

CHAPTER IV

SOLEMN ENGAGEMENT OR BETROTHAL

It is praiseworthy and in accord with ancient ecclesiastical custom for a Catholic young man and young woman who become engaged to have the engagement solemnized and blessed by the Church. For detailed discussion of a betrothal and its consequences one may consult Canon Law (canon 1017) and a commentary. Let it suffice here to say that no action is admissible to compel the celebration of marriage, even after a formal engagement has taken place, although a damage suit would be permitted before a competent judge, either in ecclesiastical or civil court.

Today there is no prescribed ritual for a formal engagement. But it is fitting that it take place before the altar of God and be followed by Mass and holy communion.

1. The priest vests in surplice and white stole, or if Mass is to follow, in the Mass vestments. He is assisted by two servers, and at hand are holy water and an altar missal. He awaits the couple at the communion table; and as they come forward the following psalm may be sung on the eighth psalm-tone (see music supplement).

Psalm 126

P: Unless the house be of the Lord's building, * in vain do the builders labor.

All: Unless the Lord be the guard of the city, * in vain does the guard keep his sentry.

P: It is futile that you rise before daybreak, * to be astir in the midst of darkness,

All: You that eat the bread of hard labor; * for He deals bountifully to His beloved while they are sleeping.

P: See, offspring come from God's giving, * a fruitful womb is the reward of His blessing.

All: Like arrows in the hand of the warrior, * are children begotten of a youthful father.

P: Happy the man who has filled with them his quiver; *
they shall uphold him in contending at the gate with his rival.

All: Glory be to the Father.

P: As it was in the beginning.

2. Now the priest addresses them, either in his own words or in the short form that follows:

Allocution

Beloved of Christ: It is in God's designs that you are called to the holy vocation of matrimony. For this reason you present yourselves today before Christ and the Church, before His sacred minister and the people of God, to ratify in a formal manner your engagement. You are here to ask the blessing of God and of the Church on your proposal, and to ask the good prayers of the faithful here present. You realize that what has begun at the inspiration of your heavenly Father requires equally His grace to be brought to a happy conclusion.

We trust that you have given serious and prayerful deliberation to your promise that you will one day be married; also that you have consulted with your parents and elders. In the time that intervenes until your wedding day, may you prepare for the sacrament of matrimony by a virtuous courtship. Then, when the happy day arrives on which you will give yourselves irrevocably to each other, you will have laid a sound religious foundation for the many years you will spend together, years that will be filled with joy and prosperity, and years that will finally give way to an eternity of joy and blessedness. May the union you purpose to consummate one day in Christian marriage be truly a sacramental image of the union of Christ with His beloved bride, the Church.

3. With their right hands joined the couple repeat after the priest what follows:

The man first:

In the name of our Lord, I, **N.N.**, promise that I will one day take you, **N.N.**, for my wife, according to the ordinances of God and holy Church. I will love you as I love myself. I will keep faith with you and be loyal to you, and so aid you and comfort you in all your necessities. These things and all that a man ought to do for his espoused, I promise to do for you, and to keep the promise by the faith that is in me.

Then the woman:

In the name of our Lord, I, **N.N.**, do declare that, in the form and manner in which you have promised yourself to me, I will one day bind and oblige myself to you, and will take you, **N.N.**, for my husband. And all that you have pledged to me, I promise to do for you, and to keep the promise by the faith that is in me.

4. Then the priest takes the two ends of his stole and in the form of a cross places them over the clasped hands of the couple. Holding the stole in place with his left hand, he says:

I bear witness to your solemn proposal and I declare you engaged; in the name of the Father, and of the Son, ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. As he pronounces the last words he sprinkles them with holy water in the form of a cross.

All: Amen.

5. Then he blesses the engagement ring:

P: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

P: The Lord be with you.

All: May He also be with you.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, Creator and preserver of the human race and the giver of everlasting salvation, may it please you to make holy this ring, which we bless ✠ in your name; through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

He sprinkles the ring with holy water.

6. The man takes the ring and places it first on the index finger of the left hand of the woman saying:

In the name of the Father,
then on the middle finger, adding:

and of the Son,

finally placing and leaving it on the ring finger he concludes:
and of the Holy Spirit.

7. The priest opens the missal at the beginning of the Canon, and presents the page imprinted with the crucifixion to be kissed, first by the man and then by the woman.

8. After this the priest may read these passages from Sacred Scripture:

Tobias 7 and 8

Tobias said: "I will not eat nor drink here this day, unless you first grant me my petition, and promise to give me Sara, your daughter." . . . The angel said to Raguel: "Be not afraid to give her to this man, for to him who fears God is your daughter due to be his wife; therefore another could not have her." . . . And Raguel, taking the right hand of his daughter, gave it into the right hand of Tobias, saying: "The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob be with you, and may He join you together, and fulfill His blessing in you." And taking paper they made a writing of the marriage. And afterwards they made merry, blessing God. . . . Then Tobias exhorted the virgin, and said to her: "Sara, arise, and let us pray to God today, and tomorrow, and the next day; because for these three nights we are joined to God; and when the third night is over, we will be in our own wedlock. For we are the children of saints, and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God." So they both arose, and prayed earnestly both together that health might be given them.

John 15.4-12

At that time Jesus said to His disciples: "Remain united with me, and I will remain united with you. A branch can bear no fruit of itself, that is, when it is not united with the vine; no more can you, if you do not remain united with me. I am the vine, you are the branches. One bears abundant fruit only when he and I are mutually united; severed from me, you can do nothing. If one does not remain united with me, he is simply thrown away like a branch, and dries up. Such branches are gathered and thrown into the fire to be burned. As long as you remain united with me, and my teachings remain your rule of life, you may ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. This is what glorifies my Father — your bearing abundant fruit and thus proving yourselves my disciples. Just as the Father loves me, so I love you. Be sure to hold my love. If you treasure my commandments, you will hold my love, just as I treasure my Father's commandments and thus secure His love. I have told you this, that my joy may be yours, and your joy may be perfect. This is my commandment: love one another as I love you."

9. Lastly the priest extends his hands over the heads of the couple and says:

May God bless your bodies and your souls. May He shed His blessing on you as He blessed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. May the hand of the Lord be on you. May He send His holy angel to guard you all the days of your life. Amen. Go in peace.