

HOLY MATRIMONY

Holy Matrimony is a Sacrament of the Greek Orthodox Church in which a man and a woman solemnly vow before Christ, the priest, and the congregation to be true to each other for life.

The ceremony is performed by the priest who stands before a covered table. Upon it are placed the Holy Gospel, the Precious Cross, two candlesticks, a cup of wine, the wedding rings, and the wedding crowns.

The service consists of two parts, the service of the Betrothal and the service of the Crowning. The acts which you will observe solemnized today have special meaning and significance. Each act throughout the ritual is performed three times to invoke the Holy Trinity.

THE SERVICE OF THE BETROTHAL

The Betrothal consists of several beautiful prayers during which the priests ask God to grant the betrothed perfect and peaceful love, salvation, and the blessing of fair children.

The rings are blessed by the priest who takes them in his hand and making the sign of the cross over their heads says: "the servant of God, Robert is betrothed to the maid of God, Stephanie, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

The best man then exchanges the rings three times, taking the bride's ring and placing it on the groom's finger and vice-versa. The rings are the symbol of betrothal from the most ancient times. The exchange signifies that in married life the weaknesses of the one partner will be compensated for by the strength of the other. Thus, the exchange of the rings gives expression to the fact that the spouses in marriage will constantly be complementing each; other each will be enriched by the union.

THE SERVICE OF THE CROWN

The wedding service begins immediately following the Betrothal Service. It is highlighted by seven impressive and significant acts:

THE CANDLES

The bride and groom are handed candles which they hold throughout the service. The candles symbolize the spiritual willingness of the couples to receive Christ who will bless them through this sacrament.

THE JOINING OF THE RIGHT HANDS

The right hand of the bride and groom are joined when the priest reads the prayer that beseeches God to "join these thy servants, unite them in one mind and one flesh". The hands are kept joined throughout the service to symbolize the "oneness" of the couple.

THE CROWNING

The office of the crowning, which follows, is the climax of the wedding service. The priest takes up the crowns and makes the sign of the cross three times, over the heads of the bride and groom; the best man then exchanges the crowns three times, as were the rings during the Betrothal. The crowns are the symbol that the newly married couple receives the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be the founders of a new generation and are crowned with virtue and holiness to serve all their lives to the glory of Almighty God.

BIBLE READINGS

Following the crowning, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (5:20-33) , St. John. (John 2: 1 -11) concerning the mystery and holiness of the Christian Marriage and the duties and responsibilities of the husband and wife to each other is chanted by the priest.

THE COMMON CUP

In remembrance of this blessing, wine is given to the couple. This is the "common cup" of the life denoting the mutual sharing of joy and sorrow, the token of a life of harmony. The drinking of wine from the cup serves to impress upon the couple that from that moment on they will share everything in life, joys as well as sorrows, and that they are to "bear one another's burdens". Their joys will be doubled and their sorrows halved because they will be shared.

THE CEREMONIAL WALK

The priest then guides the bride and groom in a circle around the table. The husband and wife are taking their first steps as a married couple to receive Christ, who will bless them through this sacrament and the Church, in the person of the priest, leads them in the way they must walk. The way is symbolized by the circle at the centre of which are the Gospel and the Cross of our Lord. This expresses the fact that the way of Christian living is a perfect orbit around the centre of life who is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

During this ceremonial walk around the table a hymn is sung of the Holy Martyrs reminding the newly married couple of the sacrificial love they are to have for each other in marriage - a love that seeks not its own but is willing to sacrifice its all for the one loved.

THE BLESSING

The bride and groom return to their places, and the priest blesses the couple. The priest holding the Holy Gospel, now separates the joined hands of the couple, reminding them that God and only God should break the marriage bond between them, thus ending the Marriage Ceremony.