

A CATECHETICAL AND LITURGICAL MOMENT



Q: *In some places married couples are sometimes invited to “renew” their wedding vows during Mass. Has the Church given norms on how this should be done? -- J.D., Leeton, Australia.*

A: The Universal Church has no ritual for the renewal of marriage vows; either within or outside the Liturgy of the Mass. The Holy See has however, encouraged the national bishops' conferences to prepare their own Rites of Marriage and submit them for approval. Through this process several countries, especially in North and South America for example, have included in the Book of Blessings wedding-peculiar blessings (e.g., for 25th and 50th anniversaries).

These rites or blessings make a slight, but very significant and important distinction between the exchange of the couple's original matrimonial consents and the renewal of their ongoing marital commitment. The reason for this important clarification is because there is no such need for a "**renewal of marriage vows**" within the Church—unless the original consents were invalid.

The exchange of *consents* (also known as “vows”) is required only once for a valid celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Through their consent, the spouses mutually offer and accept each other, through an irrevocable and perpetual covenant, to establish a matrimonial bond (Canon 1057§2 of the Code of Canon Law and the Catechism of the Catholic Church #1638).

While, it is true that Catholics annually renew their baptismal promises (at the Easter liturgy for example); priests their ordination commitments (at the Chrism Mass to their bishop during Holy Week); and many religious brothers/sisters profess their vows, these promises are complementary to the sacrament and do not constitute a re-reception of the sacramental form itself. As we recall, nobody is ever re-baptized, re-confirmed or re-ordained again for anniversary purposes. Excluding the Sacraments of Eucharist, Anointing of the Sick and Reconciliation (which are routinely repeated in the normal life of the faithful), the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and Matrimony are not—since they confer a unique and permanent sacred seal or bond upon the recipient(s).

[In conclusion, to “renew” these sacraments (such as the vocational/covenantal vows associated with Holy Orders and/or Matrimony) could incorrectly imply that God's efficacious graces in the sacrament is somehow limited by time (much like an expiration stamp or label on a box of cereal or a carton of milk). It is our Catholic belief that God's efficacious grace in the sacraments transcends human time and space—it is not formed, confined, or dependent upon it in any way.]

(SR: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/liturgy/zlitur440.htm>)

(NB: The revised Rite of Matrimony (implemented within the U.S. on 12/31/2016) includes a specific blessing for a couple celebrating their wedding anniversary—however, it remains not a “renewal” of the original consents—since once exchanged in the sacrament, they remain valid.)