



ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA

Secretariat for Evangelization

222 North Seventeenth Street • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103-1299
Telephone (215) 587-3537 • Fax (215) 587-3561

OFFICE for WORSHIP

*"It must be lamented that, especially in the years following the post-conciliar liturgical reform, as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation, there have been a number of abuses which have been a source of suffering for many."
(Ecclesia de Eucharistia #52)*

October 15, 2004

Dear Brother Priests,

The gift and mystery of our ordination brings with it many sacred duties and responsibilities. All of us are bound by promise to safeguard and protect the Church's Rites as She has handed them down to us, not treating them arbitrarily and carelessly. Even further our Holy Father recently reminded the whole Church in his Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* that, *"Liturgy is never anyone's private property, be it of the celebrant or of the community in which the mysteries are celebrated."*

We all need to be reminded of this from time to time. One of the things that has become a source of concern in recent years is the consistency (or lack of consistency) in the way we as priests safeguard and celebrate the Sacred Mysteries. Certainly our present rites provide us with many options, however, many things are not optional and more importantly, not in keeping with the true Spirit of the Sacred Liturgy. Since the Second Vatican Council the Church has stated numerous times that *"no one, even if he be a priest, may add or subtract anything from the liturgy."* This principle should always remind us that we are part of something greater than ourselves, we are stewards of the Mysteries of the Church which we promised to celebrate both faithfully and reverently on the day of our ordination. They are entrusted to us and we celebrate them in the name of Christ.

With this in mind I would like to address specifically at this time the "Wedding" or "Unity" Candle which ironically has become a source of "dis-unity" among all of us whether priests, deacons and/or lay faithful. Certainly this is not the only liturgical abuse (or most serious) we have witnessed in our day, however, it has become an obvious "addition" (not approved by the Holy See) to the Rite of Marriage and thus a matter that must be critically assessed by all of us together.

Its questionable symbolism distorts the dignity, clarity and "noble simplicity" of the

present Rite of Marriage, a dignity, clarity and simplicity that the Second Vatican Council so greatly desired where the celebration of the rites are concerned.

Sadly, this “creative addition” to the Rite of Marriage has become an accepted (even expected) part of it. Because of its presence, many couples have come to believe that it is an “integral part” to the Rite of Marriage itself, even necessary for its validity. This is a powerful reminder of the ancient axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Its incorporation into the Rite of Marriage has now diminished a proper understanding among the faithful that the couple themselves (by their exchange of consent) are the primary symbol of unity.

Currently, there is widespread confusion concerning its use. Some parishes rightly catechize couples and help them to understand its inappropriateness. Yet other parishes and/or individual priests have arbitrarily “ritualized” its use with words of explanation, involvement of parents and even singing. Others have simply left it to be an option. With all of these variables, couples and families have justifiably become angry, upset and confused by the inconsistency among us their spiritual leaders. All of us suffer, but more importantly, the Rite of Marriage suffers; its essential ritual action is prevented from speaking in all its beauty and clarity.

My brothers, the issue here is not whether the Unity candle belongs in the Rite of Marriage or not, that answer is obvious, it doesn't. Perhaps the larger issue is the anger and confusion perpetuated among the faithful when one priest allows it while the other one doesn't. This hurts everyone whether they be priests, deacons or even parish musicians trying hard to uphold the integrity of our rites.

Therefore, I am asking that we begin now to be consistent in this matter and make it a priority to work together as brothers to catechize the faithful as to why this secular commercial product has no place within the Rite of Marriage during Mass and the Rite of Marriage outside Mass. To be *pastorally sensitive* to the faithful I would ask that if a wedding has already been planned with the inclusion of this candle, simply allow it so as not to cause any misunderstanding. However, any future consultation with couples should include a proper catechesis on this matter.

I ask you to please read carefully this months Newsletter and feel free to copy and share any information with your couples. I thank you for your cooperation in this matter and know that you have my full support as the Director of the Office for Worship.

Faternally yours,

Reverend Gerald P. Carey
Director