

It is only the church that unites the couple by the hands of an ordained priest and on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ...

THE WEDDING IN CANA OF GALILEE

At the conclusion of the Sacrament a cup of wine is blessed with a proper prayer and presented to the bride and the groom to taste. This is a direct reference to Jesus' presence at the wedding in the town of Cana in Galilee where he was invited with his blessed mother Mary and the twelve disciples. There Jesus performed his first miracle by changing water into wine, since the guests at the party had run out of wine. This event comes in the Armenian Sacrament of Crowning first for the personal blessing and support of Jesus, and then for the happy ending of the wedding and merriment. The wisdom of such allusion is to make Christ, St. Mary, and the disciples the "honorary witnesses" to the Sacrament, making the unity between the groom and bride more honorable and even miraculous.

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Holy Matrimony The Sacrament of Crowning



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WHAT IS A SACRAMENT?

A Sacrament in the Armenian Church is the vehicle to distribute the gifts of God through His Holy Spirit. There are seven Sacraments in the Armenian Church as the "visible" moving forces and the "life-giving" sustainers of the members of the church. All seven are established by Christ himself. They are not just rites and ceremonies; they are the "actions" of Christ performed by the authorized members of the clergy. No Sacrament can be performed outside the church anywhere else since it is holy and is the action of Christ himself. Under circumstances where there is no Armenian Church edifice, a sister church in the neighborhood may be used.

No sacrament can be performed outside the church...

ARE SACRAMENTS ESSENTIAL?

A church without Sacraments is not considered as "functional" because they are integrated in the life of the Christian faithful all along, from his birth to his death, even though some may argue that the church firmly believes primarily in the Holy Bible and preaches the Word of God as a priority, deeming Sacraments unnecessary. For that

matter, however, the Sacraments are certainly the off-springs of the Word of God and have reached us as the ordinances of the Bible, directly mandated by our Savior Jesus Christ.

The divine initiative and the moral foundations set by Christ make marriage a Holy Sacrament...

MARRIAGE IS HOLY

God's ordinance addressed to man and woman is "to go and be fruitful and replenish the earth," as we read in the first chapter of Genesis. Holy Matrimony, known also in the Armenian tradition as the Sacrament of Crowning, is therefore a divine order for a specific purpose: the procreation of children and the formation of the little kingdom within the larger Kingdom of God. God's initiative is always holy and carries with it virtuous life and moral upbringing, having its ultimate goal to replenish the Kingdom of God on earth.

It is the Holy Spirit, which acts in each Sacrament and bestows divine gifts accordingly, such as love, righteousness, patience and endurance...

MATRIMONY IS A SACRAMENT

Marriage mandates not only God's orders, but it also demands life commitment of the married man and woman toward each other. The divine initiative and the moral

foundations set by Christ make marriage a Holy Sacrament. Jesus followed His Father's initial creation and granted it his sanction and endorsement, emphasizing the inseparable unity between the husband and wife. Separation and divorce in Christ's view ends up in adultery which is the principal sin in the relationship of the married couple.

Matrimony or the Sacrament of the Crowning must take place in the church...

MATRIMONY IS ALWAYS PERFORMED IN THE CHURCH

Like all the Sacraments, Matrimony or the Sacrament of the Crowning, must take place in the church proper. Under no circumstances a Sacrament can be performed outside the church for convenience and/or for pleasure. The holiness of the Sacrament is safeguarded by the church alone. A wedding is considered invalid and void in the eyes of the church if performed in places outside the church, like hotels, halls, parks or beaches, and by the hands of lay people. By the same token defrocked clergy are not allowed to perform Matrimony or any of the Sacraments.

HOW TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR A WEDDING?

At least two meetings are needed with the officiating priest months prior to the date of the marriage service. There are days in

the church calendar, especially the 40 days in Lent, when no marriage can be blessed by the church. The priest shall advise the couple for the date and time, considering other previously scheduled weddings and their respective dates. Counseling is important on moral issues, and certificates of Baptism and Confirmation must be provided by the couple. In case one or the other, or both, have not been baptized, it becomes mandatory for him/her to go through those two Sacraments weeks before the wedding. An application form must be completed to provide important data about the couple's identity, age, and marital status for church records and for the issuance of a church certificate. Divorced individuals shall produce proper documents from respective states.

Under no circumstances a Sacrament can be performed outside the church for convenience and/or for pleasure...

THE WAY HOLY MATRIMONY IS PERFORMED

It is only the church that unites the couple by the hands of an ordained priest and on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. To repeat, no outside institution or authority shall perform matrimony the way Christianity upholds it, since the sanctity of the union between husband and wife is sealed by the hands of Christ. Furthermore, it is the Holy Spirit which acts in each Sacrament and bestows divine gifts accordingly, such as love, righteousness, patience and endurance. Such action is symbolically expressed in the ex-

change of the vows and the wedding rings, which the priest blesses and presents them individually to wear them on their left hand finger.

THE PURPOSE OF MARRIAGE

The purpose of marriage has a basic and important pre-condition. It has to be unbreakable and inseparable unity between the two parties. Jesus sanctified the Father's initiative by confirming the forceful and purposeful unity, saying: "Therefore what God has joined together let no man separate." To be fruitful is obviously the purpose of this Sacrament, namely bearing children of virtuous behavior, for which the Armenian Church offers lengthy prayers to safeguard the sanctity and the lasting unity between the husband and his wife. Separation and divorce are the denials of God's purpose and intentions. Instead, understanding, patience, and responsibility should come in and prevent such danger.

A wedding is considered invalid and void in the eyes of the church if performed in places outside the church, like hotels, halls, parks or beaches...

CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

The unity of Christ and his Church is such that no church can exist without Christ. Jesus made reference to himself as the groom and to the church as his bride. This was bril-

liantly elaborated by St. Paul who likened the unity of the husband and his wife to the unity of Christ and his Church. As the Church is obedient to Christ, so also the wife should be to her husband, and furthermore, as Christ cherishes and nourishes his Church, likewise husbands should do to their wives with the bond of love, respect, and obedience, all three ultimately rendered to Christ our Lord. The unity therefore is a holy unity in both cases.

There are days in the church calendar, the 40 days in Lent, when no marriage can be blessed by the church...

WHY DO WE CALL IT CROWNING?

The Armenian Church crowns the couple as king and queen by actually placing crowns on their heads, or by circling around the forehead a tricolor (white, green, red) braid with a little cross in front. It symbolizes the establishment of a kingdom within the Kingdom of God, at which time a special hymn is sung dedicated to the first king and queen of Armenia, Trdat and Ashkhen, who embraced Christianity as a state religion. Unlike other churches, the central prayer of the service specifies clearly the "placing of crowns with precious gems on their heads." Royalty in this case, as the crowns are removed with a special prayer, reflects humility in terms of service and dedication, as well as dignity and power under the banner of the Church which is the Cross.