

During this prayer, the priest places two crowns on the heads of the bride and groom; hereby ordaining them king and queen of their new kingdom - their house. This ritual is only done for virgins, or if one of the partners is widowed.

Rite of the Matrimonial Prayer

✠ The priest begins by saying the ‘Our Father’, followed by the Prayer of Thanksgiving. The deacons sing the hymn of ‘*Censer of Pure Gold*’, whilst the priest places five spoonfuls of incense into the censer to begin saying the Litany of the Pauline incense silently, and places the cross on the head of the bride and groom for blessing.

NOTES:

The hymn of ‘Censer of Pure Gold’ is a hymn about St Mary, and it is sung during the ceremony to remind the bride to emulate the holy Theotokos, and to bring up children who will be true children of Christ, and emulate Him in all things.

† A deacon reads from the Pauline Epistle to the Ephesians :
“Wives submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife ... Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it ..., that He might preserve it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish (likewise the bride). This is a great mystery (Sacrament of Matrimony) ... let each one of you so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (obeys him) ... children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise” (Ephesians: 5:22 - 6:3)

NOTES:

This commandment is directed to the groom, reminding him not to neglect his parents, and to treat them with respect and generosity, especially in their old age, even though he lives apart from them with his wife. It is his duty to care for them, for the purpose of obeying God’s commandment and receiving their parents’ blessings. His wife must not forbid him to care for his parents.

† After the Pauline reading, the deacons sing the hymn of the Holy Spirit (‘Bi-Epnevma’), which asks for the Holy Spirit to dwell upon the bride and groom to sanctify and unite them.

✠ Then the Trisagon of glorification is sung. The priest prays the Litany of the Gospel, followed by the reading by one of the deacons : ***“Like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber and rejoices like a strong man to run its race...”*** (Psalm 18:5-6). This is a prophecy about Christ rising from the dead in victory, and strength and joy, just like the bridegroom who comes out of his chamber filled with happiness. ***“Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine, in the very heart of your house. Your children like olive plants all around your table ... Blessings on those who fear the Lord”*** (Psalm 128:3-4).

The person who lives in righteousness, reverence and the fear of God is blessed by God. The Lord blesses his house with a wife who is like a fruitful vine of virtues and good deeds, and children, who are a blessing from God, who will become a holy and righteous generation. Good children (who resemble a fruitful olive vine from which the best oil is extracted), are a source of blessing and happiness for their parents and others who serve them. Through them, Christ’s name is glorified. This is the splendour of a Christian house. It is a small Church.

✠ The Gospel reading is from St Matthew (19:1-6), and mentions several important principles which are the foundations for a stable marriage and the formation of an ideal Christian house:

1. Unity of marriage: one man and one woman, as God created them in the beginning.
2. Independent living: ***“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife”*** although

they have their own home, in order to avoid interference from others, they must never neglect caring and loving their parents, in order to receive their blessings, according to the Lord's commandment.

3. One Flesh: ***“They are no longer two but one flesh”***, one spirit, one heart, one aim, and one life, for they are not two but one.
4. Stability and Continuity of the Family: As the Church does not approve of divorce except in the case of adultery, whoever encourages divorce is breaking a divine law which was instigated by God Himself when He wedded Adam and Eve and blessed them saying, ***“What God has joined together, let no man separate”*** (Matthew 19:6). Through the division caused by divorce, the couple are sinning against God and His commandments.

✠ The deacons then chant the response of the Gospel reading:
“Those that have been united together in harmony by the Holy Spirit, are praising God continually like a harp. With Psalms and praises and spiritual songs, day and night, from the heart, without failure.”

The response has much significance and meaning : Who united the bride and bridegroom ? The Holy Spirit, for a good wife is from the Lord. How did the Holy Spirit unite them? Like a harp with reviving, comforting, and soothing tunes. For what purpose did the Holy Spirit unite them? To praise God, as Isaac the prophet said: ***“Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory, I have formed him, yes, I have***

made him. This people I have formed for Myself. They shall declare My praise” (Isaiah 44: 7,21).

With what do they praise God? With praises and spiritual songs; by a family altar where prayers are led by the father as the family’s priest, by lips confessing the name of the Lord, thanking Him for His multitude of blessings, and countless graces He provides every morning. And when do they praise God? Day and night continually. This is the Christian house, the small church which is heaven on earth.

SUPPLICATIONS

The Liturgy of Matrimony begins with praying these supplications. Therefore, it is important that all people are standing reverently, lifting their hearts to God. We ask ourselves, is it possible for the Holy Spirit to bless the bride and groom amidst a show of indecency - both in terms of apparel and also behaviour? Such behaviour as talking loudly, eating sweets, and photographers running about anxious to take several shots, whilst the priest stands praying?

I hope we always bear in mind that our, *“God is not the author of confusion but the peace”* (1 Corinthians 14:33).

✠ The priest raises the cross and prays the supplications, asking the Lord to grant blessing and grace upon the bride and groom, just as He blessed Adam with his wife Eve, and Abraham with Sarah, and Isaac with his wife Rebecca, and Jacob with his wife, and Joseph with his wife, and blessed the wedding of Cana of Galilee by His presence.

The priest prays twelve supplications, and after each supplication, the congregation respond, “*Lord have mercy.*” The deacons then say, “*O Christ, the Logos, the only begotten Son, grant us Your peace, that is full of every joy...*” The deacons’ response asks the Lord to bestow peace and joy on the couple.

✠ The priest prays the Litanies of Peace, the Fathers and the Congregations. He prays for the peace of the Holy Church, power for the Church fathers, and bishops and teachers, to guard the Orthodox faith. He then prays for the Congregations who are in the Church and at home, that the Lord may disperse from them their enemies, and make their houses to be houses of prayers, houses of purity, houses of blessing, through the dwelling of God in them according to his blessed promise: “*For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20), and, “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him*” (John 14:23).

✠ All gathered pray the Orthodox Creed to remind the couple that their wedding is founded on the holy Orthodox faith of the one, holy, universal, and Apostolic Church. It is a reminder for them to keep the faith in truth, and instil it in their children as a precious gift.

NOTES:

Note the similarities between the Liturgy of Matrimony and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, with its deep Prayers, recitation of the Orthodox Creed, and the various supplications.

✠ Now the priest prays three supplications for the unity of the bride and groom: for their union to be holy love not lust, and for them to rejoice in the birth of their children. He asks for their cooperation in every good work, so they may glorify the Lord by their blessed deeds.

The First Supplication: *“Let them enter into the law of happiness and abide in truth ... grant them a living fruit out of the womb ... prepare them for every good work...”*

The Second Supplication: *“Bless the union of Your servants (...name) and (...name), that were united together according to Your Will. Bless them as You blessed our forefathers Abraham and Sarah. Elevate them as You did with Isaac and Rebecca, and multiply them as You multiplied Jacob and his offspring. Glorify them as You glorified Joseph in Egypt. Grant them purity, prosperity, wisdom, salvation and blessing.”*

The deacons then respond with a hymn which requests peace for the new family.

NOTES:

Although the physical union between the couple has not taken place yet, the priest prays for their union to be blessed, and to be a pure, spiritual and sentimental union, which is more important and permanent.

The Third Supplication: *“O Master and Lord look upon Your servants (...name) and (...name). Confirm their union, guard their bed to be undefiled. Shield them and their home with Your unconquerable right hand. Save them from all envy and intrigue. Preserve them in harmony and peace. Grant them joy...”*

✠ The deacons chant the response, *“Do not forget Your Covenant...”* If God does not forget His Covenant with us, we, the bride and the groom must not forget our covenants with our Lord: the renunciation of the devil, and abiding in Christ through Baptism. And the covenant of the Eucharist which is sealed by the holy precious Blood of Christ. We keep all these promises and fulfil them in order to receive the blessings of God’s promises which are in store for us.

✠ The priest then says a Prayer for Submission where the couple bow their heads and the priest places his hands on them praying this prayer humbly before God : *“Listen to us O God, we unworthy sinners ... Save them from all evil, and lengthen their lives in meekness, calmness, endurance and obedience, and keep them blameless and without fall. Enlighten their hearts and minds so that*

they may always do Your will.” The deacons respond, asking for their blessing from the Holy Trinity.

Anointing the Couple with Oil

† The priest prays over the oil in the bottle, making the sign of the cross upon it. After each prayer, the deacons respond, “*Amen.*” The priest first anoints the bridegroom, and then the bride, while the deacons chant, “*May this oil destroy demons and evil spirits through Jesus Christ the King of Glory.*”

Anointing the couple with oil has many advantages:

- It is an oil for sanctification and blessing as the Psalm says: “***You anoint my head with oil***” (Psalm 23:5).
- It is an anointment of purity and incorruption and a strong weapon against all lustful thoughts. It is for power, salvation and victory over all the deeds of the adversary.
- It is an anointment for health, renewal and salvation to their souls, bodies and spirits.
- It is an oil of joy and gladness, according to the Psalm, “***You love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, Your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions***” (Psalm 45:7). Oil was used in the Old Testament to anoint kings, and as the couple here appear as the king and queen, so too are they anointed. Oil also signifies

gladness, which is being felt during the celebration of the holy Matrimony.

† The priest then prays the following prayer of blessing, after having anointed the couple : *“O God guard Your servants (...name) and (...name). Protect their union in purity. Fortify them by Your pure angels ... grant us to be in the places of rest of Your saints in the Heavenly Kingdom.”*

NOTES:

How wonderful and meaningful are these prayers! In the middle of the Matrimony, the priest mentions eternal life, to remind the couple not be preoccupied by earth’s comfort, its pleasures and lusts, but to always focus on the better life which we will receive in heaven with the angels and saints.

Crowning the Couple

† The priest holds the crowns (or one of the deacons may hold them for him) and prays over them making the sign of the cross. After each prayer, the congregation responds, *“Amen.”*

† *“O Holy God Who crowned the saints with unfading crowns and reconciled and united the heavenly and earthly beings. O Master, bless now these crowns which we are going to set upon your servants’ heads. Make these crown for them: Crowns of glory and honour. Amen! Crowns of Blessing and salvation. Amen!”*

NOTES:

In this prayer we notice that the priest does not forget the heavenly crowns, whilst holding and blessing the matrimonial crowns. Crowns of unfading righteousness, kept in heaven for those who struggle for righteousness sake, according to what our teacher St. Paul says: ***“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who loved His appearing”*** (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Through these words, the couple are reminded of their heavenly crowns, which they must strive for in their lives, and not focus on earthly crowns, such as the ceremonial ones which will be removed after the ceremony. (It is the significance of the crowns placed, rather than the actual crown itself which is important). The priest asks God to grant the couple crowns of heavenly glory, salvation and delight and for victory against trials.

✠ Then the priest places the crowns on the head of the groom and then the bride, saying: *“O Lord, set upon Your servants crowns of unvanquished grace. Amen! Crowns of elevated and everlasting glory. Amen!”* These words refer to the heavenly crowns which are given to the repentants and those who are victorious in their spiritual struggle. Thus, the crowns which are placed on the couple’s heads are representative of the heavenly crowns; the crowns of elevated and everlasting glory.

✠ The priest then puts their heads together, as a symbol of their intellectual and physical union, and then makes the sign of the cross on them three times, saying:

✠ “*Crown them with glory, O Father, Amen;*”

✠ “*Bless them, O only begotten Son, Amen;*”

✠ “*Sanctify them, O Holy Spirit, Amen!*”

Through these three supplications made in the sign of the cross, the Holy Spirit dwells on the couple, blesses their wedding and unites them in one heart and body.

NOTES:

Crowns signify royalty and king/queenship. By placing the ceremonial crowns on the heads of the bride and groom, represents that they are the king and queen of their new kingdom - their home.

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments. And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Isaiah 61:10).

- It is important that each person have control over themselves, and keep themselves from destructive lusts and passions, and hence make themselves strong through perseverance. The wise King Solomon said, ***“He who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city”*** (Proverbs 16:32).

- Wearing the crown signifies that the couple have become the glory of the other person: “*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband*” (Proverbs 12:4), and, “*The head of woman is man*” (1 Corinthians 11:3).

The deacons sing the hymn of “*Worthy*” for the bride and groom. It is important that this hymn be sung exactly as specified in the hymn books. In recent times, some deacons have diverted from the hymn book and sing, ““Bless, O Lord by Your Holy Name...”. However, this is not correct, because blessing can only be given by the priest. Commitment and adherence to the Rites saves us from committing mistakes.

The deacons then chant responses for the couple, such as, “*Unperishable crowns were given by God to the bridegroom...*”

✠ The priest places the cross on the head of the bridegroom and makes the sign of the cross three times while saying:

- “*The Lord who blessed our father Adam ..., bless you and your helper.*”

- “*The Lord who blessed Isaac ..., bless you and your helper.*”

- “*The Lord who blessed our father Jacob ..., bless you and your helper.*”

✠ Then he places the cross on the bride’s head and makes the sign of the cross three times while saying:

· *“The Lord who blessed our father Adam ..., bless this marriage.”*

· *“The Lord who blessed Jacob ..., bless this marriage.”*

· *“The Lord who blessed Joseph ..., bless this marriage.”*

The deacons then chant the praise of the Cherubim, *“The Cherubim worship You...”*

The priest gives a word to the couple about the creation of Adam and Eve. God created Eve from Adam’s ribs so that she be equal to him. He did not create her from his foot, so he does not tread on her and despise her, and did not create her from his head so she does not dominate him. he Lord created Eve from Adam’s rib, which is near the heart, and therefore he must be caring for her.

The deacons respond, asking God to grant His peace to the happy couple.

The Rings

✠ After placing the crowns, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which has united them, the priest then places the rings on their fingers, as a clear indication of their unity and marriage, as follows:

- The priest places the groom’s ring onto the finger of the bride (left hand), and then the groom pushes the ring all the way on her finger.

- The priest places the bride's ring onto the finger of the groom (left hand), and then the bride pushes the ring all the way on his finger.

NOTES:

1. The priest places the rings onto the couple's hands, for he is the minister of God's Sacraments, and so his hand signifies the hand of Christ. Therefore, the Christian Matrimony should remain intact, for what God has joined together, no one shall separate.
2. The groom's ring must have the bride's name engraved on it, so that when he wears the ring, it is as if he is holding her in his hands, and is responsible for her.
3. The bride's ring must have the groom's name engraved on it, to signify that her groom has become her delight.
4. Each partner wears their ring which has been engraved with their spouse's name, as proof of their love, commitment, and possession of each other in all things. St Paul said, "***The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does***" (1 Corinthians 7:4)
5. The bride and groom wear the rings on the left hand, for the left side is near the heart, and so they must love one another and be close to each other's heart.

6. The wedding rings are made of gold, which is a precious metal that does not corrode. So too should be the value and preciousness of the marital bond. It does not crumble or fall apart during tribulations, but rather, shines greater, as gold that is purified by fire.

THE COMMANDMENT



The bride and groom rise from their chairs and the priest takes them to stand before the sanctuary door, facing east. He gives them the commandment before the sanctuary, as a witness that they are being wedded before the Lord, and so must keep what the Church advises them, by the priest, before

the holy altar of God.

- † The priest says, *“Now since you have been present at this blessed time before the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts and His holy altar, you have been joined together and united in the blessedness of matrimony ... So you must know each other and submit yourselves to one another in love and purity.”*

NOTES:

It is very important for the married couple to be aware of each other's rights, so that they may live together in harmony, stability and joy. They must give comfort and joy to each other.

“*Submit yourselves to one other*”, is a very important commandment; they must submit in terms of sharing and exchanging and being agreeable to each other's ideas and thoughts, not just clinging to what they want individually. There must be dialogue, advice and discussion between them, in order for them to come to a common, correct agreement, and so their lives together will be peaceful. The man must never put down his wife's thoughts, or dominate her with his.

✠ The deacons then sing, “*O King of Peace...*” Followed by, “*Take unto you, O bridegroom, your bride, Jesus Christ has given her to you, and by the hand of the priest He has given her to you. And blessed you both with His holy name!*” The priest takes the right hand of the bride and places it in the right hand of the groom, and then covers their hands with a small white veil. (The white veil was originally given to the couple for Holy Communion, when the Matrimonial ceremony took place before the Mass, but now the veil presents a reminder to them to be regular in their partaking of the Holy Communion).

The priest giving the bride to her groom, represents the Church giving the bride to her bridegroom, to whom he will be responsible for her before God. Their “***Marriage is honourable and the bed undefiled***” (Hebrews 13:4).

He must keep her happy and do all that is good for her, and have compassion on her, like Tobit had on Sarah. Sarah's father took her hand and gave it to Tobit saying, "***The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be with you, and bless you***" (Tobit 7:15).

✠ Then the priest says to the bridegroom: "*My blessed son, may the grace of the Holy Spirit strengthen you to take unto yourself your wife, in purity of heart and sincerity. Do all that is good for her. Have compassion on her and always hasten to do that which will gladden her heart.*"

NOTES:

It is an important commandment, and the bridegroom must listen well to every word in order to try fulfilling it. It is an invitation of love, sacrifice and giving in marital life, warning him against selfishness and carelessness, which is the basis of trouble and strife.

The priest must say this commandment and the wife's commandment carefully and unhurriedly, so the couple can hear and comprehend.

✠ Then, as an introduction to the commandment the priest will give to the bride, the deacons sing: "*Listen O bride, and lend your ear, forsake your people and your father's home, for your chastity has appealed to the bridegroom, and he is your husband and to him you will obey!*" hence,

alerting her to take care to the commandment about to be given in order to try fulfilling it.

‡ The priest advises the bride saying, *“And you, blessed daughter, and happy bride (...name), you must honour and respect him, do not disagree with him but increase your obedience to him over what was commanded many times ... Receive him with joy and cheer. Do not frown in his face. Do not ignore any of his rights upon you and fear God in all your deeds with him...”*

NOTES:

It is an important commandment for the bride to humble herself for her husband and so live in peace. Problems can occur when the woman wants dominion over the family. As God is the head of the Church, He placed man to be head of the family, and the woman to be the heart of the family; he centre of motherhood, compassion, love and emotions. But once his heart does not exist, problems occur, and children suffer, becoming the victims.

We wish that the Church may design a beautiful Marriage Certificate, upon which is written the commandments given to the bride and groom on their wedding day. It would be great if they an frame and hang this certificate in a place that they can read as often as possible, in order to remind themselves of their responsibilities towards each other. The marital house, is supposed to be a small church from which arises the sweet smelling incense of peace and love of God and united worship, whether it be fasting, praying, or Bible reading. Thus the Lord will be glad with the aroma of this blessed house (Genesis 8).

✠ The deacons then chant the hymn, “*O King of peace, give us Your peace...*”, requesting peace for this new family from the first moment of its formation to the last moment of each one’s life.

✠ The priest then prays the Prayer of Blessing on them : the bride and groom kneel before the altar, and place their joined right hands which are covered by the white veil, on the Holy Bible presented before them. Their heads are placed together as a symbol of union and marriage.

NOTES:

The placing of hands on the Holy Bible signifies an oath of promise to keep and abide by the Biblical commandments, and that their life will be according to the commandment, having the mind of Christ, to live following the Gospel of Christ.

✠ The priest says, “*Fill your heart with spiritual love,*” speaking in the singular form, for they are now one heart, one body, and one mind.

It is a belief amongst many non-spiritual people, that the period of most fervent love is prior to marriage, during the engagement period, and that after marriage, this fervent love decreases, and in some cases even becomes hatred. This feeling was expressed by the master of the feast in the wedding of Cana of Galilee, who said, “***Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then that which is***

inferior” (John 2:10). However, when the Lord Jesus Christ attended and blessed the wedding of Cana of Galilee and blessed the Sacrament of Matrimony, He set right the things that were not. He gave the guests the good wine (water converted to wine) after the inferior wine, to teach us that marital love has its beginnings during the engagement process, but increases and enhances, like good wine. The love that is shared between the couple, through Christ, increase over time, for as St Luke said, *“old is better”* (Luke 5:39).

The Lord Jesus Christ attended the wedding of Cana of Galilee to establish and sanctify the Sacrament of Matrimony, making the marital house a small church, which is sanctified by the presence of the Lord Christ. Within the house, the Lord will manifest His glory, just like He did with His disciples, *“He manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him”* (John 2:11).

A loving couple should glorify the Lord in all they do, and manifest His greatness to others. They believe in the power of Christ and His mysterious work granted in the Sacrament of Matrimony. They surrender their lives to Him, obey Him and His commandments given to them in the sacrament, and they allow for the Holy Spirit to work in their lives.

✠ All those gathered then pray the Lord’s Prayer, followed by the priest praying the absolution for the couple. He then says the final blessing, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Dismissal, *“... go in peace, the peace of the Lord be with you.”*

✠ The deacons then lead the procession, singing the hymn, *“Hail Mary the Queen”*, followed by the bride and groom,

until they reach the door of the church where they stand to accept the congratulations from their guests.

NOTES:

It would be a nice gesture from the Church if the priest gives a Holy Bible to the couple and two Agbias, advising them to start their life by reading the Holy Bible regularly, and praying from the Agbia together, even if only once a day before sleeping. It would be good also if the couple are regular in Repentance and Confession, and receiving the Holy Communion. It is also important that they do not neglect paying their tithes, so that God may grant them blessings and bless their house and protect them.

I hope the couple will care and take the time, during their first days of marriage, to read together certain chapters from the Holy Bible, relating to the subject of marriage and family. Examples are: Genesis 2: 18-24, Matthew 19, Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3.

The Church should care to visit the couple in their new home, and quickly address any problems that the couple may face, before they become serious. The church also remembers their new home, during the prayers of the holy Mass, in particular when the priest prays asking the Lord to grant, *“Purity for those in virginity and good life for those in wedlock.”* And in the Litany of Congregations, the priest prays, *“Houses of purity houses of blessing. Grant us O Lord and to all Your servants.”*

THE SECOND MARRIAGE FOR WIDOWS

Although the Coptic Church does not prefer it, it does not prohibit remarriage. In the Selective Council it is mentioned: “But the second marriage is different from the first. It has certain order of laws, without the blessing of the Matrimony, but rather, a prayer of forgiveness.” Our teacher St. Paul says: ***“But I say to the unmarried and to the widows. It is good for them if they remain even as I am (unmarried), but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion”*** (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

St Ambrose said: *“We do not prohibit second marriage, but we do not advise it.”*

St Jerome said: *“The first Adam married once but the second Adam (Christ) never married.”*

The Church forbids the person who remarries, and any children he bears from his second marriage, to join the Priesthood.

St. Gregory the Theologian said: *“The first marriage is a law, the second marriage is forgiveness, the third transgression and the fourth is clearly adultery.”*

St. Jerome also mentions, *“Even the pigeons and doves don’t take another partner if their companions pass away. Remarriage is even rejected by the birds.”*

Rite of the Ceremony of Second Marriage for Widows

The priest prays the Lord's Prayer, followed by the Prayer of Thanksgiving, and Psalm 50.

A deacon reads the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews, "***Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers***" (13:1-6). The couple are advised to love and respect each other, and maintain the dignity of marriage, purity of the bed, warning against adultery, the love of money and lusts, and to be content and rely on God.

Then the Trisagon of glorification is chanted, followed by the Litany of the Gospel.

One of the deacons reads the Psalm and Gospel: "***Your wife like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house***" (Psalm 128:3), which speaks about a God fearing man being rewarded by God giving him a good wife and children, who are like fruitful olive branches.

The Gospel reading is from St John, "***He who has the bride is the bridegroom...***" (3:27-29), which tells of the pure and great love between Jesus Christ the bridegroom, and the Church His bride. He purchased the Church with His own precious blood, and He manages it and cares for it, and in return, the Church obeys and submits herself to Him. Likewise should the wedded bride and groom.

The response of the Gospel reading is as follows: *“This is your joy, and your delight has been consummated ... , marriage is joy, delight and jubilation, as long as it is in God.”*

The priest says the three Major Litanies, followed by the Orthodox Creed.

The priest prays, *“O Lord, God, our Master, the Pantocrator ... bless them now with Your freedom and forgiveness, to shelter them with Your right arm, to save them from envy, to guard them and to give them one heart, and grant them delight and joy...”*

After anointing them with oil, the priest gives them the commandment saying, “The woman was taken from the rib of man so that she might be in his possession and be obedient to him, and that he may be kind to her, concerned about her welfare, and as merciful towards her as he was towards himself. A man is to leave his father and mother and be with his wife. The two of them are to be one body and one heart and be in accord, fearing God and pursuing His approval ... As for you blessed sister, you are to obey your husband knowing that he alone is to lead you ... And you, blessed brother, should hasten to satisfy her and work toward her welfare, fulfilling the saying of St. Paul: *“And you men, love your women as your own bodies...”*

The priest prays the Lord’s Prayer, followed by the three Absolutions.

The priest then grants the blessing and final dismissal, and so the Rite of the Second Marriage is completed peacefully.

Glory be to God forever. Amen.

