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## **UNITY CANDLE**

*It must be lamented that, especially in the years following the post-conciliar liturgical reform, as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation, there have been a number of abuses which have been a source of suffering for many. (Ecclesia de Eucharistia #52)*

The gift and mystery of priestly ordination brings with it many sacred duties and responsibilities. Priests are bound by promise to safeguard and protect the Church's Rites as She has handed them down, not treating them arbitrarily and carelessly. Even further Pope John Paul II reminded the whole Church in his Encyclical Letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* that, "*Liturgy is never anyone's private property, be it of the celebrant or of the community in which the mysteries are celebrated.*"

The use of the Wedding or Unity Candle has ironically become a source of dis-unity among priests, deacons and/or lay faithful. Certainly, this is not the only liturgical abuse (or most serious) we have witnessed in our day; however, it has become an obvious addition (not approved by the Holy See) to the Rite of Marriage and thus a matter that must be critically assessed by all of us together. Its questionable symbolism distorts the dignity, clarity and noble simplicity of the present Rite of Marriage, a dignity, clarity and simplicity that the Second Vatican Council so greatly desired where the celebration of the rites are concerned.

Sadly, this creative addition to the Rite of Marriage has become an accepted (even expected) part of it. Because of its presence, many couples have come to believe that it is an integral part to the Rite of Marriage itself, even necessary for its validity. This is a powerful reminder of the ancient axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi*. Its incorporation into the Rite of Marriage has now diminished a proper understanding among the faithful that the couple themselves (by their exchange of consent) are the primary symbol of unity.

Currently, there is widespread confusion concerning its use. Some parishes rightly catechize couples and help them to understand its inappropriateness. Yet other parishes and/or individual priests have arbitrarily ritualized its use with words of explanation, involvement of parents and even singing. Others have simply left it to be an option. With all of these variables, couples and families have justifiably become angry, upset and confused by the inconsistency among their spiritual leaders.

The issue here is not whether the Unity candle belongs in the Rite of Marriage or not, that answer is obvious, it doesn't. Perhaps the larger issue is the anger and confusion perpetuated among the faithful when one priest allows it while the other one doesn't.

Efforts should be made now to be consistent in this matter and make it a priority to work together as brothers to catechize the faithful as to why this secular commercial product has no place within the Rite of Marriage during Mass and the Rite of Marriage outside Mass. To be pastorally sensitive to the faithful, if a wedding has already been planned with the inclusion of this candle, simply allow it so as not to cause any misunderstanding. However, any future consultation with couples should include a proper catechesis on this matter.

