Old Testament Readings

1. Male and female he created them.

A reading from the Book of Genesis 1:26-28, 31a

Then God said:
“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.
Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,
the birds of the air, and the cattle,
and over all the wild animals
and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”
God created man in his image;
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.
God blessed them, saying:
“Be fertile and multiply;
fill the earth and subdue it.
Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air,
and all the living things that move on the earth.”
God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

The Bible’s first book, Genesis, contains not one, but two episodes of creation. They offer differing details, and each contains unique riches. In this offering from the first chapter, human life is the crowning jewel of all cosmic things, made on the sixth day after the earth, sky, water, plants, and animals. Male and female are created at the same time and bear God’s Triune image (v. 26, “Let us make man…”). Made in the image of the creating God, men and women are to participate with God to bring about more life (vs. 28 “be fertile and multiply”). Yet this gift of giving life is intertwined with the gift of prudent stewardship. In this first creation story, God creates out of chaos by ordering it properly. Spouses are called to do the same. Filling the earth with life comes with the responsibility to subdue it (vs. 28), or discipline, calm, and cultivate it. This applies foremost though not exclusively to children, and then towards all life on earth. Peace in societies today begins with spouses participating in God’s desire of ordered harmony among all living things.

This text is used every year to begin the Easter Vigil. It is an elaborate nighttime feast celebrating powerful change and new spiritual life for those who are initiated into the Church. At a wedding, this reading signals the new realities and spiritual life

that flow from marriage. New life, seen and unseen, will abound for married couples who view their relationship as a mirror of God's ongoing act of creation.

2. The two of them become one body.

A reading from the Book of Genesis 2:18-24

The Lord God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone.
I will make a suitable partner for him."
So the Lord God formed out of the ground
various wild animals and various birds of the air,
and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them;
whatever the man called each of them would be its name.
The man gave names to all the cattle,
all the birds of the air, and all wild animals;
but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.
So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man,
and while he was asleep,
he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.
The Lord God then built up into a woman the rib
that he had taken from the man.
When he brought her to the man, the man said:
"This one, at last, is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
This one shall be called 'woman,'
for out of 'her man' this one has been taken."
That is why a man leaves his father and mother
and clings to his wife,
and the two of them become one body.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This second version of creation is vastly different from the first. God creates man first, and then the birds, wild animals, and other life forms – the very opposite from the previous account. Yet even with an abundance of natural life surrounding the man, something fundamental is lacking. This passage highlights the importance of human relationships, and the need for a strong society – one that begins with men and women in committed, mutually loving relationships.

As Catholics we do not look to the Bible's creation story for biological truths. Physicians attest that men and women have equal pairs of ribs. (In an ancient language, one word meant both "rib" and "life.") From the 'man' comes 'wo-man'. This passage leads one to ponder a deeper, spiritual truth. Between men and women there is an intimate connectedness, radical unity and kinship, as well as sexual attraction. When the two come together, especially in the sacredness of marriage, their connection is so life-giving, that all other relationships are secondary – even the link to parents who initially provided life. This passage is a biblical meditation on the more contemporary phrase that one's spouse is "my soul mate."

3. In his love for Rebekah, Isaac found solace after the death of his mother.

A reading from the Book of Genesis 24:48-51, 58-67

The servant of Abraham said to Laban:
"I bowed down in worship to the Lord,
blessing the Lord, the God of my master Abraham,
who had led me on the right road
to obtain the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son.
If, therefore, you have in mind to show true loyalty to my master,
let me know;
but if not, let me know that, too.
I can then proceed accordingly."
Laban and his household said in reply:
"This thing comes from the Lord;
we can say nothing to you either for or against it.
Here is Rebekah, ready for you;
take her with you,
that she may become the wife of your master's son,
as the Lord has said."
So they called Rebekah and asked her,
"Do you wish to go with this man?"
She answered, "I do."
At this they allowed their sister Rebekah and her nurse to take leave,
along with Abraham's servant and his men.
Invoking a blessing on Rebekah, they said:
"Sister, may you grow
into thousands of myriads;
And may your descendants gain possession
of the gates of their enemies!"

Then Rebekah and her maids started out;
they mounted their camels and followed the man.
so the servant took Rebekah and went on his way.
Meanwhile Isaac had gone from Beer-lahai-roi
and was living in the region of the Negeb.
One day toward evening he went out . . . in the field,
and as he looked around, he noticed that camels were approaching.
Rebekah, too, was looking about, and when she saw him,
she alighted from her camel and asked the servant,
“Who is the man out there, walking through the fields toward us?”
“That is my master,” replied the servant.
Then she covered herself with her veil.
The servant recounted to Isaac all the things he had done.
Then Isaac took Rebekah into his tent;
he married her, and thus she became his wife.
In his love for her Isaac found solace
after the death of his mother Sarah.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This text is but a piece of a larger story riddled with challenged relationships, unlikely children, and unforeseen circumstances. Key to the story is Abraham’s total faith that God will provide and guide. Abraham had left his homeland. Landing in Canaan at a very old age, his barren wife Sarah remarkably gives birth to their son, Isaac. When Sarah dies, Abraham looks to give Isaac a wife.

This snippet from that story appears to be a pre-arranged marriage, but a second consideration of the text reveals a marriage made by God. Abraham’s main intent is not to pick his son’s wife. Instead, he seeks the fulfillment of a promise made by God to give Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. This reading from Genesis’ 24th chapter begins with verse 48. Previously in the chapter Abraham exhorted his servant Laban to pray to the Lord God, who had blessed him in all things (vs. 1). Prayer helps to verify that this process is done with God. Laban prays to be guided to the right young woman. Rebekah’s consent in the matter (vs. 58) verifies that she is participating in God’s will, not some coercive act. Isaac’s newfound comfort further confirms all this is God’s handiwork. Isaac does not merely accept her. He took her into his tent. He loved her, and they married.

The Catholic Rite of Marriage steers clear of any hint of arranged marriages. Like this passage from Genesis, the bride and groom first declare their own freedom and consent to marry before exchanging vows. Parents are not questioned. The rite does not envision anyone “giving the bride away.” In the eyes of the Church, both bride and groom are free individuals who

have discerned their love is from God. For this reason, the Church directs that the entrance begin with the priest at the doors of the church greeting the bride and the groom, showing that the Church shares in their joy.

4. May the Lord of heaven prosper you both. May he grant you mercy and peace.

A reading from the Book of Tobit 7:6-14

Raphael and Tobiah entered the house of Raguel and greeted him.
Raguel sprang up and kissed Tobiah, shedding tears of joy.
But when he heard that Tobit had lost his eyesight,
he was grieved and wept aloud.
He said to Tobiah:
“My child, God bless you!
You are the son of a noble and good father.
But what a terrible misfortune
that such a righteous and charitable man
should be afflicted with blindness!”
He continued to weep in the arms of his kinsman Tobiah.
His wife Edna also wept for Tobit;
and even their daughter Sarah began to weep.
Afterward, Raguel slaughtered a ram from the flock
and gave them a cordial reception.
When they had bathed and reclined to eat,
Tobiah said to Raphael, “Brother Azariah,
ask Raguel to let me marry my kinswoman Sarah.”
Raguel overheard the words;
so he said to the boy:
“Eat and drink and be merry tonight,
for no man is more entitled to marry my daughter Sarah
than you, brother.
Besides, not even I have the right to give her to anyone but you,
because you are my closest relative.
But I will explain the situation to you very frankly.
I have given her in marriage to seven men,
all of whom were kinsmen of ours,
and all died on the very night they approached her.
But now, son, eat and drink.

I am sure the Lord will look after you both.”
Tobiah answered, “I will eat or drink nothing
until you set aside what belongs to me.”
Raguel said to him: “I will do it.
She is yours according to the decree of the Book of Moses.
Your marriage to her has been decided in heaven!
Take your kinswoman
from now on you are her love,
and she is your beloved.
She is yours today and ever after.
And tonight, son, may the Lord of heaven prosper you both.
May he grant you mercy and peace.”
Then Raguel called his daughter Sarah, and she came to him.
He took her by the hand and gave her to Tobiah with the words:
“Take her according to the law.
According to the decree written in the Book of Moses she is your wife.
Take her and bring her back safely to your father.
And may the God of heaven grant both of you peace and prosperity.”
He then called her mother and told her to bring a scroll,
So that he might draw up a marriage contract
stating that he gave Sarah to Tobiah as his wife
according to the decree of the Mosaic law.
Her mother brought the scroll,
and he drew up the contract,
to which they affixed their seal.
Afterward they began to eat and drink.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

There are some fantastically incredible stories in the Scriptures. This one ought to be toward the top. Though fiction, the book of Tobit portrays the ordinary life of an Israelite family. It offers stories of life, death, food, family, and God. A main theme is the nature of human suffering. Some suffering comes from demonic forces. Other suffering can be initiated by God as a corrective measure so the selfish and righteous see God’s justice.

Tobit is blind. Perhaps this is a metaphor for him to trust in the wife that God’s angel (Raphael / Azariah) will choose for his son Tobiah. Sarah suffers from having lost seven husbands after consummating her marriage to each. If past events are any indication, then Sarah’s new husband will be dead. Such does not happen. Like the previous scripture option from Genesis

24, their happy marriage and newfound life is a biblical way of revealing that marriage is a participation in God's divine plan. The imposed suffering on the two did in fact lead them more closely to God's will.

This passage does not fit the conventional storyline for marriage most couples imagine. Yet it has a unique inner beauty and inspiration. Look closely. The passage contains heartfelt prayers: "I am sure the Lord will look after you both" (vs. 11); "Your marriage to her has been decided in heaven" (vs. 11); "And may the God of heaven grant both of you peace and prosperity" (vs. 12). The couple overcame major obstacles. Couples in today's society face great difficulties as well, and many bring their own suffering. Passages from this text appear in the final blessing for marriage. Couples may find this passage helps them to trust in God's divine providence regardless of hardships they face.

5. Allow us to live together to a happy old age.
A reading from the Book of Tobit 8:4b-8

On their wedding night Tobiah arose from bed and said to his wife,
"Sister, get up. Let us pray and beg our Lord
to have mercy on us and to grant us deliverance."
Sarah got up, and they started to pray
and beg that deliverance might be theirs.
They began with these words:

"Blessed are you, O God of our fathers;
praised be your name forever and ever.
Let the heavens and all your creation
praise you forever.
You made Adam and you gave him his wife Eve
to be his help and support;
and from these two the human race descended.
You said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone;
let us make him a partner like himself.'
Now, Lord, you know that I take this wife of mine
not because of lust,
but for a noble purpose.
Call down your mercy on me and on her,
and allow us to live together to a happy old age."
They said together, "Amen, amen."

Commentary

From their marriage bed, Tobiah rises and tells his bride to get up to join him in prayer to God. Given her history – seven previous husbands dying after making love to Sarah – Tobiah's request is more than understandable. It's nearly a necessity! What follows is a tender prayer that any married couple would hope to speak. He blesses the God of his ancestors and praises the God of creation who fashioned Adam and Eve. Just as Eve was a perfect complement to Adam, Tobiah sees Sarah as an equally fitting partner. He tells God that he has taken his wife not for sexual pleasure but for true virtue. He begs God for mercy upon them both and that they may reach old age together. Sarah adds her voice to the prayer as they conclude, "Amen."

This text reveals that marriage is not just to temper sexual desires, but that real spiritual strength is found in the sacrament. It has a noble purpose – which is to help, support, and mutually uphold one another into old age. This reading encourages couples to foster a shared prayer life, and reveals the blessings that flow from it.

6. The woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

A reading from the Book of Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

When one finds a worthy wife,
her value is far beyond pearls.
Her husband, entrusting his heart to her,
has an unfailing prize.
She brings him good, and not evil,
all the days of her life.
She obtains wool and flax
and makes cloth with skillful hands.
She puts her hands to the distaff,
and her fingers ply the spindle.
She reaches out her hands to the poor,
and extends her arms to the needy.
Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting;
the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
Give her a reward of her labors,
and let her works praise her at the city gates.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

The book of Proverbs is a collection of mostly two-line sayings from sages who studied God, creation, and human nature. These insights of wisdom tend to focus on covenant and redemption. This passage appears at the end of the book and is unusually longer than the shorter sayings that preceded it.

Many couples will find this passage distasteful as it addresses the wife with only a brief mention of the husband. It emphasizes the importance of a grounding faith in the Lord which will be stronger than fleeting beauty or passing charm. Fearing the Lord means awe, obedience, and right relationship with God as the foundation for living wisely. The good husband trusts his wife because she trusts in the Lord. The passage supports the idea that an important aspect of marriage is for couples to walk with each other on their spiritual journey until they reach the gates of God's eternal love.

7. Stern as death is love.

A reading from the Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a

Hark! my lover–here he comes
springing across the mountains,
leaping across the hills.
My lover is like a gazelle
or a young stag.
Here he stands behind our wall,
gazing through the windows,
peering through the lattices.
My lover speaks; he says to me,
“Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one, and come!
“O my dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the secret recesses of the cliff,
Let me see you,
let me hear your voice,
for your voice is sweet,
and you are lovely.”
My lover belongs to me and I to him.
He says to me:
“Set me as a seal on your heart,
as a seal on your arm;
For stern as death is love,
relentless as the nether world is devotion;
its flames are a blazing fire.
Deep waters cannot quench love,
nor floods sweep it away.”
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

Readers are often shocked to find this little-known book tucked into the pages of the Old Testament. It is a love poem describing two young lovers discovering the beauty of their created bodies, and their desire to share it in love and mutual fidelity. Parts of the book express erotic love. The gift of sexuality is affirmed and portrayed without apology. There is radical equality with both lovers desiring to share in it with equal intensity. Love is seen as a communion of souls.

This passage seems operatic. It describes a young man appearing at his beloved’s window just before dawn, wooing her into the countryside blossoming with springtime life and promise. The maiden makes a statement that beautifully describes

the mutuality of marriage, “My lover belongs to me, and I to him.” He then declares the ferocity of love, for just as stern as death is, love is even more relentless. Love is eternal.

8. Like the sun rising in the Lord’s heavens, the beauty of a virtuous wife is the radiance of her home.

A reading from the Book of Sirach 26:1-4, 13-16

Blessed the husband of a good wife,
twice-lengthened are his days;
A worthy wife brings joy to her husband,
peaceful and full is his life.
A good wife is a generous gift
bestowed upon him who fears the Lord;
Be he rich or poor, his heart is content,
and a smile is ever on his face.
A gracious wife delights her husband,
her thoughtfulness puts flesh on his bones;
A gift from the Lord is her governed speech,
and her firm virtue is of surpassing worth.
Choicest of blessings is a modest wife,
priceless her chaste soul.
A holy and decent woman adds grace upon grace;
indeed, no price is worthy of her temperate soul.
Like the sun rising in the Lord’s heavens,
the beauty of a virtuous wife is the radiance of her home.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

The book of Sirach, is frequently referred to as “Ecclesiasticus,” or “The Book of Wisdom.” It is the wisdom writings of Ben Sira.

Like the passage from Proverbs (OT option #6), this one emphasizes the role of the wife. She can reveal God’s blessing to her husband. He can expect to live twice as long with a good wife, for she brings joy and peace to him. These were traditional blessings, and they are more important than wealth. While it is a compliment to the wife to be compared to the rising of the sun – that which gives life, hope, and promise – the passage has a noticeable tinge of inequality to it. It appears that the woman is to spend her life pleasing her husband and feeding him. At its best, it shows how people can be a blessing from God.

9. I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah 31:31-32a, 33-34a

The days are coming, says the Lord,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
and the house of Judah.
It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers:
the day I took them by the hand
to lead them forth from the land of Egypt.
But this is the covenant which I will make
with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord.
I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts;
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.
No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives
how to know the Lord.
All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

Most couples will not immediately see the hidden beauty and the strength this passage has in its depth of illuminating the marital covenant. The marriage vows bind the couple into a covenant. This passage describe the ideal vision of what that covenant can look like.

Jeremiah was a prophet who could see and hear things from God that others could not. He is on his prophetic tower evaluating the past and future. In the past, God had made a covenant with the people, promising to be their God if they would be faithful to him in return. The covenant was broken. The people failed in fidelity. In this passage, Jeremiah speaks about a new covenant that will be given by God, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” The staggering difference in this second covenant is the absence of one little word, “if.” By omitting the word “if” God is making this covenant unconditionally. God is pledging complete, unconditional love. God has forgiven them for their infidelity, and this law of loving forgiveness is written on their hearts.

This image of unconditional love as the foundation for a covenant is a mirror for what married couples strive to do and aspire to be for each another. Sacramental marriage reveals to the world this incredible love that God has for us. Husbands and wives enter into this sacrament with the same commitment to love as God has shown his people. Couples with a deep

committed faith in God, those who have reconciled from difficult infidelities, and those committed to forgiveness and unconditional love will want to seriously consider this eloquent passage.

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New Testament Readings

1. What will separate us from the love of Christ?

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39

Brothers and sisters:
If God is for us, who can be against us?
He did not spare his own Son
but handed him over for us all,
how will he not also give us everything else along with him?
Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones?
It is God who acquits us.
Who will condemn?
It is Christ Jesus who died, rather, was raised,
who also is at the right hand of God,
who indeed intercedes for us.
What will separate us from the love of Christ?
Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine,
or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?
No, in all these things, we conquer overwhelmingly
through him who loved us.
For I am convinced that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities,
nor present things, nor future things,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth,
nor any other creature will be able to separate us

from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This reading concludes a long opening section in Paul's letter to the Christian community living in Rome. He preaches that the Gospel announces salvation for all peoples whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Then he offers reflections on our justification to God. Thus, the questions in this passage sound a bit like a back-and-forth argument. It is Christ whose death and resurrection has justified us and now intercedes on our behalf before God (vs. 34). A love that Christ demonstrates by dying for all of us is a bond of love that cannot be broken by anything – earthly, supernatural, or otherwise (vs. 38-39).

The Church offers a sacramental marriage, something different and in addition to a civil marriage. Sacraments are an encounter with and a participation in the life of Christ Jesus. Couples who marry in the Catholic Church root their relationship in this inspiring vision of Christ's love. It is a love that unites and a love that is unbreakable. Husbands and wives who share this strength of love can be as confident as St. Paul knowing that when hardship, suffering, and difficulties arise, their love will help carry them though. No hardship from the heavens or from earth, from creatures, rulers, or angels can destroy their marriage bond. Christ's love was victorious, and any love that imitates his will share in the same gift.

2. Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.
(Long Form)
A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans 12:1-2, 9-18

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,
to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.
Do not conform yourselves to this age
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and pleasing and perfect.
Let love be sincere;
hate what is evil,
hold on to what is good;
love one another with mutual affection;
anticipate one another in showing honor.
Do not grow slack in zeal,
be fervent in spirit,

serve the Lord.
Rejoice in hope,
endure in affliction,
persevere in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the holy ones,
exercise hospitality.
Bless those who persecute you,
bless and do not curse them.
Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
Have the same regard for one another;
do not be haughty but associate with the lowly;
do not be wise in your own estimation.
Do not repay anyone evil for evil;
be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all.
If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.
The word of the Lord.

OR

Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.
(Short Form)
A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans 12:1-2, 9-13

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,
to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.
Do not conform yourselves to this age
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and pleasing and perfect.
Let love be sincere;
hate what is evil,
hold on to what is good;
love one another with mutual affection;
anticipate one another in showing honor.
Do not grow slack in zeal,
be fervent in spirit,

serve the Lord.
Rejoice in hope,
endure in affliction,
persevere in prayer.
Contribute to the needs of the holy ones,
exercise hospitality.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

When St. Paul speaks of a living sacrifice, the people would initially think this is an impossible contradiction. Sacrifices entailed the blood of an animal offered in the temple. This was done to express the moral life, to make up for one's faults, and to please God. St. Paul, however, is preaching after Jesus' blood was shed on the cross. That sacrifice of his own life was the fulfillment of all sacrifices. The Apostle suggests that those who follow Christ are to offer their bodies as living sacrifices. This is the paradox of faith–that sacrificing, most especially the sacrifice of the cross, gives life and shuns death. In other words, St. Paul is saying that something completely new is taking place because of Christ's death on the cross and his resurrection. The lives of the Christian believers are to look different, and they are to embrace a new way of living in the world because of the beliefs they hold.

Husbands and wives must compromise. A successful compromise entails sacrifice from both. The marriage vows state that each is willing to lovingly sacrifice for the other, whatever the cost. The second portion of this reading outlines a series of outward and visible actions that one can do to reflect sacrificial love that benefits others while also pleasing God. This list of high ideals will inspire many couples, yet it is intended to be a sign for all believers.

Couples who choose the shorter option of this reading will miss some wonderful passages: "weep with those who weep," "have the same regard for one another," "do not repay anyone evil for evil," "on your part, live at peace with all." These images express the hopes for many couples, and should be the ideals for all. Proclaiming them will add to the joy of the celebration.

3. Welcome one another as Christ welcomed you.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans 15:1b-3a, 5-7, 13

Brothers and sisters:
We ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves;
let each of us please our neighbor for the good,
for building up.

For Christ did not please himself.
May the God of endurance and encouragement
grant you to think in harmony with one another,
in keeping with Christ Jesus,
that with one accord you may with one voice
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you,
or the glory of God.
May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This reading emphasizes St. Paul's strong hope that the Christian community in Rome might live in harmony. With different people in our global society today, we hear much about living peacefully with all. We use phrases like, "we agree to disagree;" "we respect one another;" or "we tolerate the things we don't like." Some married couples find that these phrases can balance the differences in their relationship. However, St. Paul calls for a particular expression of harmony, based on an imitating of Christ.

This reading will clearly remind both bride and groom that the success of their marriage will come when they lose track of their own selves and focus their energies on their spouse. Efforts that are made for the good of the other will build up the marriage. Christ has accepted and even welcomed us with all our shortcomings and faults. The loving couple will seek to allow their love to go beyond themselves to friends, family, and even strangers. Couples with convictions about improving their society and faith community will want to consider this reading. Younger couples looking forward to long years of marriage will also appreciate the prayer for endurance, encouragement, joy, and peace.

4. Your body is a temple of the Spirit.
A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20

Brothers and sisters:
The body is not for immorality, but for the Lord,
And the Lord is for the body;
God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.
Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?
Whoever is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

Avoid immorality.
Every other sin a person commits is outside the body,
but the immoral person sins against his own body.
Do you not know that your body
is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,
whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?
For you have been purchased at a price.
Therefore glorify God in your body.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

The apostle Paul writes some of his most extensive thoughts to the Corinthians. In these letters he responds to various problems occurring in Corinth. Some are not all that different from society today, including marital obligations and sexual immorality. When this reading is proclaimed before an assembly gathered for a wedding, all will know the immorality referenced in the opening phrase is sexual in nature. When read at the wedding, this reading does not have to be dour or come across as a finger shaking. Rather it upholds the supernatural beauty hidden in the human body.

This scripture passage supports the Catholic teaching of abstaining from sexual intercourse until marriage, precisely because of the dignity given to each individual human body. Sexual relations affect both the individual and collective Christian body–the community. Just as bodily actions can cause harm to others and tear down God's kingdom, so too can they be used to glorify God (vs. 20). Paul states that the body is to be conformed to the Lord. He refers to the Risen Lord (vs. 14) because the resurrected body of Jesus is radiant and glorifies God – an image of what our bodies can be. Furthermore, our bodies are a fitting place for the Holy Spirit (vs. 19). When viewed as holding the potential to glorify God, couples might grow to see their sexual intimacy as a sign of the sacred.

5. If I do not have love, I gain nothing.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians 12:31–13:8a

Brothers and sisters:
Strive eagerly for the greatest spiritual gifts.
But I shall show you a still more excellent way.
If I speak in human and angelic tongues
but do not have love,
I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal.
And if I have the gift of prophecy
and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge;
if I have all faith so as to move mountains,
but do not have love, I am nothing.
If I give away everything I own,
and if I hand my body over so that I may boast
but do not have love, I gain nothing.
Love is patient, love is kind.
It is not jealous, is not pompous,
it is not inflated, it is not rude,
it does not seek its own interests,
it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing
but rejoices with the truth.
It bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never fails.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage is known as a hymn of love. It is popular for Catholics and other Christians, and it tugs at the heartstrings of engaged couples as soon as they glance over the options. Most will not initially realize that St. Paul is not talking directly to husbands and wives. He is addressing many concerns within Corinth's Christian community and is seeking to strengthen their overall unity. The community appears to have lost some of the vision of Gospel living. Thus, the apostle offers these thoughts. This bold Christian view of love demonstrates clearly that it cannot be reduced to a romantic emotion. Love looks like something. Here, St. Paul describes it with poetic detail. He tells what love is – patient, kind, enduring– as well as what it is not – jealous, pompous, inflated, rude, quick-tempered. The reading also foretells what happens when love is absent. Without it, lives and relationships are like a noisy gong. We can accumulate things, be showered with gifts, and even give things away, yet without love, all is worthless. Really, what Paul is describing, is a love that looks like Christ, the one who is Love incarnate.

6. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.

(Long Form)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians 5:2a, 21-33

Brothers and sisters:
Live in love, as Christ loved us
and handed himself over for us.
Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.
Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord.
For the husband is head of his wife
just as Christ is head of the Church,
he himself the savior of the body.
As the Church is subordinate to Christ,
so wives should be subordinate to their husbands in everything.
Husbands, love your wives,
even as Christ loved the Church
and handed himself over for her to sanctify her,
cleansing her by the bath of water with the word,
that he might present to himself the Church in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.
So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself.
For no one hates his own flesh
but rather nourishes and cherishes it,
even as Christ does the Church,
because we are members of his Body.
For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother
and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh.
This is a great mystery,
but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.
In any case, each one of you should love his wife as himself,
and the wife should respect her husband.
The word of the Lord.

OR

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians 5:2a, 25-32

(Short Form)

Brothers and sisters:
Live in love, as Christ loved us
and handed himself over for us.
Husbands, love your wives,
even as Christ loved the Church
and handed himself over for her to sanctify her,
cleansing her by the bath of water with the word,
that he might present to himself the Church in splendor,
without spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
that she might be holy and without blemish.
So also husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.
He who loves his wife loves himself.
For no one hates his own flesh
but rather nourishes and cherishes it,
even as Christ does the Church,
because we are members of his Body.
For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother
and be joined to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh.
This is a great mystery,
but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

Couples looking for a clear, strong image of sacramental marriage will gravitate toward this passage. It is the most expressive passage in the New Testament regarding marriage. It is also complex. Some couples will dismiss it as objectionable to a contemporary perspective of spousal love. The language within the reading can pose pastoral challenges. Yet couples who pray with this passage might trade in their initial objections for a spirited embrace of the vision of marriage offered here.

The author gives an extended meditation on the second creation story and quotes it directly (Genesis 2:18-24, 2nd Old Testament option). The author is very familiar with the Gospel of Christ Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead. Christ's actions of suffering, dying, and rising make all the difference in the world, even to husbands and wives. The initial verse (2) indicates how to interpret this passage: "Live in love, as Christ loved us, and handed himself over for us." Christ did this for the Church, the living body of believers. Married couples constitute the domestic church. Their mutual love should mirror the

love Christ demonstrated. They are not expected to give their lives for the whole world, but they are to offer their lives for their spouse, the one they love. It is a love that is offered and given for another, or as the author states, “be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ” (vs. 21).

Some believe this passage unfairly treats women. The passage uses different verbs–to be subordinate, and to love–to describe the actions of wives and husbands, but the intent is the same. Both are to mutually give of themselves and freely love the other all for the sake and unity of their family.

The author stresses the unity present in all creation. When husbands and wives mutually give and love one another in a way that imitates Christ, they help to strengthen the unity in society. All is connected, and this exhortation to spouses to live as Christ is a part of his larger mission “to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth,” (1:10).

The shortened option removes the two more glaring references to subordinate wives. This might be the wiser option, especially if the person preaching does not intend to elaborate on this particular scriptural image.

7. The God of peace will be with you.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians 4:4-9

Brothers and sisters:
Rejoice in the Lord always.
I shall say it again: rejoice!
Your kindness should be known to all.
The Lord is near.
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,
make your requests known to God.
Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Finally, brothers and sisters,
whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious,
if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
Keep on doing what you have learned and received

and heard and seen in me.
Then the God of peace will be with you.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage urges the Christian people of Philippi to live fully in the ideals of truth, justice, and love, all the while savoring God's peace that will follow them. This is a worthy passage for a marriage liturgy, particularly because the Catholic Church believes that marriages and families are the very building blocks of society. A couple that humbly prays to God, keeps their hearts rooted in Christ, and seeks truth, justice, and love, will be a couple that promotes peace in their home and in society.

Weddings in the United States all too easily turn into elaborate productions and can be the source of enormous stress for the couple and their friends. Couples will bring their doubts and worries with them to the wedding celebration. Some questions linger: Will we be able to establish a home we like? What kind of parents will we be? How will we work out our financial challenges? This passage helps to put all those many things into perspective as it boldly encourages, "Have no anxiety at all." It promotes a radical dependence upon God, whose peace "surpasses all understanding." Starting a covenanted relationship with the firm belief and proclamation that "the God of peace will be with you," is a comforting truth, and will be reason for bride, groom, and guests to rejoice!

8. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.
A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians 3:12-17

Brothers and sisters:
Put on, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved,
heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience,
bearing with one another and forgiving one another,
if one has a grievance against another;
as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.
And over all these put on love,
that is, the bond of perfection.
And let the peace of Christ control your hearts,
the peace into which you were also called in one Body.
And be thankful.
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,

as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another,
singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs
with gratitude in your hearts to God.
And whatever you do, in word or in deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This selection of the Colossians letter describes to the people what they should do now, in light of their resurrection with Christ Jesus. Throughout much of the New Testament there are descriptions of what is necessary for a good and flourishing Christian community. These readings work well for the wedding liturgy, for the ideals of a good society are the ideals for a good marriage.

The list of characteristics that opens the passage is one that every couple should regularly review. Spending a lifetime growing richly in heartfelt compassion, humility, gentleness, forgiveness, etc. will be a lifetime well spent. The perfection of these attributes will be love. The biblical image of love is not an emotion or feeling, but here, it is the glue and the motivator for each person to pursue a more Christ-like way of life.

Verse 15 references the “Body,” which is the Church as the Body of Christ. But in the wedding liturgy, it could refer to the fact that the two now become one through this sacrament. This reading would be a nice complement to the Genesis and Gospel readings referencing the two becoming one flesh, one body.

The passage ends with an inspiring command to “let the word of Christ dwell in your richly,” and in all things, “give thanks to God the Father.” For Catholics, this can be a gentle reminder of the importance of Sunday Mass. We open our hearts to receive the word of Christ when the scriptures are proclaimed at Mass, and we give thanks at the altar of the Lord. We go to Mass not out mere obligation, but out of love, a love which binds us to one another and to God who is Love.

9. Let marriage be held in honor by all.
A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews 13:1-4a, 5-6b

Brothers and sisters:
Let mutual love continue.
Do not neglect hospitality,

for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels.
Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment,
and of the ill-treated as of yourselves,
for you also are in the body.
Let marriage be honored among all
and the marriage bed be kept undefiled.
Let your life be free from love of money
but be content with what you have,
for he has said, I will never forsake you or abandon you.
Thus we may say with confidence:
The Lord is my helper,
and I will not be afraid.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

In marriage preparation an often cited phrase is that it takes three to make the marriage successful: the husband, the wife, and God. This short passage speaks to the ways that God can be interwoven with the life of the couple. Generous hospitality can lead to encounters with divine realities. Sharing in the sufferings and hardships of others is a virtue. Loving God and loving one another should clearly take a greater priority than preoccupations with money. These short examples illustrate how the Lord lovingly sustains with us.

Couples who have had struggles in their lives might be drawn to this passage. Those who resist the societal expectations of an extravagant wedding celebration and those who do not have abundant financial resources will find themselves at home with this passage. In place of household gifts for the couple, some are directing guests to make contributions to charitable organizations. This passage certainly reinforces that social consciousness. Those who have seen the Lord with them in their need in the past might use this passage as a proclamation of faith that they trust in God's presence with them as they embark upon their married life.

10. Be of one mind, sympathetic, loving toward one another.
A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter 3:1-9

Beloved:
You wives should be subordinate to your husbands so that,
even if some disobey the word,
they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct

when they observe your reverent and chaste behavior.
Your adornment should not be an external one:
braiding the hair, wearing gold jewelry, or dressing in fine clothes,
but rather the hidden character of the heart,
expressed in the imperishable beauty
of a gentle and calm disposition,
which is precious in the sight of God.
For this is also how the holy women who hoped in God
once used to adorn themselves
and were subordinate to their husbands;
thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him “lord.”
You are her children when you do what is good
and fear no intimidation.
Likewise, you husbands should live with your wives in understanding,
showing honor to the weaker female sex,
since we are joint heirs of the gift of life,
so that your prayers may not be hindered.
Finally, all of you, be of one mind, sympathetic,
loving toward one another, compassionate, humble.
Do not return evil for evil, or insult for insult;
but, on the contrary, a blessing, because to this you were called,
that you might inherit a blessing.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This letter was originally sent to five Roman provinces in Asia Minor where Christianity had taken root in some small pockets. The Romans were nervous of outside religions like Christianity. Their society was strongly patriarchal, and they feared that strange, new religions would cause revolts. This is why it includes household codes, and ethical statements to wives, slaves, and children.

That bit of background might help to understand the harsh tone of this passage to 21st century readers. The bulk of the reading is directed toward wives. There is mentioned that “husbands should live with your wives in understanding, showing honor.” Readers will resonate more favorably with the vision for married life in the final lines that encourage them to be of one mind, loving one another compassionately and humbly. It challenges the couple to resist the temptation to play the blame game, “Do not return evil for evil, or insult for insult.” It calls them to a higher way of relating, by striving to be a blessing for one another.

11. Love in deed and in truth

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John 3:18-24

Children, let us love not in word or speech
but in deed and truth.
Now this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth
and reassure our hearts before him
in whatever our hearts condemn,
for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.
Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us,
we have confidence in God
and receive from him whatever we ask,
because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.
And his commandment is this:
we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ,
and love one another just as he commanded us.
Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them,
and the way we know that he remains in us
is from the Spirit that he gave us.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

The first letter of St. John was written as a response to some people who had broken away from the early Christian community and were opposed to some of the basic teachings about Jesus. This is why the passage opens with references to what is true. Love is not a matter of words. It must also involve real actions. One's thoughts and beliefs (things of the heart) must match what is done on the outside, for "God is greater than our hearts and knows everything."

The reading emphasizes truth. At the heart of the wedding liturgy is the vows, during which the couple will say, "I promise to be true to you." Traditionally this has referred to sexual fidelity, yet it can include a wider range of truth. Couples also need to be true about their finances, their hopes for family, their personal histories, their struggles and addictions, their beliefs about God, and much more. Being true in all things is an imitation of the way Christ Jesus loves us.

The passage describes a love that is sincere. God has commanded us to believe in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit will help us to know when we have kept God's commands.

12. God is love.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John 4:7-12

Beloved, let us love one another,
because love is of God;
everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.
Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.
In this way the love of God was revealed to us:
God sent his only-begotten Son into the world
so that we might have life through him.
In this is love:
not that we have loved God, but that he loved us
and sent his Son as expiation for our sins.
Beloved, if God so loved us,
we also must love one another.
No one has ever seen God.
Yet, if we love one another, God remains in us,
and his love is brought to perfection in us.
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage dives deep into the Christian mystery and spirituality of love. Love one another, not because of anything we have done or felt or experienced. Rather, we love only because God has loved us first. In other words, love is not dependent upon us or our capabilities. Love depends upon God. God, who is unseen, has shown us what love is like – Love is his Son, Jesus. Most especially, love is his embrace of our sinfulness and the new life that follows in the resurrection.

The readings says nothing specifically about marriage. Yet, marriage has everything to do with love. Couples often believe that love has to do with the feelings and emotions they share with one another. That may be one piece, and this reading can help them see that their love is really gift from God and a participation in God.

The reading will help couples to see that authentically loving their spouse will at some point include a sacrifice, like the love seen in the actions of the Son. Yet loving each another is a way to experience God's abiding presence, and trusting that God will perfect their love for each another.

13. Blessed are those who have been called to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

A reading from the Book of Revelation 19:1, 5-9a

I, John, heard what sounded like the loud voice
of a great multitude in heaven, saying:
“Alleluia!
Salvation, glory, and might belong to our God.”
A voice coming from the throne said:
“Praise our God, all you his servants,
and you who revere him, small and great.”
Then I heard something like the sound of a great multitude
or the sound of rushing water or mighty peals of thunder,
as they said:
“Alleluia!
The Lord has established his reign,
our God, the almighty.
Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory.
For the wedding day of the Lamb has come,
his bride has made herself ready.
She was allowed to wear
a bright, clean linen garment.”
(The linen represents the righteous deeds of the holy ones.)
Then the angel said to me,
“Write this:
Blessed are those who have been called
to the wedding feast of the Lamb.”
The word of the Lord.

Commentary

The book of Revelations is also referred to as apocalypse, which was an ancient writing genre. An apocalypse was when an author would reveal (hence the title Revelations) visions about the future or heaven. This passage is a glimpse into a heavenly wedding feast. Christ is the central figure, and his bride is the entire church, the people of God. The great multitude is the throngs of angels and saints. Reference is made to a bright, clean garment. At a wedding, one would think of the bride’s dress. Here, it is the white garment of the saints, and the baptismal garment of those born into the life of Christ through the waters of baptism.

A wedding is referenced twice, yet it is a mystical image of Christ and the Church. It tells us something about the nature of the sacrament of marriage. Christian sacramental marriage intends to show the world the kind of unity that God has with his people. The overabundance of joy in heaven at the union of the faithful with Christ is similar to the joy of a Christian husband and wife.

This reading is mystical in nature and might not easily appeal to the wedding couple and their gathered friends. It could appeal to those who have studied in depth the church's teachings, who have a common love for the Eucharist (a symbol of the banquet feast) and who look forward to a life together on earth and in heaven.

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Gospel Readings

1. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.
A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 5:1-12a

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain,
and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him.
He began to teach them, saying:
"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,

for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you
and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me.
Rejoice and be glad,
for your reward will be great in heaven."
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

On a wedding day, countless people will wish the newlyweds a "happy marriage" or some other expression of happiness. In this much beloved passage known as the Beatitudes, the word "blessed" can also be rendered as "happy," or "fortunate." This most recognizable of passages from Matthew's gospel admits that real happiness is not some fantasy of perpetual glee, but rather it is found in life's ordinary mix of bitter and sweet. All marriages experience good times and bad. As Christ's followers, we are called to consider the spiritual dimensions or the blessedness of all life's activity.

Further making this a worthy option for the marriage celebration is that this passage clearly states the basics for Christian living. It makes no reference to marriage, yet it is the first major discourse in all the Gospels where Jesus describes what life will be like for his followers. There is a parallel between Jesus beginning his teaching ministry and couples beginning their married lives. Similar to this passage, the nuptial blessing in the marriage rite concludes with the hope of eternal fulfillment by praying, "May you…come at last to the kingdom of heaven." Both stress that marriage has a cosmic dimension, for its fulfillment is in heaven.

2. You are the light of the world.
A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples:
"You are the salt of the earth.
But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?
It is no longer good for anything
but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.
You are the light of the world.
A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.
Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket;
it is set on a lamp stand,

here it gives light to all in the house.
Just so, your light must shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds
and glorify your heavenly Father."
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage, like the ones prior and following, is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that takes up three full chapters of Matthew's gospel. It pertains to Jesus' foundational teachings for all who seek to follow him. Obviously, a particular reference to marriage is not included here. It does state that Christian living is like a light that illumines a world gone dark from the gloom of sin. The stress on the outward nature of the Christian life is a very useful image for married couples. Love for one another should not be contained to themselves. It should seek to be poured out for others. Like the markings of an upstanding person of faith, the marks of a strong marriage are when others are positively affected and benefit from a couple's union. Authentic love translates into good deeds and into glory for God.

3. A wise man built his house on rock.
(Long Form)
A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 7:21, 24-29

Jesus said to his disciples:
"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'
will enter the Kingdom of heaven,
but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.
"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them
will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.
The rain fell, the floods came,
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.
But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.
And everyone who listens to these words of mine
but does not act on them
will be like a fool who built his house on sand.
The rain fell, the floods came,
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.
And it collapsed and was completely ruined."
When Jesus finished these words,

the crowds were astonished at his teaching,
for he taught them as one having authority,
and not as their scribes.
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage concludes the extensive opening discourse in Matthew's gospel regarding an overall picture of discipleship. This is why the longer version of the passage concludes with the note about Jesus finishing these words and the crowd being astonished at his teaching. From the Beatitudes to this point, Jesus has spent much time instructing, and he concludes it all by telling his interested followers that they must put these teachings into actions. The crowd's reaction is astonishment. Discipleship is as much about doing as it is believing. The disciple is to listen first and then act (vs. 24) upon God's Word.

All couples getting married have one eye set on the future. So does Matthew. Just like the opening statement in this passage, Matthew frequently portrays Jesus describing the actions a disciple must undertake to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Many wedding couples will be making plans for a new home together. This passage invites consideration of a spiritual and eternal home. Beginning their marriage in the Church is the start point of a solid foundation. Couples who are wise will continue to nourish their relationship with an active faith life and commitment to the parish community.

The short form (below) ends the passage with the strong image of setting one's house on rock. The image of the house built upon the uncertainty of sand is omitted.

OR

A wise man built his house on rock.
(Short Form)
A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 7:21, 24-25

Jesus said to his disciples:
"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'
will enter the Kingdom of heaven,
but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.
"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them
will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.
The rain fell, the floods came,
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.
But it did not collapse;

it had been set solidly on rock."
The Gospel of the Lord.

4. What God has united, man must not separate.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 19:3-6

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying,
"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?"
He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning
the Creator made them male and female and said,
For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother
and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?
So they are no longer two, but one flesh.
Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate."
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

As is commonplace in the Gospels, Jesus does not outright answer "Yes," or "No" to a zinging question launched by the Pharisees. After all, they were trying to trip him up. Instead of a simple one word response, Jesus poses a question back. The Pharisees were experts on the law, and they should have easily known the passage from Genesis 2 that Jesus quotes. The first five chapters of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch, were the core of Jewish life during Jesus' lifetime. Jesus does not comment on the lawfulness of divorce, at least not in civil terms. Rather, as he demonstrates a central element of his mission, Jesus raises the stakes to a divine and spiritual reality. He says that "what God has joined" those on earth must not separate. Marriage is a participation in the divine ordering of earthly activities.

This passage is the clearest expression of marriage in the Gospels (a parallel reading is found in Mark 10:2-9). It is the firm foundation for the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. When selected for the wedding ritual, it will help to highlight the couple's vows which are to last all the days of their lives.

5. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 22:35-40

One of the Pharisees, a scholar of the law, tested Jesus by asking,
“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”
He said to him,
“You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart,
with all your soul,
and with all your mind.
This is the greatest and the first commandment.
The second is like it:
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

The Pharisees are often portrayed in the gospels as micro-managers of the law. There were literally hundreds of laws governing nearly every aspect of life. So, a scholar approaches Jesus and calls him teacher, yet the Pharisee intends to test him. Jesus first quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, the commandment to love God. He doesn’t stop there, as he then recites Leviticus 19:18 to love your neighbor. Loving others is like loving God. In fact, loving others is one way to demonstrate our deep love for God. The two are now very closely linked because of this master teaching by Jesus.

At baptism, parents are asked if they are ready and willing to accept the responsibilities to raise the child as Christ has taught us, to love God and love one’s neighbor. Proclaiming this Gospel at the wedding liturgy will underscore the very basic mission of a Christian–to throw one’s entire heart, mind, and soul into loving God, and then to seek to love all others. It will make a subtle connection between baptism as the first sacrament and this sacrament of matrimony. Marriage is not explicitly noted in this passage, yet the connection is natural. Couples with a genuine commitment to improving their community and the well being of others will especially resonate with this passage.

6. They are no longer two, but one flesh.
A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark 10:6-9

Jesus said:
“From the beginning of creation,
God made them male and female.
For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother
and be joined to his wife,

and the two shall become one flesh.
So they are no longer two but one flesh.
Therefore what God has joined together,
no human being must separate."
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, contain many of the same stories, just slightly retold from their own perspective. This short reading from Mark is the same as option #4 by St. Matthew in the wedding readings. Jesus reiterates the Hebrew scripture from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, noting that God is the source of creation, making men and women who are designed to become one flesh. The Genesis text speaks of the man being joined to his wife, yet Jesus' final remarks drive the point home that the intent is for both of them to be together inseparably.

This passage reflects the hallmark of any sacrament – they are particular experiences of the Divine. God is doing the joining and no human being must separate it. This final phrase will be heard once again directly after the bride and groom have exchanged their consent and vows when the priest prays, "Let no one separate what God has joined."

7. Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee.
A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 2:1-11

There was a wedding in Cana in Galilee,
and the mother of Jesus was there.
Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.
When the wine ran short,
the mother of Jesus said to him,
"They have no wine."
And Jesus said to her,
"Woman, how does your concern affect me?
My hour has not yet come."
His mother said to the servers,
"Do whatever he tells you."
Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings,
each holding twenty to thirty gallons.
Jesus told them,
"Fill the jars with water."

So they filled them to the brim.
Then he told them,
“Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.”
So they took it.
And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine,
without knowing where it came from
(although the servants who had drawn the water knew),
the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him,
“Everyone serves good wine first,
and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one;
but you have kept the good wine until now.”
Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee
and so revealed his glory,
and his disciples began to believe in him.
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage is traditionally called, “The Wedding Feast at Cana.” Clearly, a wedding is taking place, and not only is Jesus there, but so is his mother, Mary. This makes it attractive to many couples. Yet, more is happening. It’s as if the wedding scene is taking place in the background. In the foreground is a conversation between Mary, the wait staff, and Jesus who reveals a tremendously transformative power.

Embedded in the story is the strength of faith – Mary encourages the servers to do whatever Jesus commands, and it ends with the disciples believing in him. Like the servers, those who demonstrate faith in Christ Jesus will experience good, glorious, and abundant things in this life and especially the next. This text appears early in John’s gospel and is the beginning of Jesus’ many signs. It offers a glimpse of heaven showing the glory of a world to come. The generously overflowing jars of fine wine are symbolic of what Jesus himself offers to us.

Couples who have experienced the transforming power of faith and the abundant presence of Jesus in their lives will enjoy this passage. It encourages them to be like earthen vessels – open to divine transformation whereby their lives are changed to imitate more clearly the ways of Christ.

8. Remain in my love.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 15:9-12

Jesus said to his disciples:
“As the Father loves me, so I also love you.
Remain in my love.
If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father’s commandments
and remain in his love.
“I have told you this so that my joy might be in you
and your joy might be complete.
This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.”
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

As family and friends gather for a wedding ceremony one can sense that the church and the environment is oozing with love. There is great excitement and an overabundance of good will and joyful well wishes for the couple. This passage from John’s gospel builds upon the love that is present as it urges the couple and the community to remain in love.

This passage is part of some words of farewell from Jesus to his disciples. He expresses his love for them before his return to the Father. The Father has loved the Son, who in turn loved the people. Now, the people are to keep alive that love by imitating it in their communities. This kind of love is particular. It is the love expressed by the Triune God. “As the Father loves me, so I love you” (v. 9). God the Father loves God the Son boundlessly, without calculation, condition, or discussion, and absolutely freely. The love of the Father to the Son is a pure expression of liberating selflessness.

Couples who are joyously in love, and see God as the source of that love will be attracted to this passage. This love is not an emotion or a feeling which are always passing, but it is a permanent love that wells up from within the fullness of one’s being. Following the command to love in the selfless ways of the Triune God leads to lasting joy. As couples strive to retain and remain in love, they bring joy to God. Committed, mutual, married love completes divine joy.

9. This is my commandment: love one another.
A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 15:12-16

Jesus said to his disciples:
“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.
No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.
You are my friends if you do what I command you.

I no longer call you slaves,
because a slave does not know what his master is doing.
I have called you friends,
because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.
It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you
and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain,
so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you."
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage is a continuation of the farewell words from the previous selection. Jesus is at the Last Supper, and prepared to depart from his disciples. Though absent physically, his presence will remain, particularly in the expressions of selfless loving that imitate his actions. The sacrificial love of married couples is like a mirror of the selfless way that Christ loved his friends. This is why marriage is a sacrament and is a path to salvation, because the two are participating in an action of Christ Jesus.

Many couples will embrace the image of laying down one's life for the other spouse. It is tough, and it reinforces the fact that spousal love is to endure until death. This is the action of spouses, and it also the central action of real friendship.

The vocation of all Christians is to be drawn into divine friendship. When believers live as Friends of God, their lives will show it (bear fruit) and they will be encouraged to rely upon that friendship in favorable ways for "whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give you" (v.16). The fruit of the married couple will likely include children who will also be formed to selflessly love and follow Christ's ways. And the family will together call upon God in their need.

10. That they may be brought to perfection as one.
(Long Form)
A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 17:20-26

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:
"I pray not only for my disciples,
but also for those who will believe in me through their word,
so that they may all be one,
as you, Father, are in me and I in you,
that they also may be in us,
that the world may believe that you sent me.

And I have given them the glory you gave me,
so that they may be one, as we are one,
I in them and you in me,
that they may be brought to perfection as one,
that the world may know that you sent me,
and that you loved them even as you loved me.
Father, they are your gift to me.
I wish that where I am they also may be with me,
that they may see my glory that you gave me,
because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
Righteous Father, the world also does not know you,
but I know you, and they know that you sent me.
I made known to them your name and I will make it known,
that the love with which you loved me
may be in them and I in them."
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

Just before Jesus enters into his passion and death, he prays this prayer for love and unity. He looks up into heaven and desires that the glory of heaven will be made known on earth. His prayer draws upon the profound unity of the Trinity, where God the Father perfectly and fully loves God the Son and they dwell in each other's love.

The Trinity has at times, been described in our tradition this way: The three persons of the Godhead are like a Lover, the Beloved, and the Love between them – corresponding to God the Father, who loves God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit who is the love shared between them. The seamless unity of the Father and Son (the Lover and the Beloved), is a metaphor for the unity that is desired through a sacramental marriage.

As Jesus mystically envisions heavenly glory, he desires that all in his flock are to share heaven with him. Married couples embark on a journey that is to culminate in heaven. They walk alongside each another in their earthly lives, and an indispensable part of life include a spiritual life and an eternal dimension.

This passage might be favored by couples who desire an intense bond, including a strong spiritual unity that can only come from relying upon the Holy Spirit in their relationship. Also, those who have struggled to reconcile differences between themselves, their families, or within their community of faith, might find this a useful passage. Jesus desires the same unity for them, the fullness of which will not be realized until eternity breaks through.

Unless the homilist is drawing from the phrase, “before the foundation of the world” little will be lost using the shorter form (below). It retains the Trinitarian image of unity, and preserves the vision that the community of believers is to be perfectly one.

OR

That they may be brought to perfection as one.

(Short Form)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 17:20-23

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:
“Holy Father, I pray not only for these,
but also for those who will believe in me through their word,
so that they may all be one,
as you, Father, are in me and I in you,
that they also may be in us,
that the world may believe that you sent me.
And I have given them the glory you gave me,
so that they may be one, as we are one,
I in them and you in me,
that they may be brought to perfection as one,
that the world may know that you sent me,
and that you loved them even as you loved me.”
The Gospel of the Lord