

The Blessing of the Wedding Pig

April 4, 2010

Easter Morning

Mary asked me to officiate the wedding for her son who was going to marry a Filipino gal. Mary and her son, a Navy reservist, are Hispanic. Texans. Wedding was to be on Saturday evening April 3. Day before Easter. Unusual day to have a wedding.

Mary is quiet. Sits in the back row of church each Sunday, never says a word. Just walks in each Sunday, writes her offering check, drops it into the offering bowl, and sits quietly on the back row. I think she grew up Catholic.

Having officiated weddings for the past 30 years as a minister and having been a military chaplain for 20 of those years and doing weddings for people from parts of the world, I learned a long time ago that you never know what wedding traditions you will be asked to perform, bless, and endorse.

For instance, you never know what a girl from deep in the woods of Mississippi expects her minister to do at the wedding. One Mississippi bride, with whom I had met with for months planning the ceremony, was so disappointed at her wedding because I did not roll out a red carpet for her prior to her Processional Wedding March down the aisle. I never knew about it. She said, "But my preacher at my church in Mississippi ALWAYS did that for EVERY wedding." She never told me that before the wedding, assuming that ALL preachers rolled out the red carpet.

So Mary says to me... "Pastor, there will be a pig at the wedding. Will you bless the pig?"

"You mean there will be a pig at the reception?" I asked. She said, "No, the pig will be at the wedding."

I said, "Alive or dead?" She said, "Dead. With a ring in its nose. You have to bless the pig and the ring. It is important to my son and his new bride."

That is what Mary asked me on Sunday morning March 21, two weeks before the Easter Eve wedding between a Catholic boy and a Filipino gal in Texas, Mary handed me about 12 pages of Ceremony so that I would know what a Blessing of the Pig was.

A pig liturgy.

Not wanting to disappoint Mary like I disappointed the gal from Mississippi who did not get her red carpet in the Air Force chapel wedding I did at Carswell Air Force Base back in the 80's when she married an airman, I told Mary "Sure. I will bless the pig and the ring in its nose at the wedding. Sure." I wanted to be supportive of her son in the Navy.

The next Sunday, March 28, the Sunday prior to the wedding, Mary told me at church,

“The pig blessing is off. They can not afford the pig. So no pig blessing. But I will bring a ceramic pig to church the next morning and you can bless it during worship service. It will mean a lot to my son and his bride. It is important.”

I said, “Mary, I already have a bunny rabbit at the Easter morning service. I can not have a rabbit and a pig at the service. Too many animals. I will bless the pig during the Easter Egg hunt and Easter breakfast at church. We are having ham for breakfast anyway. Bring the pig to the Easter Egg Hunt prior to church and we will bless the pig at 10 am, prior to our 10:30 am Easter service.” She said okay to that.

At the 4:00 pm wedding on Easter Eve, the wedding coordinator and I talked at 4:01 pm about the wedding processional and all. We had not had a wedding rehearsal. The bride was late to the wedding. I had been out of town for two days, taking a break from church work and weddings and programming. Church work is exhausting some weeks.

Wedding coordinator said, “Here are the items for the Blessing of the Lariat, the Blessing of the Coins, and the Blessing of the Couple’s Wedding Veil. When you say those words the respective sponsors will come up with these items and then you do that part of the Wedding Ceremony.

I blankly stared at her and she stared at me. I told her gently that I had no clue what she was talking about. She said, “My mother said she gave you the Words for the Ceremony for the Blessing of the Lariat, the Blessing of the Coins, and the Blessing of the Veil.”

I said, “Your mother told me she was handing me the Blessing of the Pig wording and then last week she said there was not going to be a pig here so there would be no Blessing of the Pig ceremony. So I did not even bring the Blessing of the Pig ceremonial wording.

She said, “So you did not bring the Wedding Ceremony? That WAS the entire wedding ceremony.” This was not going so well.

Bride was 45 minutes late. That gave me time to make up wording for the Blessing of the Lariat (couple lassoed together for life), Blessing of the Coins (he hands her money in a nice box and trusts her to learn how to manage the new household and his resources), and Blessing of the Wedding Veil (large veil covers both bride and groom and prayer is that God’s love would cover both of them at the same time, etc.).

We had to stop the wedding because the sponsor forgot the Special Coin Box and Coins and had to go search in cars in the parking lot for the Coins. Wedding was outside in the San Marcos Park so lots of cars drove by the wedding and honked. While waiting for the coins to be found, we just all stood and waved at honking cars going by. It was hot and I had on my robe and cross, just to look ceremonial and dignified and religious.

Mary brought the pig to church. 80 people got quiet as I laid my hands on the pig, made up a bunch of words about how the Filipino rural tradition is for the young, poor couple

to offer up the best pig to God for the wedding prayer, blah, blah, blah. Mary helped me place the two plastic rings on the nose of the ceramic pig. Everybody just stared in reverence at me as I explained this deeply meaningful Blessing of the Pig ritual.

Texans (cattlemen and women, remember!) had never seen anything like this. They were attentive. Not a sound in the room.

After I said “Amen” and had everyone say “Amen” with me to Bless the Wedding Pig, then Mary handed me a note to read to the congregation. I told her she could read it since I had just seen her writing it. She said, “No, I would like you to read it.”

I read the note out loud, reverently. “Gary, it’s a big thing to have a pig at the wedding. But Gary, the Blessing of the Pig is just a joke on you!”

The congregation roared. Gary the preacher had been April Fooled. Had. Done. Skewered. Big time. I could not believe it. Quiet little Mary had fooled us all. Her son tried to talk her out of the joke, saying “But Mom, he is a minister!”

She said, “Gary is always getting others. Someone needs to get him!” I told Mary, in front of everyone, that she needs to become a Baptist and that I would take her to meet Mark the First Baptist minister here in town. God, it was hilarious.

Steve Jones said, “We could all take lessons from that woman.” Another person said, “I am not going to mess with Mary. Ever.”

Glynn Cooper was late to church and missed the Blessing of the Pig joke. He is a Texas Tech nut. So I announced to HIM during church, “Glynn, we blessed the Wedding Pig during the Easter Egg hunt. You missed it. It is important in the Filipino wedding tradition that ALL members of the congregation lay their hands on the Wedding Pig for 15 seconds...to pray for the new couple. So during the time of Greeting and Passing of the Peace of Christ in a few moments, just go lay your hands on the pig for 15 seconds.”

Glynn, being from Texas Tech, did go lay his hands on the pig. The congregation just beamed as they watched him go lay his hands on the pig. They looked at him and then looked at me and just shook their heads.

Dr. Bert Cobb, a native Texan and an Aggie, walked over to Glynn and said, “Get your d.....hands off that pig. It is all a joke.”

Glynn just sheepishly slipped his hands off that pig. Mary was grinning so hard in the back row. She told us that she told her boss last year on April 1st that she was resigning. Her boss gave her a raise to get her to stay. She came clean and said she did not want a raise...it was just an April Fool’s joke. He let her keep the raise, thinking she was just using April Fool’s day to ask for a raise in a veiled way since she was so shy.

She got a raise and I got a pig. I can not make this stuff up. Mary will make a good Baptist! You never know WHO is lurking and scheming on the back row of church! Gary