

The Sacrament of Marriage

The Union Blessed by God and a School of Virtue

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The High Significance of Marriage

Love between bride and groom begins with feelings of amiability and mutual attraction toward each other, which do not as yet reach the realm of real and deep love. Genuine love requires spiritual closeness, sensitivity, constancy, and often sacrifice. People desiring to be married or those already married must be concerned that their natural attraction to each other is enhanced by constant **spiritual bonding**. This bonding is facilitated by spiritual contact, sincerity, communication, mutual prayer, attending worship services, participating in Holy Communion, and discussion of spiritual topics. Without spiritual bonding of the partners, physical love alone is insufficient for a happy marriage.

Love is a very tender and fragile feeling. Every married person should use all means to avoid that which might hurt his or her partner: cruel words, rudeness, bad habits, stubbornness and the desire to serve oneself at the expense of the other. Unavoidable problems in life must be resolved in the spirit of Christian faith: with humility, patience, forgiveness of mutual offenses, faith in the power of God, and kindness.

The purpose of marriage is for the couple to **help one another** and complement one another. And since the main purpose of human life is the **salvation of the soul**, the couples must encourage one another to live a Christian way of life. Then God's blessing will remain on the married couple; their marriage will be happy and will serve as a comfort and joy to them.

In this work we will attempt to help the reader understand the Christian meaning of marriage. We will discuss briefly the major problems confronted by married couples and the ways in which to reinforce mutual love and trust. At the end we will provide prayers from the Sacrament of Marriage and will make a few practical notes.

Marriage as an Institution of God

"It is not good for man to be alone," said the Lord, after He created man. Indeed, man's road through life and the execution of his true destiny requires of him to participate with other people in mutual efforts and cooperation. For this purpose the Lord established marriage and blessed it, as is written in the Holy Scripture: *"And God created man in His image, in God's likeness He created him, as male and female He created them. And God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and have dominion over it"* (Genesis 1:26-28).

While animals also received God's blessing to multiply, the union of man and woman in holy matrimony received from the Creator a more profound and religious meaning. During the joining of man and woman, a mystery of the union of two opposite sexes takes place as if they are

blended into one living being, one body. Thus a physical unity is begun from which stems human society. The earliest biblical writings state regarding this unifying side of marriage: "*A man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and the two become one flesh*" (Genesis 2:18-24).

Here it is important to note that because marriage was instituted by God in the Garden of Eden when people were still innocent and immortal, it follows that the marital union between man and woman into one body, in the Creator's plan, was to be everlasting and indissoluble.

As we know from the Bible, the later disobedience to God of our first parents brought corruption into human nature, and since then all their descendants have been born with a predisposition to sin. This damage to human nature had an adverse effect on all forms of private and social life, including the marital relationship. Thus, natural attraction between individuals sometimes becomes disordered, taking various forms of perversion in sexual instinct such as harlotry, polygamy, homosexuality, marital unfaithfulness and so forth.

Nevertheless, the ideal of a true marital relationship was not completely lost, and the Old Testament prophets were concerned about the purity of marriage. Among the Jews a happy marriage was considered to be God's blessing: "*Home and wealth may come down from parents, but a sensible wife is a gift from the Lord*" (Proverbs 19:14). "*Who can find a virtuous woman? Her price is far above jewels. The heart of her husband safely trusts her ... Attractiveness is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a wife who fears the Lord is worthy of praise*" (Proverbs 18:22). Marriage prayers, which the reader will find in the second part of this pamphlet, show examples of happy marriages blessed by God.

Christian Attitude towards Marriage

The Lord Jesus Christ, Who came to earth to restore the Divine moral foundation to human society, concerned himself also with restoring the marital union. By His presence at the marriage at s in Galilee the Lord blessed and sanctified the marriage and performed his first miracle there. Later, the Lord elucidated to the Jews the true significance of marriage. Referring to the Scriptures regarding the union between man and woman, the Lord reinforced the principle of indissoluble marriage in definite terms: "*Thus they (man and woman) are no longer two, but one flesh. And thus whom God has joined together, let no man separate.*" The Sadducees, however, continued to question the Savior, "*How is it that Moses permitted that a man might divorce his wife by a certificate of dismissal?*" To which the Lord replied: "*Moses permitted divorcing a wife because of your hardness of heart, but it was not like that in the beginning. But I tell you: he who divorces his wife for any cause other than adultery and marries another commits adultery*" (Matthew 19:3-9). In other words, a person entering marriage is required to remain in it. The breaking of marital fidelity is disobeying God's will and, therefore, a grievous sin.

These words of our Savior permit us to understand the complete value, seriousness and responsibility of marriage. But in the true Christian psychology of wedlock, the seeming burden of marriage becomes light and joyous. With God's help, granted during the Sacrament of Marriage, spouses can amicably, peacefully and cooperatively bear the joint burden of family

life. And to the contrary, devoid of a Christian outlook on marriage, it at times becomes unbearably heavy and a mutual torment.

Marriage is a great shrine and saving state of a person's life when it is properly regarded. Marriage is the foundation of a family, and a family is a small church of Christ. It is the family that is the meaning and purpose of marriage. Present-day fear of having a family with children is the result of faintheartedness, a source of both dissatisfaction and anguish in marriage. Christian upbringing of children is the goal and joy of the family; it gives meaning and justification to marriage.

Yet even if the spouses are childless, the marriage does not lose its meaning. This makes it easier for the spouses by mutual love and mutual help to live a Christian life. The Apostle Peter in his first epistle directs the wives to imitate the lives of ancient righteous women and to be gentle. He directs the husbands to treat their wives with understanding, as a fragile vessel, to show them respect as co-heirs of the grace of eternal life (I Peter ch. 3).

The Apostle Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians writes about the marriage vows: "*Now to the married it is not I who commands, but the Lord: A wife is not to divorce her husband. But even if she does divorce, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled with her husband. And a husband is not to leave his wife. But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any man has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not leave her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy*" (I Cor. 7:10-14). These words of the Apostle have special significance for our contemporary society, in which so often only one of the spouses is an Orthodox Christian or at least believes in God.

The Apostles in their epistles speak of the dependent role of woman in marriage. They do not belittle her by this but have in mind her origin and nature, more complex and fragile, requiring special care: "*For man is not from woman, but woman from man. It is not man who was created for the woman, but woman for the man (as his friend and helpmate). And for this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, for of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God*" (I Cor. 11:8-12).

In the above Apostolic teaching we see the early Christian attitude towards marriage: husbands and wives are co-workers in God. They are absolutely equal as members of the Kingdom of God and inheritors of eternal life. Nevertheless, the difference between them as determined by their nature, their origin and their guilt for the fall from grace is not lost. The wife was created to be a helpmate to the husband, but not the husband for the wife (although he is born of the wife). The wife, in human significance and God's plan, is equal in everything to the husband, but in practical aspects she is his helper and dependent on him, and the husband is the head of the wife; "So they will live by the will of God," says one of the prayers of the Sacrament of Marriage.

Further, the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians teaches Christian wives regarding their responsibilities to help their husbands: "*Wives be subject to your husbands as though to the Lord; for the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the Church. Christ is, indeed, the Savior of that body (i.e., the Church) but just as the Church is subject to Christ, so are the wives subject to their husbands in everything*" (Eph. 5:22-24). It might seem that in obliging the wives to obey their husbands, the Apostle belittles their human worth. But that is absolutely not so. Here the Apostle describes the ideal marital relationships. The Church obeys Christ as its Savior and benefactor. This is not slavish subordination but an impulse of responsive love.

Clarifying this, the Apostle also gives the husbands the necessary instruction regarding their responsibilities: "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself as a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself... For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be cleaved to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery*" (Eph. 5:25-31).

In his first epistle to Timothy, the Apostle Paul speaks about motherhood as a woman's primary mission in life. "*Woman will be saved through motherhood*" (I Tim. 2:15). Motherhood consists not only of giving birth to a child and caring about his welfare but also especially in planting in his soul the basis of faith and morality. It is necessary that a child learns the beginning of goodness along with his "mother's milk" so that it will penetrate into his subconscious and will become part of his nature. This is accomplished by the constant presence of mercy, forgiveness and mutual building up within the family. There should be every expression of true love as is generally found in those who are holy.

Here is the Christian ideal of love: "*Love is patient and kind, is never boastful, never conceited, never rude; love is never selfish, never quick to take offense. Love keeps no score of wrongs, takes no pleasure in the sins of others, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, its endurance. Love will never come to an end*" (I Cor. 13:4-8). Then the child, even though he might come under some bad influence later in his life, can, being directed by his spiritual impulse, return to God. Contemporary mothers need to understand the seriousness and responsibility of their mission: the future of human society and the Church depends on them.

In his epistle to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul writes about the relations among members of a family in this way: "*Wives be subordinate to your husbands; as is befitting to the Lord. Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for that is pleasing to God. Fathers do not exasperate your children, so they may not become discouraged*" (Col. 3:18-21). By these words of the Apostle each member of the family is given proper instruction.

Such is the natural and basic law of human nature: the husband is the support of his wife and the head of the family, responsible for the material and spiritual welfare of all the members of the

family. The wife is the husband's support, responsible for the upbringing of the children. Children are helpers to the parents and are as though "citizens" of their small kingdom. The established disparity in the family roles is dictated by nature itself and is necessary for harmonious existence and development of the family.

Each person, as a member of a family, community, and the Church, performs in this temporary life specific service or "obedience" that is necessary for the common welfare. In the Kingdom of Heaven there will be no difference in the existing sexual, racial and social distinctions between people. Human responsibility to God is in proportion to ones duties, but the reward in heaven is determined not by the status or privilege that he had in the community but by the effort with which he carried out his service. Before God all people are equal; the access to God's benevolence and to eternal bliss is open to all.

When both married spouses behave in a Christian manner towards their marital responsibilities, this behavior serves to strengthen their mutual respect and true love. Having this in mind, St. John of Kronstadt taught newlyweds: "Where there is love, there is God; and where there is God, there everything is good."

Contemporary Difficulties in Marriage

The marital union in our time exists under unfavorable conditions. Some fifty years ago divorce was a rare occurrence; today divorces are an epidemic. The American Academy of Marriage Lawyers (ABA Journal, February 1, 1988) conducted a survey on the causes of divorce and established that the main ones among them are: 1) lack of communication between spouses, 2) gradual divergence of interests, 3) sexual problems and breach of marital faithfulness, 4) financial difficulties, and 5) lack of mutual understanding.

These reasons and others, less significant in essence, come down to the fact that a husband and wife lose their spiritual contact over time as each one begins to lock himself into the sphere of his own personal interests. From this, one may deduce that spouses, in order to strengthen their marital union, need to establish and maintain their spiritual contact. Of course, this is more easily achieved when both of them belong to the same faith, but with good will, it is achievable even when they are not.

The roots of spiritual contact between spouses are formed in the Sacrament of Marriage. It is then that a spiritual candle is lit in their hearts. Husband and wife must carefully guard the grace they have received during the Sacrament. For this purpose it is necessary for them to devote some time for a joint spiritual life: when feasible, to pray together daily ("A family which prays together, stays together." - So states a proverb); to regularly go to Church together and participate in the Sacrament of Holy Communion; to read the Holy Bible together; and to discuss spiritual topics. Reading God's Word together will help the spouses resolve, in a Christian spirit, unavoidable problems of life - in a spirit of love, humility, gentleness, forgiveness, leniency, patience and acquiescence.

Furthermore, to maintain spiritual contact a husband and wife must talk with each other frankly and share their difficulties and desires. They must help one another as much as they can and be

concerned about each other. They must respect the opinions, tastes and habits of each other. Joint life always requires concessions and compromises.

Under no circumstances should there be crudeness, use of force or insults. Often in marital relations the unbridled tongue becomes a great evil when in the heat of anger a man and a woman lash out at one another with all kinds of insults. Scars from these verbal wounds last a long time. An ancient holy book gives the following meaning to the word: "*An insult is sharp as a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*" (Proverbs 12:18 When anger is aroused, it is best to be silent for awhile and calm down ("take and hold a mouthful of water") and then later, having prayed, to say in a well intentioned tone that which may be helpful. The tirade of accusations and lecturing is best replaced by two mighty words - "**Forgive me!**" which, by the way, are very difficult to utter. In general, it must be said that the family environment is one in which a person learns virtuous living. This is exactly how a man and woman should view their marriage, as a school for Christian living. This school is not always easy.

A contemporary book dedicated to marital problems gives the following advice for a happy marriage: 1) Never be angry at the same time; 2) Never yell at each other (unless the house is on fire); 3) If one of you has to win an argument, let it be your mate; 4) If you have to criticize, do it lovingly; 5) Never bring up mistakes of the past; 6) Never go to sleep with an unsettled argument; 7) At least once every day try to say one kind or complimentary thing to your life's partner; 8) When you have done something wrong, be ready to admit it and ask for forgiveness; and 9) It takes two to make a quarrel, and the one in the wrong is the one who does the most talking.

In essence, these and other similar admonitions rephrase that which our Christian faith teaches. Therefore, if both spouses will try to become better Christians, all disagreements will be dissolved, and mutual understanding and love between husband and wife will grow.

The Sacrament of Marriage

The significance of Christian vows is especially revealed in an Orthodox wedding. In addition to the fact that for those uniting in matrimony it is one of the most joyous occasions for the couple who love each other, the Church, on the threshold of their married life together, admonishes them that marital life is not only a cup of bliss, but also a commitment which requires, with the help of God, mutual effort and patience.

For us, the Orthodox, marriage is not merely an ancient ritual, a beautiful custom, but it is a **Sacrament**, in which the spouses petition God's blessing, guidance and help in all their future life together. The bride and groom must prepare themselves spiritually for this great Sacrament. Also they should relegate all pomp to second place and concentrate primarily on the prayers read during this Sacrament.

The celebration of this divine service consists of two parts: the service of betrothal and that of marriage.

The Service of Betrothal

THE BETROTHAL BEGINS near the entrance of the church. The groom stands to the right and the bride stands to his left. The ushers stand to the right of the groom; the bridesmaids to the left of the bride. The priest blesses the bride and groom three times and gives them lit candles, which they hold until the end of the service. The candles symbolize the warmth of their faith and love of God.

Priest: Blessed is our God, always, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

Choir: Amen.

Deacon: In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Choir: Lord, have mercy. (After each petition.)

Deacon: For the servant of God name, and for the handmaid of God name, who now plight to each other their troth, and for their salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

That they may be granted children for the continuation of the race, and for the fulfillment of all their petitions for salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

That He will send down upon them a perfect and peaceful love and His help, let us pray to the Lord.

That He preserve them in oneness of mind, and in steadfastness of faith, let us pray to the Lord.

That He will bless them with a blameless life, let us pray to the Lord.

That the Lord our God will grant unto them an honorable marriage and an undefiled nuptial-bed, let us pray to the Lord.

For our deliverance from all tribulation, wrath, danger and necessity, let us pray to the Lord.

Priest: For unto Thee are due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever unto ages and ages. Amen.

O eternal God, who hast brought into unity those who were apart, and hast ordained for them an indissoluble bond of love, who didst bless Isaac and Rebecca, and didst make them heirs of Thy promise: Bless also these Thy servants, name and name, guide them unto every good work. For Thou art a merciful God who lovest mankind, and unto Thee we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever unto ages of ages. Amen

Priest: Peace be unto all.

Choir: And to Thy spirit.

Deacon: Bow your heads unto the Lord.

Choir: To Thee O Lord.

Priest: O Lord our God, who hast espoused the Church as a pure virgin from among the Gentiles: Bless this betrothal, and unite and maintain these Thy servants in peace and oneness of mind. For unto Thee are due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever unto ages and ages. Amen.

Then taking the ring of the bridegroom, the priest blesses him with the ring saying:

The servant of God, *NAME*, is betrothed to the handmaid of God, *NAME*, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The priest repeats the blessing and the words three times, placing the ring onto the groom's finger. Then he takes the ring of the bride and blessing her he says:

The handmaid of God, *NAME*, is betrothed to the servant of God, *NAME*, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

And repeating these words three times, he places the ring on the bride's finger. The best man exchanges the rings on the fingers of the bridal pair. This symbolizes the voluntary union, in which each party gives up some rights and assumes certain responsibilities. The round form of the ring symbolizes the irrevocable and eternal nature of the union.

Next the priest says the following prayer:

O Lord, our God, who didst accompany the servant of the patriarch Abraham into Mesopotamia, when he was sent to seek a wife for his lord Isaac to espouse, and who, by means of drawing of the water at the well, didst reveal to him that he should betroth Rebecca: Do Thou, the same Lord, bless also the betrothal of these Thy servants, name, and, name, and confirm the promise that they have made. Establish them in the holy union which is from Thee. For in the beginning Thou didst make them male and female, and by Thee the woman is joined unto the man as a helper and for the procreation of the human race. Therefore, O Lord our God, who hast sent forth Thy truth upon Thy inheritance, and Thy covenant unto Thy servants, our fathers, Thine elect from generation to generation: Look upon Thy servant, name, and Thy handmaid, name, and establish and make firm their betrothal, in faith and in oneness of mind, in truth and in love.

For Thou, O Lord, hast declared that a pledge should be given and confirmed in all things. By a ring power was given to Joseph in Egypt; by a ring Daniel was glorified in the land of Babylon; by a ring the uprightness of Tamar was revealed; by a ring our heavenly Father showed His mercy upon His Son, for He said: place a ring upon His right hand, and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry. By Thine own right hand, O Lord, Thou didst arm Moses in the Red Sea; by Thy true word the heavens were established, and the foundations of the earth were made firm; and the right hands of Thy servants also shall be blessed by Thy almighty word and by Thine upraised arm. Therefore, O Master, bless now this putting-on of rings with Thy heavenly blessing, and let Thine angel go before them all the days of their life. For Thou art He that blesses and sanctifies all things, and unto Thee are due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and unto ages and ages. Amen.

The Service of Crowning

AFTER THE PRAYERS THE BRIDE AND GROOM follow the priest to the center of the Church and both step on a white cloth, placed there in advance. The white cloth symbolizes the moral purity that must be established between husband and wife. The couple advance to the place of marriage as the priest reads the verses of the 128th Psalm:

Blessed are they that fear the Lord; and walk in his ways!

You shall eat of the fruit of the labor of your hands;
You shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.
Your wife will be a fruitful vine within your house;
Your children will be like olive shoots around your table.
Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.
The Lord shall bless you from Zion!
Peace be upon Israel!
May you see your children's children!

Then, the priest asks the bridegroom:

Do you, *NAME*, of a good, free and unconstrained will and a firm intention to take as your wife this woman, name, whom you see here before you?

Bridegroom: I do, reverend father.

Priest: Have you promised yourself to any other woman?

Bridegroom: I have not promised myself, reverend father.

And, addressing the bride, the priest asks her:

Do you, *NAME*, of a good, free and unconstrained will and a firm intention to take as your husband this man, name, whom you see here before you?

Bride: I do, reverend father.

Priest: Have you promised yourself to any other man?

Bride: I have not promised myself, reverend father.

Priest: Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever unto ages and ages.

Choir: Amen.

Deacon: In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Choir: Lord have mercy.

For the servants of God, *NAME*, and *NAME*, who are now being united to each other in the communion of marriage, and for their salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

That He will bless this marriage, as He blessed the marriage in Cana of Galilee, let us pray to the Lord.

That He will give them chastity, and of the fruit of the womb as is expedient for them, let us pray to the Lord.

That He will make them glad with the sight of sons and daughters, let us pray to the Lord.

That He will grant them joy of parenthood, and a blameless life, let us pray to the Lord.

That He will grant to them and to us, all our petitions which are unto salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

That He will deliver them and us from all affliction, wrath, danger, and necessity, let us pray to the Lord. Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by Thy grace.

Choir: To Thee, O Lord.

Priest: For unto Thee are due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages and ages. Amen.

Then the priest recites aloud the following prayers:

O God most pure, author and creator of all creatures, who didst transform the rib of our forefather Adam into a wife, because of Thy love towards mankind, and didst bless them and say to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. Thus by the union of the two, made them one flesh: Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh, and what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

Thou didst bless Thy servant Abraham, and opening the womb of Sarah didst make him to be the father of many nations. Thou didst give Isaac to Rebecca, and didst bless her in childbirth. Thou didst join Jacob unto Rachel, and from them didst bring forth the twelve patriarchs. Thou didst unite Joseph and Asenath, giving to them Ephraim and Manasseh as the fruit of their procreation. Thou didst accept Zachariah and Elizabeth, and didst make their offspring to be the Forerunner. From the root of Jesse according to the flesh, Thou didst bud forth the ever-virgin one, and were incarnate of her for the redemption of the human race. Through Thine unutterable gift and manifold goodness, Thou didst come to Cana of Galilee, and didst bless the marriage there, to make manifest that it is Thy will that there should be lawful marriage and procreation.

Do Thou, the same all-holy Master, accept our prayers, Thy servants. As Thou were present there, be Thou also present here, with Thine invisible protection. Bless this marriage, and grant to these Thy servants, name, and name, a peaceful and long life, chastity, mutual love in the bond of peace, long-lived offspring, gratitude from their children, a crown of glory that does not fade away. Graciously grant that they may see their children's children. Preserve their bed undefiled, and give them of the dew of heaven from on high, and of the fruitfulness of the earth. Fill their houses with wheat, wine and oil and with every good thing, so that they may give in turn to those in need; and grant also to those here present with them all their petitions which are for their salvation.

For Thou art the God of mercy, and of bounties, and of love towards mankind, and unto Thee we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages and ages. Amen.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, priest of mystical and undefiled marriage, and ordainer of the law of marriage of the body; preserver of immortality, and provider of the good things of life; the same Master who in the beginning didst make man and establish him as a king over creation, and didst say: "It is not good, that man should be alone upon the earth. Let us make a helper for him." Taking one of his ribs, Thou didst fashion woman; and when Adam saw her he said: "This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." For this reason a man shall leave his

father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh; what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

Do Thou now also, O Master, our Lord and our God, send down The heavenly grace upon these Thy servants, name, and name; grant that this Thy handmaiden may be subject to her husband in all things, and that this Thy servant be the head of his wife, so that they may live according to Thy will. Bless them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst bless Abraham and Sarah. Bless them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst bless Isaac and Rebecca. Bless them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst bless Jacob and all the patriarchs. Bless them O Lord our God, as Thou didst bless Joseph and Asenath. Bless them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst bless Moses and Zipporah. Bless them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst bless Joachim and Anna. Bless them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst bless Zachariah and Elizabeth. Preserve them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst preserve Jonah in the belly of the whale. Preserve them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst preserve the three holy children from the fire, sending down upon them dew from heaven; and let that gladness come upon them which the blessed Helen had when she found the precious cross.

Remember them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst remember Enoch, Shem, Elijah; Remember them, O Lord our God, as Thou didst remember Thy forty holy martyrs, sending down upon them crowns from heaven. Remember them, O Lord our God, and the parents who have nurtured them, for the prayers of parents make firm the foundations of houses. Remember, O Lord our God, Thy servants, the attendants of the bridal pair, who have come together in this joy. Remember, O Lord our God, Thy servant, name, and Thy handmaiden, name, and bless them. Grant them of the fruit of their bodies, godfearing children, concord of soul and body. Exalt them like the cedars of Lebanon, like a luxuriant vine.

Give them fruitfulness like unto full ears of grain; so that having sufficiency in all things, they may abound in every work that is good and acceptable unto Thee. Let them see their children's children, like olive shoots around their table; so that, finding favor in Thy sight, they may shine like the stars of heaven, in Thee our God. For unto Thee are due all glory, honor, and worship: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages and ages. Amen.

O holy God, who had formed man from the dust, and had fashioned woman from his rib, and had joined her unto him as a helpmate, for it seemed good to Thy Majesty that man should not be alone upon the earth: Do Thou, the same Lord, extend now also, Thy hand from Thy holy dwelling place, and unite this Thy servant, name, and this Thy handmaiden, name ; for by Thee is the husband joined unto the wife. Unite them in one mind; wed them into one flesh, granting to them the fruit of the body and the procreation of godfearing children. For Thine is the majesty, and Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages and ages. Amen.

The priest takes the crowns, which recall those with which the "martyrs," or witnesses of Christ, are crowned in heaven, and crowns first the bridegroom, saying:

The servant of God, *NAME*, is crowned unto the handmaiden of God, name, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So also he crowns the bride saying:

The handmaiden of God, *NAME*, is crowned unto the servant of God, name, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

They each kiss the crown as it is extended toward them. The groomsmen hold the crowns above the heads of the bridegroom and bride. Then the priest blesses them three times, saying each time:

O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor.

With the crowning and thrice repeated blessing of the married couple the most important part of the sacrament is completed. The Holy Spirit descends upon the married couple and blesses them in their united life. The crowns symbolize the high status of the marital union.

Deacon: Let us attend.

Priest: Peace be unto all.

Choir: And to Thy spirit.

Deacon: Wisdom!

Reader: The prokeimenon in the eighth tone (Psalm 21): Thou hast set upon their heads crowns of precious stones; they asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest it them. *The choir repeats the prokeimenon.*

Deacon: Wisdom.

Reader: The reading from the Epistle of the holy Apostle Paul to the Ephesians:

Deacon: Let us attend.

Reader: Brethren: Give thanks always and for everything 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 Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your 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 the church might be presented before Him in splendor, 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 it 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 cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one." This is a great mystery: I speak in reference to Christ and to the Church: however, let each one of you love his wife as himself and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Eph. 5:20-33).

Choir: Alleluia.

Priest: Wisdom, all shall rise to hear the holy Gospel.
Choir: And to thy spirit.
Priest: The reading of the Holy Gospel is according to John.
Choir: Glory to Thee our Lord, glory to Thee.
Priest: Let us attend.

The priest reads the Gospel:

In those days 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 failed, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what wouldst thou have me do? 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. Then Jesus 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, not knowing where it came from (though the servants who drew 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 miracles, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him (John 2:1-11).

Choir: Glory to Thee, O Lord, glory to Thee.

Priest: O Lord our God, who in Thy saving providence didst vouchsafe by Thy presence in Cana of Galilee to declare marriage honorable: Do Thou the same Lord, now, also maintain in peace and concord Thy servants, name, and name, whom Thou hast been pleased to join together. Cause their marriage to be honorable. Preserve their bed undefiled. Mercifully grant that they may live together in purity; and enable them to reach a ripe old age, walking in Thy commandments with a pure heart. For Thou art our God, the God of mercy and salvation, and unto Thee we ascribe glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages and ages. Amen.

Deacon: Help us, save us, have mercy on us, and keep us, O God, by Thy grace.

Choir: Lord have mercy. *The deacon says the rest of the petitions.*

Priest: And make us worthy, O Master, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call on Thee, the heavenly Father, and to say:

Choir sings the Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the

glory, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Priest: For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory: of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages and ages.

Choir: Amen.

Priest: Peace be unto all.

Choir: And to your spirit. Deacon: Bow your heads unto the Lord.

Choir: To Thee, O Lord.

Then the common cup is brought and the priest blesses it saying:

O God, who hast created all things by Thy might, and hast made firm the world, and adorned with a crown all that Thou hast made: Bless now, with Thy spiritual blessing, this common cup, which Thou dost give to those who are now united for a community of marriage. For blessed is Thy name, and glorified is Thy Kingdom, of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages and ages. Amen.

The newlyweds drink out of the cup three times, thereby stating that they are prepared to participate in the mutual cup of life, with its joy and hardships.

Then the priest joins the right hands of the newlyweds, takes a cross and leads them three times around the podium upon which the Holy Gospel is placed. The groomsmen follow behind still holding the crowns above their heads. This reminds the newlyweds that their life together must be based on Christian principles, given in the Holy Gospel.

Choir: Rejoice, O Isaiah! for a virgin was with child; and bore a Son, Immanuel: He is both God and man; and Orient is His name; magnifying Him, we call the virgin blessed.

O holy martyrs, who fought the good fight and have received your crowns: entreat ye the Lord, that He will have mercy on our souls.

Glory to Thee, O Christ our God, the Apostles' boast, the Martyrs' joy, whose preaching was the consubstantial Trinity.

Then taking the crown of the bridegroom, the priest says:

Be thou exalted like Abraham, O bridegroom, and be blessed like Isaac, and multiply like Jacob, walking in peace, and keeping God's commandments in righteousness.

Then taking the crown of the bride, he says:

And you, O Bride: Be exalted like Sarah, and exult like Rebecca, and multiply like Rachel; and rejoice in your husband, fulfilling the conditions of the law, for this is well pleasing to God.

O God, our God, who didst come to Cana of Galilee, and didst bless there the marriage feast: Bless also these Thy servants, who through Thy good providence now are united in wedlock. Bless their goings out and their comings in. Fill their life with good things. Receive their crowns into Thy Kingdom, preserving them spotless, blameless and without reproach, unto ages of ages.

Choir: Amen.

Priest: Peace be unto all.

Choir: And to thy spirit.

Deacon: Bow your heads unto the Lord.

Choir: To Thee, O Lord.

Priest: May the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the all-holy, consubstantial, and life-giving Trinity, one Godhead and one Kingdom, bless you; and grant you length of days, godfearing children, prosperity in life and faith; and fill you with abundance of all earthly good things, and make you worthy to obtain the blessings of the promise; through the prayers of the holy Theotokos and of all the saints.

Choir: Amen.

Here the closing words are given, and "God, grant them many years" is sung three times.

Comments

WEDDINGS ARE NOT PERFORMED on the following days: from Cheese-fare week (the week before Lent) until one week after Easter; during the Apostles', Dormition and the Christmas fasts; on the eve of Wednesdays, Fridays, Sundays and the major feasts.

Indissolubility of marriage: The church only on exceptional occasions allows divorce, primarily when the marriage is already defiled by adultery or damaged by circumstances of the lengthy absence of one of the spouses. A second marriage is permitted after the death of a spouse, though in the second marriage service prayers of forgiveness for the second marriage are included. A third marriage is tolerated only as a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater one - that of licentiousness.

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