

# 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:** Until recently, the universal Church had no ritual for the renewal of marriage vows; either within or outside of Mass. The Holy See has encouraged the national bishops' conferences to prepare their own Rites of Marriage and submit them for approval; regarding the initial conferral of the Sacrament of Matrimony. Along with this process several countries, especially in North and South America for example, have included in the Book of Blessings wedding-peculiar blessings (e.g., 25th and 50th anniversaries).

These blessings make a slight, but very significant distinction between the original vows (or exchanged matrimonial consents) and the renewal of the couple's ongoing matrimonial commitment. The reason for these slight, but significant changes is because in an essential way, there is no such thing as a "**renewal of marriage vows**" within the Roman Catholic Church.

The exchange of consents (also known as "vows") is required only once for a valid celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage. Through their consent, the spouses mutually give 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), priests their ordination commitments (at the Chrism Mass to their bishop during Holy Week) and members of religious communities profess their vows, these "promises" are complementary to the sacrament and do not constitute a re-reception of the sacramental form itself. No one is ever re-baptized, re-ordained or re-consecrated again for anniversary purposes. Excluding the Sacraments of Eucharist, Anointing and Reconciliation which are repeated in the normal life of the faithful, the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders and Marriage are not.

In conclusion, to "**renew**" these sacraments (such as the vocational/covenantal vows associated with Holy Orders and/or Marriage) could incorrectly imply or infer that God's efficacious graces in the Sacrament is somehow limited by time (much like an expiration stamp or label on a can, box or 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.

Of note, the revised Rite of Celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony (to be implemented as of 12/30/2016) now includes an appendix with a prescribed Order of Blessing an Engaged Couple and an Order of Blessing a Married Couple within Mass on the Anniversary of Marriage.

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