

A Catholic wedding ceremony between two baptized Christians is considered a sacrament within the church. In the Roman Catholic faith, a wedding is about much more than marrying two people; it is a celebration of their love for God and each other. Modern touches or flourishes are oftentimes welcomed within a Catholic ceremony. A unity candle to represent the couple joining as one can be added to a side table, or a floral bouquet may be placed on a Marian side altar to honor of the Blessed Mother. The presentation of the Rosary and Bible is sometimes added.

Attire for Weddings

The Catholic Church has no specific requirements about attire for a wedding (although in some parishes, brides are requested to cover their shoulders). Unlike in Orthodox Judaism, the bride does not have to wear a veil. However, the traditional nature of a wedding in the Catholic Church does lend itself to traditional bridal attire, including a veil. Wearing a veil is a personal preference for the bride. Decades ago, this piece of fabric was worn over the bride's face as part of the superstition that it was bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the wedding. Today, the veil is seen as a sign of purity, though it is not an accessory required by the church.

Brides marrying for the first time traditionally wear a white, floor-length gown. The color white symbolizes chastity and purity. In general, the bridal gown should be modest enough not to distract from the religious nature of the event. Baring the shoulders is no longer considered disrespectful, but a plunging neckline, minidress, or second-skin tight dress would all be inappropriate for the setting. While it is not a set rule of the Catholic Church, some priests require the bride — and her bridesmaids — to cover their shoulders during the ceremony as a sign of respect. Purchase removable sleeves for the dress, or wear a shawl while in church that can later be removed for a strapless look later on during the reception. The Catholic bride should definitely err on the side of more conservative dress out of respect for her Church and her faith.

Both the bride and groom should also make an effort to cover any tattoos and to remove any unconventional piercings — any piercings that are not in the ear — during the ceremony. Again, while it is not required, it is considered sign of respect for the pastor and for the sanctity of the marriage.

The bride groom traditionally wears a tuxedo or suit with a neck tie and dress shoes during the wedding ceremony, depending on how formal the reception is. Because the sacramental ceremony is a significant life event, it is important to dress the part — no jeans and sneakers.

Flowers

Every bride wants flowers and decorations at her wedding!. While you can decorate near the altar, no flowers are to be placed directly on the altar itself. There are restrictions regarding use of tape or staples to hang decorations on the ends of pews for fear of damaging the wood. The space should not be over decorated, as it can distract from the central focus of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Ask what seasonal decorations may be in place at the time of your wedding. If you are planning to get married right after Christmas, for instance, the church may be so beautifully decorated that you don't have to do anything at all.

It is customary for a Catholic bride to carry either a bouquet or a white Bible down the aisle. Devout brides may also wish to carry a rosary. The flowers in the bridal bouquet can be anything that strikes your fancy, of course, but some may wish to carry white lilies, in honor of the Virgin Mary. If you wish to carry a small white Bible instead of a bouquet, it can be decorated with a small spray of flowers, such as delicate lilies-of-the-valley. Using a family Bible will make this tradition even more meaningful. Brides who opt to carry a Bible down the aisle can always have the florist make up a

small bouquet especially for tossing at the end of the reception (actually many brides who carry bouquets do this too so they can save their original bouquet as a wedding keepsake).

The Nuptial Mass, or Marriage Outside of Mass

Then there are the preparations for the marriage ceremony itself. When the bride and groom are both Catholic, they have the option of either a Nuptial Mass (which includes Communion) or a marriage Outside of Mass, which does not include Holy Communion. Rarely will a bride and groom have a Nuptial Mass with Communion when one of them is a non-Catholic. The reason for a Catholic couple to opt for the full Nuptial Mass is that it is an added blessing to their marriage. The reasons to choose a marriage without the Eucharist are usually either the length of the Nuptial Mass or other family considerations. Nuptial Masses usually run about twenty minutes longer, around one hour to ninety minutes total. In some cases, if many of the wedding guests will be non-Catholic, the bride and groom may decide it is best to omit the Communion portion of the ceremony. The traditional **wording for a wedding invitation** is slightly different for a Nuptial Mass than for another form of church wedding (including a Catholic wedding outside of Mass). Notice the use of the joining word “and” because the bride and groom are being united in Holy Matrimony. This is a sample invitation: Mr. and Mrs. Roger Talbot / Request the honor of your presence / At the Nuptial Mass of their daughter / Susan Anne / and / Mr. James Thomas / Saturday, June Fifth / Two Thousand and Fourteen / at three o'clock in the afternoon / St. Mary Catholic Church / Plantersville, Texas.

When many of the people in attendance will be unfamiliar with Catholic traditions, it can be helpful to have a wedding program to inform them about the proceedings. The priest conducting the ceremony will help too, by clearly indicating when the congregation should sit, stand, or kneel. Additionally, the priest may offer that any non-Catholic may approach the altar during Communion to receive a blessing, minus the actual Eucharist, which is a nice way to make everyone feel included. It should go without saying, but perhaps must be reiterated anyway, that a non-Catholic should never take the Sacrament of Communion. Any wedding guest of another faith should feel free to sit and stand with the congregation if they wish, but they may also remain seated if they prefer. Additionally, it is perfectly acceptable for a non-Catholic guest to remain silent, if they are not comfortable reciting the prayers, and of course, they would not be expected to make the Sign of the Cross.

Format of the Wedding

The Catholic **wedding ceremony** follows a very specific format. The processional is first. The groom and best man approach the altar from the side, where the priest is standing. Then the processional begins. The groomsmen and bridesmaids may pair up on the way down the aisle; the first pair should be the bridesmaid and groomsmen who will stand at the furthest place out in the line at the altar, and the pairs work in from there. If preferred, the groomsmen may go to the altar with the groom and best man, and greet the bridesmaids as they come up the aisle. The maid of honor is followed by the flower girl and ring-bearer, who should be a minimum of 5 years of age, so as to be old enough to participate appropriately. The rehearsal, which usually takes place the day before the wedding, is very helpful in working all of this out! The maid of honor walks up the aisle alone, and then it is time for the bride to make her grand entrance, usually on the arm of her father. Guests rise as the bride marches and then take their seats once the bride's

father has “given” her to the groom and the bridal couple is standing at the altar with the priest. In some Catholic ceremonies, there will be kneelers for the couple at the front of the church.

The Readings, Gospel, And Exchange Of Marriage Vows

It should be noted that all the music played in a Catholic wedding must be appropriate to the Liturgy (sometimes certain classical selections may be permitted), not only during the ceremony, but before and after as well. The ceremony begins with an opening prayer. That is followed by a reading from the Old Testament. Verses from Genesis are particularly popular, but there are other traditional readings from which to choose. The “Together for Life” handbook contains the selections from which the bride and groom may choose both their readings. A special friend or family member is often asked to do a reading during the ceremony. All readers should be present at the rehearsal so as to be fully instructed on their part in the Liturgy. After the Old Testament reading comes the Psalm, which will be proclaimed by the cantor, with the congregation responding. Then it is time for the second reading, this time a New Testament verse.

The priest will then read the Gospel, which is a passage from the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Following that is the homily, during which the priest will reflect on the readings, and help to make their message more clear. In the context of a marriage ceremony, the homily will naturally speak about what the Gospel means regarding love and marriage. Following the homily is the part of the wedding ceremony where the bride and groom say their vows and exchange rings. Rarely will a Catholic bride and groom be permitted to write their own vows, although sometimes they might be allowed to add a few personal words to the end of the traditional vows. If not, the wedding reception offers the opportunity to say a few words from the heart. Once vows have been exchanged, the bride and groom give each other the rings and the priest blesses them. The wedding bands are powerful symbols of love and fidelity. Then it is time for the kiss!

The Nuptial Blessing is next, during which the priest will bless the new marriage and say a prayer. This is followed by a very familiar part of Mass to any Catholic: the sign of peace. Each person is invited to turn to their neighbors and offer a handshake (or a hug for family) and the words, “Peace be with you”. In a Nuptial Mass, this is followed by Communion. As mentioned before, guests who are not Catholics should simply remain quietly seated during the Eucharist, unless the priest has extended an invitation for non-Catholics to approach the altar for a blessing. Following the Sacrament of Communion, the congregation joins in reciting the Lord's Prayer.

Finally, the Nuptial Mass concludes with a blessing and the traditional dismissal: “The Mass has ended. Go in peace”. At the end of a regular Mass, this would be the cue for the congregation to exit the church, but of course during a wedding, guests should remain in the pews until after the recessional. The Catholic recessional takes place in the reverse order of the processional, led by the joyous newlyweds, then the bridesmaids and ushers in pairs. The recessional at any wedding is a very happy moment, and should be accompanied by more up-tempo music than the more stately processional. Once the wedding party has exited, the guests may leave as well.

Receiving Lines

It should be noted that a receiving line is never to be held inside a church. Alternatively, the receiving line could be held at the reception site as guests enter. Speaking of the reception, a Catholic wedding reception is much like any other, except that there may be a blessing offered before dinner. Then it is time to eat, drink, be merry, and celebrate the newly joined bride and groom!

Frequently Asked Questions at St. Mary's:

Is there a bridal room for the bride and bridesmaids to dress before the ceremony?

St. Mary's does not have a bridal room. You should arrive at the church ready for the ceremony. However, to keep the bride from being seen by the groom before the ceremony, she may be seated in the confessional in the side annex, or may use the ladies' room in the same hallway.

May we throw rice, potpourri, bird seed, flower petals, etc., when leaving the church?

St. Mary's asks that you reserve this practice for the reception. There is very little time between weddings and scheduled confessions and Masses in our church for cleanup. Also, some of these items can cause damage to the church property.

Will we have time for pictures after the ceremony in the church?

You will have between 30 and 45 minutes for pictures in the church (depending on whether you had a full Mass or not). Confessions are scheduled for 4:45, and all should be out of the church by then.

Are the readers required to be Catholics?

It is preferred that your selected readers be Catholics who are lectors in their own parishes. However, exceptions may be made on an individual basis. Discuss this with the Wedding Coordinator.

Who supplies the worship aids for the Liturgy?

St. Mary's will provide the worship aids for your wedding. These will be handed out to guests as they arrive at the church.

When should we have the rehearsal?

Rehearsals are normally done on the evening before the wedding. Choose a time which allows for travel for anyone coming from a long distance, and considering any rehearsal dinner reservations you might have. Call the Wedding Coordinator at least two weeks before the wedding to schedule the rehearsal.

Who should be at the rehearsal?

All persons involved in the wedding itself should be at the rehearsal: bride and groom, bridesmaids, groomsmen, flower girls, ring-bearers, parents of bride and groom (and any step-parents who will be in the procession), any grandparents or special friends or relatives who will be in the procession, ushers, readers.

Are there any restrictions for photographers and videographers?

Photographers and videographers should visit with the Wedding Coordinator on the day of the wedding, at least 30 minutes before the ceremony begins.

When are the fees to be paid?

Fees for the organist, cantor, the rehearsal fee, and sacristan (if you are having a full Mass with a visiting priest) should be paid in cash at the rehearsal. It is usual to give a stipend to the presider (priest or deacon), but this is optional. You may leave this with the Wedding Coordinator at the rehearsal.

What do I do with the marriage license?

Bring the marriage license to the rehearsal and give it to the Wedding Coordinator. You should have already completed submission of any other documents to the church at least a month prior to the wedding.