

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

WEDDING ETIQUETTE...

A comedian once joked about marriage saying that it was a "Three ring circus." First, the engagement ring, then the wedding ring and finally suffice-ring!" Well, we all know that marriage is a great vocation and couples can find great happiness and fulfillment in their lives as husband and wife. Unfortunately, today what is sort of like a "three ring circus" is the confusion that we as clergy often encounter when we prepare couples for marriage.

For instance, as a priest I've been asked several times over the years if I could officiate a wedding on a beach or at some other venue. However, the response of the Church is that two Catholics can never get married at Disneyland or Jones Beach. The proper place for the Sacrament of Marriage is the Church which is a sacred place.

An exception to that rule is when a Catholic marries a non baptized person of the Jewish, Muslim or Hindu religion. Then a dispensation or permission can be granted for the wedding to take place in a "neutral location" like a catering hall or a rose garden. For a Catholic and Protestant marriage, the ceremony could take place in either of the churches with permission.

A couple of times, I have officiated at a wedding for a Catholic and Jewish couple. Usually, the priest and rabbi take separate parts of the ceremony. One time, a priest friend told me he did one of those weddings. He and the rabbi had an equal share of the ritual with the rabbi maybe saying a few more words.

At the end, my friend read a special blessing from the Pope for the newly married couple. During the reception later on, one of the guests, obviously Catholic, motioned the priest over and said, "Father, I thought the rabbi was getting the best of you at the ceremony-but when you pulled out the Pope's blessing, you blew him out of the water!" Well, such an interfaith ceremony can be a little awkward at times, but we make it work.

Sometimes a mom or dad will come into the rectory to make a baptismal arrangement for their child. One of the questions on the baptism form is "Place of marriage." These days, often enough, the couple will reply that they were married by a civil official which is an invalid marriage in the eyes of the Church. The priest can always "convalidate" such a marriage at a later date. That simply means celebrating the marriage in the Church before a priest and two witnesses.

However, some couples say that they were married at a catering hall and it was by a priest. I always tell them that no "real" Catholic priest would ever do that. However, there is a website on the internet called "Rent a priest." Priests who have left the active ministry and are no longer in good standing with the Catholic Church advertise their services to perform marriages anytime and at any place! This creates a good deal of misunderstanding for some Catholics who are not too well informed about their faith.

Another common scenario currently is for a priest to be asked to do a small wedding in the Church and then for another "ceremony" to take place at a hall or other location later on. This is ok as long as the second celebration is not religious or asks for the couples consent again!

If all this sounds confusing, it's not meant to be. The Church wants to help couples planning for a marriage to do what is right and that's not easy these days. This Sunday, let's say a special prayer for all those who are planning to get married in the near future. May God help them to be true partners in life and in love!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Father Jerome*