

## **The Service of Betrothal**

In this service, the priest begins by offering petitions of prayer on behalf of the man and woman who are being betrothed. He then asks God's blessings upon the rings and proceeds to bless the bride and groom with the rings. He does this three times in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, first from the groom to the bride, and then from the bride to the groom. The back and forth movement can be interpreted to mean that the lives of the two are being entwined into one. Double wedding bands are used, since according to Old Testament references, the placing of rings was an official act indicating that an agreement had been sealed between two parties. In this case, the agreement is that a man and a woman agree to live together in the fellowship of marriage as husband and wife.

The priest then places the rings on the ring fingers of the right hands of the two. It is noteworthy that the right hands are used in the putting on of the rings, since according to all Biblical knowledge we have, it is the right hand of God that blesses; it was to the right hand of the Father that Christ ascended; it is to the right that those who will inherit eternal life will go. Thus, the Church preserves the superiority of the right also in marriage. The Sponsor as a further expression and witness that the lives of the two are being brought together then exchanges the rings three times on the fingers of the bride and the groom. A final prayer is read, sealing the putting on of the rings, which then take on the added meaning that the agreement was sealed and that God Himself enacted the marriage.

## **The Service of Crowning**

### **The Joining of Hands**

The Service of Crowning begins with the invocation of the Holy Trinity. After petitions are offered on behalf of the bride, groom and wedding company, three prayers are read which ascribe to God the institution of marriage and the preservation of His people through the ages. These prayers portray humanity as one continuous fabric, in which is interwoven everyone from the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, to the present generation of believers. The bride and groom enter into this fabric with the reading of the third prayer. During this prayer the celebrant joins the right hands of the two to symbolize the union coming from God. Since God is the true Celebrant of every sacrament, the priest always expresses himself in the third person. He is simply God's instrument in the service.

### **The Crowning**

The union is then completed with the Crowning. The celebrant takes the crowns from the altar table and blesses the bride and groom in the same manner as he blessed them with the rings. He then places the crowns upon their heads, chanting, "O Lord our God, crown them with glory and honor." The crowns have several meanings, two of which are most important. First, they conform to Biblical teachings in that God bestows His blessing upon His children in the form of crowns. Second, they identify the bride and groom as the beginning of a new kingdom, and as such they reign supreme under the Divine Authority of God, Who reigns over all. The sponsor exchanges the crowns over the heads of the bride and groom as a witness to the sealing of the union.

The service continues with the Epistle (Ephesians 5:20-33) and Gospel (John 2:1-11) readings. The readings are self-explanatory, the Epistle addressing the responsibilities of each partner in the marriage and the Gospel recounting Christ's first miracle, that of changing water to wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The Church sees a pertinent relationship between the presence of Christ at that particular wedding and God's presence in the Garden of Eden. For just as the first public act of God the Father in the Book of Genesis was to unite man and woman and to bless them for the continuance of His people on earth, so also the beginning of Christ's ministry on earth was at a wedding.

### **The Common Cup**

Following the Gospel reading and brief prayers, the common cup is presented to the bride and groom. The cup contains a small portion of wine. This is blessed by the celebrant and offered to the now wedded husband and wife as a witness that from that moment on they will share the cup of life, and whatever life has in store for them, they will share equally.

### **The Procession**

The celebrant then takes the arm of the groom and leads him and his bride around the table as an expression of joy. The three-fold walk around the anti-altar is seen as a religious dance. In this respect it is an expression of gratitude to God for His blessings, and joyfulness at the receiving of those blessings. As the bride and groom are led around the table three times, three significant hymns are sung. The first speaks of the indescribable joy that Isaiah the Prophet experienced when he envisioned the coming of the Messiah upon the earth. The second reminds us of the martyrs of the Faith, who received their crowns of glory from God through the sacrifice of their lives. The third is exaltation to the Holy Trinity.

### **The Removal of the Crowns and the Benediction**

When the bride and groom have returned to their original places, the Priest faces the groom and says: "Be magnified, O Bridegroom, as Abraham, and blessed as Isaac, and increased as was Jacob. Go your way in peace, performing in righteousness the commandments of God." Turning to the bride, he says, "And you, O Bride, be magnified as was Sarah, and rejoiced as was Rebecca, and increased as Rachel, being glad in your husband, keeping the paths of the Law, for so God is well pleased." Then, removing their crowns, the Priest says, "Accept their crowns in Your Kingdom unsoiled and undefiled; and preserve them without offense to the ages of ages." After this, the prayer of benediction is recited and the newly married couples depart from the Church.