
Concerning the Liturgical Celebration of Matrimony 'MIXED MARRIAGE' AND 'DISPARITY OF CULT'

Your Grace / Your Excellency,

In order to promote a common understanding and a uniform liturgical practice throughout the Ecclesiastical Region of Tamil Nadu, the Commission for Liturgy, having examined the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Code of Canon Law, the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, the Order of Celebrating Matrimony, and the recent clarification of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, respectfully offers the following guidance regarding the celebration of Matrimony in cases of 'mixed marriage' (matrimonium mixtum) and 'disparity of cult' (disparitas cultus).

The Church teaches that marriage is a covenant established by the Creator and, between the baptized, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a Sacrament (Gaudium et Spes, no. 48; Code of Canon Law, c. 1055 §§1-2). The Eucharist, moreover, is "the source and summit of the Christian life" (Lumen Gentium, no. 11; Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 10), while Baptism is "the gateway to the sacraments" (CCC, no. 1213). Consequently, the Church's liturgical discipline seeks to express faithfully the intrinsic relationship between Baptism, Matrimony, Eucharistic communion, and the unity of the Church.

Mixed Marriage: According to Canon 1124, a 'mixed marriage' is contracted between a Catholic and another baptized Christian who is not in full communion with the Catholic Church. Since both parties are baptized, such a marriage is sacramental by virtue of Canon 1055 §2. Nevertheless, because Eucharistic communion ordinarily presupposes full ecclesial communion, the Church regulates communicatio in sacris, the sharing in sacramental life with Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church (c. 844). These norms safeguard both the integrity of the sacraments and the unity of the Church. The Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism calls for prudent pastoral discernment in the celebration of the Eucharist (nos. 129-131; 159-160). Consistence with this teaching, the Order of Celebrating Matrimony permits the celebration of a mixed marriage either within the Holy Mass or outside the Holy Mass, depending upon the pastoral circumstances and the prudent judgment of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Disparity of Cult: In view of Canon 1086, a marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person requires a dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult. Although validly celebrated after dispensation, such a marriage is not

sacramental, since only a valid marriage between two baptized persons is, by that very fact, a Sacrament (c. 1055 §2). The Catechism of the Catholic Church further teaches that marriages involving disparity of cult require particular pastoral care because the spouses do not share the common foundation of Christian Baptism (CCC, nos. 1633-1637). Therefore, the Order of Celebrating Matrimony provides that such marriages are ordinarily to be celebrated outside the Holy Mass. This discipline is not based merely on the fact that the unbaptized spouse cannot receive Holy Communion, but on the Church's sacramental theology, whereby the Eucharist is the fullest expression of ecclesial and sacramental communion. The recent clarification of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments reaffirms this ordinary discipline while recognizing that, for a grave and just pastoral reason, the Diocesan Bishop may permit the celebration within the Holy Mass as an exceptional case.

Therefore, for the sake of a common and uniform liturgical practice throughout the Ecclesiastical Region of Tamil Nadu, it is recommended that:

- Mixed marriages (cc. 1124-1129) may be celebrated either within the Holy Mass or outside the Holy Mass, in accordance with the Order of Celebrating Matrimony, taking into account the norms concerning communicatio in sacris and Eucharistic communion (c. 844), the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, and prudent pastoral judgment. (Note: For the uniformity it can be celebrated within the Holy Mass)
- Marriages involving disparity of cult (c. 1086) are ordinarily to be celebrated according to the Rite of Celebrating Matrimony Outside Mass. Celebration within the Holy Mass is to remain exceptional and requires the prior permission of the Diocesan Bishop for a grave and just pastoral reason, in conformity with the liturgical books and the guidance of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

I shall be grateful if this clarification may be communicated to the clergy and to all those engaged in marriage preparation and pastoral ministry within Your Diocese, so that a common and faithful observance of the Church's liturgical discipline may be maintained throughout the Tamil Nadu Ecclesiastical Region.

Yours fraternally in Christ,

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