

grant them the fruit of the womb and fine children."³⁵⁹ The priest confirms the vows of the bride and groom with the words: "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mk 10:9).

480 The priest completes the rite by crowning the groom and bride, blessing them thrice, and proclaiming: "Lord our God, crown them with glory and honour." The crowns are a symbol of the dignity of human persons—men and women—created "a little while lower than the angels," with everything put in subjection under their feet (see Ps 8:6-7; see Heb 2:7) and called by God to be co-creators with him, receiving progeny from him. The crowns are also a symbol of the couple's victory over sensual desire during courtship: they subjected their bodily passions to marital love. Likewise, they symbolize the crowns of martyrdom, testifying to a fidelity to Christ's love unto death.

481 The asceticism of Christian marriage is also presented in the troparia sung before the removal of the crowns. In the first troparion we hear the words: "Dance, Isaiah: the Virgin has conceived in her womb and has borne a Son, Emmanuel, who is God and man...." The Church rejoices in the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah about Emmanuel—God-with-us—coming into the new marriage and dwelling there as in a domestic church. In the second troparion, "O holy martyrs, you suffered gloriously and have received your crowns....," the Church asks the holy martyrs for their intercession. She prays that Christ, the "apostles' boast and the martyrs' joy" (as sung in the third troparion), become the boast and joy of this couple, so that in their marriage they may imitate the sacrificial love of the martyrs and proclaim the consubstantial Trinity.

482 Removing the crowns from their heads, the priest prays that Christ would receive the couple's crowns in his kingdom, and "keep them unblemished, undefiled, and unassailed for ever and ever." This is a sign that by the power of Christ the marital love of the couple is stronger than death and will endure for ages. The Rite of Crowning concludes with the blessing of the couple in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, of whom they are called to be an icon.

3) The Rite of Second Crowning

483 Love does not cease with the death of one of the spouses. Love is stronger than death. The Church encourages the widower or widow to preserve fidelity to the deceased partner as an indication of their unique relationship. As testimony to the eternity of their love, it invites them to abstain from a second marriage (see 1 Cor 7:40). If, however, it is too burden-

³⁵⁹ Trebnyk, Rite of Crowning, Prayer before the Crowning.

some for the widower or widow to remain without a marital relationship, the Church can give a blessing for a second crowning. When a widower marries a widow (that is, when both of the spouses have previously been married), the Church blesses their marriage with a special Rite of Second Crowning. Some of the prayers of this Rite have a penitential character. The priest prays: "Cleanse the iniquities of your servants who find themselves unable to bear the heat and the daily burden of passion, and so are coming together in second marriage. Such was the injunction you gave through your apostle Paul"³⁶⁰ (see 1 Cor 7:9; 7:39).

4) The Rite of Blessing of a Couple on Their Twenty-fifth or Fiftieth Anniversary

484 The holy Church highly values the witness of those married couples who have shared their lives together for twenty-five, fifty, or seventy-five years. She solemnly and publicly blesses them, thanking the Lord for their witness to mutual fidelity and love, and presents them as a living model for other married couples.

b. The Holy Mystery of Orders

485 In his love for humankind, God the Father "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:16-17). The Son of God, Jesus Christ, calls himself the Good Shepherd: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11). Christ fulfils in himself God's promise of the one Shepherd for the People of God: "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd" (Ez 34:23). Christ passes on his pastorship to his chosen apostles whom he called, and also to their successors. This he does so that through them he would continue to remain in the Church and lead it.

1) The Priesthood of Christ

486 Christ, as the God-man, renewed the bond between God and the human race, becoming the sole Mediator between God and humanity (see 1 Tim 2:5). Ascending to heaven in his human nature, he was revealed as the Intercessor for us before the face of Go (see Heb 9:24). Christ is the eternal Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek." This means

³⁶⁰ Trebnyk, Rite of Second Crowning, Second prayer.