

Readings from the Old Testament

Looking at the Text

M O-1 Genesis 1:26-28, 31a:
Male and female he created them.

The Book of Genesis

Genesis is the first book of the Bible. Some have called it the book of beginnings, for it starts with the stories of the beauty and goodness of Creation. It continues with God's plan for saving and blessing people, with stories of people being presented with opportunities, to choose between the bad or the good, to demonstrate faith when others around think they are mad, to believe in God's promises when it seems impossible, to make choices to forgive and to trust. Perhaps one of these stories might speak to you about opportunities and choices you make as a couple, which lead to great blessings in your life, for example, choosing to get married according to the rites of the Catholic Church.

This reading from Genesis, chapter 1, speaks of Man and Woman created in the image of God, and God's plan for them to live life to the full in an exclusive, loving commitment and fruitful relationship. And this image of man and woman together gives us a glimpse of what God is like.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- How would you describe your relationship? What is 'very good' about your love for one another? What are your hopes for your life together?
- Why do you think this reading might be a good one for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

M = this indicates that this is a reading which speaks explicitly about Marriage. One of the chosen readings must be taken from those which are about Marriage.

Looking at the Text

M O-2 Genesis 2:18-24
They become one body.

The Book of Genesis

Genesis is the first book of the Bible. Some have called it the book of beginnings, for it starts with the stories of the beauty and goodness of Creation. It continues with God's plan for saving and blessing people, with stories of people being presented with opportunities, to choose between the bad or the good, to demonstrate faith when others around think they are mad, to believe in God's promises when it seems impossible, to make choices to forgive and to trust. Perhaps one of these stories might speak to you about opportunities and choices you make as a couple, which lead to great blessings in your life, for example, choosing to get married according to the rites of the Catholic Church.

In Genesis, chapter two, God sees the companionship of men and women as the pinnacle of creation. To reflect his creative loving goodness and faithfulness God makes a man and a woman, and plans for them to be side by side in a committed, loving and fruitful relationship, as good stewards of the world, taking responsibility for the environment. In this passage, we hear how delighted the man and the woman are to be together, two people made for each other, becoming one in the love and intimacy of their relationship.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- In what ways do you find yourself and your husband or wife to be 'just right' for you? What 'delights' you about your partner? How does it feel to have found each other? What's the difference between being 'friends' and being 'one' in marriage? What does it mean for you to be 'one' in your life of love and intimacy, in heart and mind, and in body? How will you support each other in your married life together?
- What do you particularly like about this reading? Why might it be suitable for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

M O-3 Genesis 24:48-51, 58-67

Isaac loved Rebekah, and so he was consoled for the loss of his mother.

The Book of Genesis

Genesis is the first book of the Bible. Some have called it the book of beginnings, for it starts with the stories of the beauty and goodness of Creation. It continues with God's plan for saving and blessing people, with stories of people being presented with opportunities, to choose between the bad or the good, to demonstrate faith when others around think they are mad, to believe in God's promises when it seems impossible, to make choices to forgive and to trust. Perhaps one of these stories might speak to you about opportunities and choices you make as a couple, which lead to great blessings in your life, for example, choosing to get married according to the rites of the Catholic Church.

In this passage, we hear the story of the love between Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac was a miracle child, born to Sarah and Abraham when both parents were very old. After his father, he was a man of faith, and God worked through him in spite of, or even because of, his shortcomings. Rebekah, although full of initiative, isn't always wise, and tries to justify the things she chooses to do. However, in this extract of the story, we see how the two are destined for one another in love.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- In what ways do you feel 'destined' for each other — how did you know he or she was 'the one'? When, where, how did you meet? Remind yourselves of the stories, and how you felt, and how this encounter has led you to engagement and preparation for marriage. What do you think are the most important things about a married relationship?
- What do you particularly like about this reading? Why might it be suitable for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

M O-4 Tobit 7:6-14

The Lord of heaven favours you, my child, and grants you his grace and peace.

The Book of Tobit:

This is a story about being faithful to God and family, and persistently trying to live a good life. Tobit came from the tribe of Naphtali, who thought they were good, but were not particularly so! Tobit was the one in the tribe who kept his faith when all around were losing theirs. He did what the law required, and gave a portion of his income for good causes — however, his downfall was pride in his own goodness. He looked after his wider family, and was guided and protected by an angel sent by God (called ‘Azariah’ in the story, but his real name was ‘Raphael’!) Tobit’s wife was Anna, a strong woman. Their son was Tobias, who eventually married his bride-to-be, Sarah, who had been very long-suffering in trying to find the right husband. Her father, Raguel, and mother, Edna, cared very much for Sarah’s wellbeing and future, and were trying to help her marry someone who would live long enough to consummate the marriage!

Specific background for this passage

Tobias, son of Tobit, is of the same tribe and a kinsman of Raguel, father of Sarah, whom Tobias is destined to marry. He finally meets Sarah’s parents. Raguel, her father, is blind. He is so delighted to meet Tobias, Son of Tobit, a ‘suitable’ spouse for his daughter Sarah, that he jumps up and kisses him, and the engagement is formally announced.

This story comes from a very different age and culture from our own. It feels rather strange to us. However, after a short time of reflection, you may find some aspects of it striking.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the ‘Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way’ in the introduction ‘Choosing your Wedding readings’.

Further Reflection

Following the ‘slow reading’ process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What strikes you about Tobias’s searching for a wife? And Sarah’s hopes? How did you ‘search’ for each other? What were your hopes and concerns about finding the right person? What role have your own parents played in your understanding of marriage, what it is, and what it is not? What other voices have influenced you? What role do your parents have now in supporting your engagement and future life together? Who else will support you?
- What do you particularly like about this reading? Why might it be suitable for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

M O-5 Tobit 8:4b-8
Bring us to old age together.

The Book of Tobit:

This is a story about being faithful to God and family, and persistently trying to live a good life. Tobit came from the tribe of Naphtali, who thought they were good, but were not particularly so! Tobit was the one in the tribe who kept his faith when all around were losing theirs. He did what the law required, and gave a portion of his income for good causes — however, his downfall was pride in his own goodness. He looked after his wider family, and was guided and protected by an angel sent by God (called ‘Azariah’ in the story, but his real name was ‘Raphael!’) Tobit’s wife was Anna, a strong woman. Their son was Tobias, who eventually married his bride-to-be, Sarah, who had been very long-suffering in trying to find the right husband. Her father, Raguel, and mother, Edna, cared very much for Sarah’s wellbeing and future, and were trying to help her marry someone who would live long enough to consummate the marriage!

Background

At this point in the story, Sarah and Tobias are newly married, on their wedding night. In a conversation with Tobias before he met Sarah, the angel Azariah had encouraged Tobias, saying that on their wedding night, Tobias and his new wife Sarah should pray together for their marriage, asking for God’s blessing, mercy and health.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the ‘Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way’ in the introduction ‘Choosing your Wedding readings’.

Further Reflection

Following the ‘slow reading’ process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- How do you think you two are ‘made for each other’? What might you talk to God about or ‘pray’ for concerning your own marriage and life together? What does ‘growing old together’ mean for you? Could you perhaps make these shared thoughts into a very simple prayer with each other?
 - e.g. *Dear Lord, Thank you that we have found each other. In our life together we hope... (your hopes)... We ask your blessing on this time of preparation and our married life together. We make this prayer through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*
- What do you particularly like about this reading? Why might it be suitable for your wedding?

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Looking at the Text:

+M O-6 Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31
The woman who fears the Lord is the one to praise.

The Book of Proverbs

Solomon left a legacy of wisdom in three books of which Proverbs is one. Proverbs is a collection of short, concise sayings, passing on some practical wisdom on how to live, in relationship, walking with God and one another. The sayings range from advice to young people, self-discipline, marriage and family life, to living morally and seeking truth, in tones from common-sense reminders to careful warning. The word 'proverb' comes from a Hebrew word meaning 'to rule', so you might say the Proverbs are guidance to govern the way we live.

Background to this passage

This extract is from the Epilogue to the Book of Proverbs, giving a picture of a woman of strong character, wisdom and compassion. Yes, she is a great wife and mother, but she is also a wise, resourceful and gifted businesswoman and multi-tasker. According to the text, her integrity, strength and dignity come from her rootedness in a life of faith. No mention is made of her looks or physical attributes. The attraction is her personality and giftedness. Rather than an ideal, she is to be taken as an inspiration for both men and women in a respectful, mutual relationship.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What attracts you about your wife or husband to be? What do you most respect about them? How would you describe their qualities/character and gifts?
- What gifts and qualities do you yourself bring to the marriage?
- What qualities are most important to you in a relationship?
- How do you think you can best sustain a happy, healthy relationship?
- What do you particularly like about this reading? Why might it be suitable for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

O-7 Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a
Love is as strong as Death.

The Song of Songs

This is a book about love — pursuing love, finding love, abandoning ourselves to the loved one, expressing love. It encourages wholehearted self-giving and passion. It can also remind us that God seeks us with a tender and zealous love too.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- When you have shared the words or phrases that caught your attention in this beautiful love poem, perhaps you might talk about your own lives together. What is the place of romantic love and sexual love in your own relationship?
- Go back to the beginning. How did you meet? What attracted you to one another? How did your love for one another begin and what has helped it grow? How are you going to sustain the romance and love-making in your marriage when you both have busy lives?

Looking at the Text

M O-8 Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 26:1-4, 16-21

Like the sun rising is the beauty of a good wife in a well-kept house.

The Book of Ecclesiasticus (or 'Sirach')

Ecclesiasticus, otherwise known as 'Sirach' is a book in the 'Wisdom' literature of the bible. 'Wisdom' could be described as the art of living out, every day, the prayer at the heart of our Christian faith, the 'Lord's Prayer' or 'Our Father'. Through our lives bringing God's way 'on earth as it is in heaven', whatever our circumstances, with all the grace and skill that takes. It has little to do with 'knowing' things or being clever, and much to do with the way we conduct our relationships with trust and respect, how we treat other people around us, how we lead, how we spend our money, how we grow as loving, kind people, capable of being peacemakers, witnessing to a life of faith.

In Ecclesiasticus, we learn about humans seeking meaning and purpose in life, and recognising that we cannot become fully human, fully the people we are created to be in isolation from God or others. We can't live a full and happy life through selfish pursuits, on our own terms.

This piece of sacred writing comes from a time and culture so very different from our own. Read 'between the lines' to find some deeper message.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What for you are the characteristics of a good husband? And a good wife?
- You might like to tell your fiancé(e) what the things are that you love about them.
- What do you think it takes to be a 'good' husband or wife? How are you going to show your love for one another each day?
- How do you think you can be 'content' as a couple in whatever circumstances you find yourselves, rich or poor?
- What would you say are the basic foundations or building blocks of your lives together? How are you going to share the tasks of putting these foundations in place, and developing your home and lives together?

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Looking at the Text:

O-9 Jeremiah 31:31-32a, 33-34a

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

The prophet Jeremiah

Jeremiah was born a 'prophet', called by God from his mother's womb, before he even took a breath. You could say he was a born prophet, a born leader. His purpose was to give God's message to the kings and people of Judah. He lived through good times and times of persecution. The key themes in this book of the bible include listening and trusting God in our lives, staying faithful in relationships, and remembering that our love is rooted in God's everlasting love, who knows and loves us beyond our understanding! Jeremiah seeks to encourage us!

In this passage

From Jeremiah we hear the word 'covenant' — as a vow or promise that is faithful and everlasting. God has made a covenant of everlasting love with his people. In making our wedding vows to one another, before God and our families, we are promised by God that he is with us, strengthening our ability to make a loving, fruitful and life-long commitment in marriage every step of the way. The 'law of love' or 'covenant' which is God's law, is written on our hearts, and God's love is, and always will be, there for us, like an everlasting underground spring to draw from in good times and the difficult ones. This is part of the 'mystery' of our faith, difficult to put into words, but very real.

In the wedding service, you will be making a covenant or partnership of the whole of life with each other. This is established by freely giving your consent to giving yourselves to one another in marriage, and in speaking out your vows to one another, witnessed by the priest and your families and friends.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Think of a marriage you admire. What is it that makes it a 'good' marriage? What do you think has helped the couple?
- You may like to look at the words of the vows, and talk about them together. What do the words of each vow mean to you?
*to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish
till death do us part.*
- What do you like about this reading, and why might it be a good reading for your wedding?

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Readings from the New Testament

Looking at the Text

N-1 Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39

Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ.

St Paul's letter to the Romans

In the last ten years of his life, St Paul wrote letters to the churches he had founded. He wrote to both communities and individuals, often responding to questions and or difficulties they were having. He teaches about belief in God and how to live this out in life. The letter to the Romans is the longest letter, making the point that the law itself can give us knowledge about how to live the Christian life, but ultimately, it is God, through Jesus, who gives us the power and the strength to live it. Through baptism, we enter into 'new' life with Jesus, as children of God, members of Christ's family, with all the love we need! Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus, and this love enables our love.

In this passage

Relating it to marriage, we hear that with God (who is love) on our side, we can live the life we are called to live in marriage — a relationship of love that is exclusive, lifelong and fruitful. No trouble or worry or difficulty that threatens us can overwhelm us. We have the power to overcome anything and everything through love. God is love, and God pours out his love for us through the gift of his Son, Jesus. This is the love fills our hearts, strengthening our love for each other. We can call on and trust in God's loving help at all times.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- In the ups and downs of life and relationships, what sort of worries do you have? How do you normally deal with your worries?
- What difference does this reading from the letter to the Romans make?
- Choose the words or sentence in this reading that speak to you most about 'hanging on in there', and perhaps write them down and use it as a book mark or stick it on the fridge.
- Why do you like this reading, and why might it be a good reading for your wedding?

Looking at the Text:

N-2 Romans 12:1-2, 9-18 (long form) or 1-2, 9-13 (short form)
Offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God.

St Paul's letter to the Romans

In the last ten years of his life, St Paul wrote letters to the churches he had founded. He wrote to both communities and individuals, often responding to questions and or difficulties they were having. He teaches about belief in God and how to live this out in life. The letter to the Romans is the longest letter, making the point that the law itself can give us knowledge about how to live the Christian life, but ultimately, it is God, through Jesus, who gives us the power and the strength to live it. Through baptism, we enter into 'new' life with Jesus, as children of God, members of Christ's family, with all the love we need! Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus, and this love enables our love.

In this reading

St Paul describes in a very real and practical way what it means to live a life of compassionate, merciful, self-giving love, modelled on God's merciful love, made visible to us in Jesus. Related to marriage, he says how vitally important it is to respect each other, be honest, hopeful and cheerful. Yes, trials will come — they are a normal part of life's ups and downs. But the way through, St Paul urges, is to keep working at the relationship, putting your partner first before yourself, offering yourself and all you have and are to the other, with determination, generosity and kindness. St Paul says 'make hospitality your special care', and that word 'hospitality' in relation to one another in a marriage means spending time together, listening to one another without jumping in with a 'fix-it' or your own story or any kind of judgment. This spending time together has to be planned, and carved out of your busy, demanding lives. If you don't spend quality time together, it's much harder to grow strong as a couple and be able to face the difficulties that come from a deeply peaceful, trusting 'centre'.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Which are the words and phrases that particularly catch your attention in this reading?
- What is 'real' love and what is 'pretend' love?
- What are your hopes, dreams and 'highest ideals' for your own marriage?
- How have you handled difficult things in life so far? What sort of gifts and skills will you need for handling challenges together?
- How do you/will you make decisions together, and discover what is good and right for you as a couple and a family?
- Why would this be a good reading for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

This reading is given in a long and short form — either may be chosen.

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Looking at the Text:

+ N-3 Romans 15:1b-3a, 5-7, 13
Treat each other as Christ.

St Paul's letter to the Romans

In the last ten years of his life, St Paul wrote letters to the churches he had founded. He wrote to both communities and individuals, often responding to questions and or difficulties they were having. He teaches about belief in God and how to live this out in life. The letter to the Romans is the longest letter, making the point that the law itself can give us knowledge about how to live the Christian life, but ultimately, it is God, through Jesus, who gives us the power and the strength to live it. Through baptism, we enter into 'new' life with Jesus, as children of God, members of Christ's family, with all the love we need! Nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus, and this love enables our love.

In this passage

St Paul gives advice on how to grow stronger through being unselfish and tenacious, following the example that Jesus gives in the Gospels. It takes effort to be tolerant and unselfish, and grow towards being united in 'mind and voice'. But that is how God wants us to be, and if we are open, God gives us the strength to live this way. If we treat one another as we see Jesus treating all, with radical, self-emptying love, we will have a deep sense of joy and peace, and become a place of hope and peace for others too.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What did we learn about being tolerant and unselfish in our relationships as children, growing up? Can you think of some good and some poor examples?
- Where is there room for improvement, perhaps, in our relationship together? Where and when do I need to be less selfish and more tolerant?
- What would you say are the qualities of a great relationship?
- You may like to think about the last verse together — what does it mean for you? And then to pray it, putting the word 'us' in:
May the God of hope bring us such joy and peace in our faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove all bounds to hope. Amen.
- What do you like about this reading, and why might it be a good reading for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

N-4 1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20
Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

In his first letter to the diverse groups of Christians in the busy port at Corinth, St Paul answers their questions on living the moral life, as well as making comments on their motives, behaviours and difficulties. He gives them the great teaching about Jesus Christ as the head, and everyone in the Church making up the members of his body. Each person or member has unique dignity, and unique gifts to contribute to the healthy functioning of the whole body. Each person has a part to play in relationship with others, and a certain responsibility and power to be aware of and respond to the needs of the whole body, joined to Christ the head, and filled with his spirit. A marriage, as a 'little church' or 'domestic church', has similar characteristics. The husband and wife in the marriage are united in unselfish love, which has its source in God's love which is like a spring, welling up inside them. They and the members of the family each share in the responsibility to give themselves for one another, unselfishly building a healthy happy 'body' that is the couple and the family.

In this reading

St Paul is teaching how important it is to live a moral life, with respect for your own and your partner's body. God took on human flesh in Jesus, showing us that the body is as important as the soul or spirit — we live in a physical world in a physical way with our bodies, and what we do with our bodies affects our spirits, because body and spirit are inseparable. In marriage we are called to live a joyful and fulfilling life through a faithful, exclusive and committed partnership. Our sexual relationship is a beautiful and essential ingredient of our marriage. Fornication is sex outside the marriage relationship, which violates the commitment at the heart of marriage, and always causes huge hurt, and both mental and spiritual anguish. St Paul tells us that Christ's death paid a price to set us free from sin — including sexual sin. The reading describes this saying 'we have been bought and paid for'. We are to live in this freedom and enjoy the gift of our sexuality in marriage, remembering that we have the spirit of Christ in us, and that Christian freedom is always tied to responsibility.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Talk together about what being faithful means to you, and why sexual infidelity in particular, in thought, word or action, is so damaging to a relationship. What have you noticed or experienced about this in contemporary culture?
- Our sexuality is a natural and beautiful gift given to us by God, which involves the whole person — not just our bodies, but our minds and spirits too. How do we care for each other, fulfilling each other's needs and desires, physically, emotionally and spiritually?

- We give ourselves — all we have and all we are — to one another in marriage. You might like to tell each other what you most appreciate about them, and what you receive from them that makes such a difference to your life. What you hope to give to the other through the stability of your married relationship.
- What do you like about this reading, and why might it be a good reading for your wedding?

Looking at the Text

N-5 1 Corinthians 12:31-13:8a

If I am without love, it will do me no good whatever.

St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians

In his first letter to the diverse groups of Christians in the busy port at Corinth, St Paul answers their questions on living the moral life, as well as making comments on their motives, behaviours and difficulties. He gives them the great teaching about Jesus Christ as the head, and everyone in the Church making up the members of his body. Each person or member has unique dignity, and unique gifts to contribute to the healthy functioning of the whole body. Each person has a part to play in relationship with others, and a certain responsibility and power to be aware of and respond to the needs of the whole body, joined to Christ the head, and filled with his spirit. A marriage, as a 'little church' or 'domestic church' has similar characteristics. The husband and wife in the marriage are united in unselfish love, which has its source in God's love which is like a spring, welling up inside them. They and the members of the family, each share in the responsibility to give themselves for one another, unselfishly building a healthy happy 'body' that is the couple and the family.

We often hear this particular reading at weddings. It is a beautiful description of 'the way of love', which St Paul says is better than any other way. Love as expressed here is the absolute cornerstone of a happy marriage.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Which description of love, 'the greatest gift', are you most drawn to in this reading?
- Talk about the different words to describe love. What do you think about each of these? Could you perhaps make the last section a prayer of hope & trust for yourselves, putting the words '*We hope and trust that our*' before the word love:

We hope and trust that our love will be patient and kind, and never jealous.

We hope and trust that our love will never be boastful, conceited, rude or selfish.

We hope and trust that our love will not take offence or be resentful.

We hope and trust that our love will delight in the truth.

We hope and trust that our love will be forgiving, will trust, will hope, and will endure whatever comes.

With God's grace and blessing, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our love is eternal. Thank you, Lord, for the gift of our love for each other.

- What do you like about this reading, and why might it be a good reading for your wedding?

Looking at the Text

+ N-6 Ephesians 4:1-6
One Body and one Spirit.

St Paul's letter to the Ephesians

This letter is full of encouragement for living out a Christian life. At its heart is the most important message of all — that we are unconditionally loved by God, and that we can give, receive and enjoy love throughout our lives, particularly as married couples, and over time grow stronger. There are so many blessings from God that strengthen our human capacities, including the ability to live in love, listen to our consciences, connect thought with action and have a sense of purpose in family life and relationships, knowing we are loved.

This passage speaks of the unity we are called to in the Christian vocation. St Paul helps us consider what it means to have a 'vocation' to being and becoming the person God intends us to be. In this time of preparing for marriage, we are thinking about our 'calling' or 'vocation' to live out our marriage as best as we possibly can. St Paul gives us some clues here. He asks us to live with humility — that is to work at putting our partner before ourselves, being gentle and patient. It takes hard work to build a relationship, especially because we know our own selfishness and weaknesses — and God knows our weaknesses too! In a Christian marriage, God promises to strengthen our human resolve to love one another, for better for worse, in good times and bad, with his own faithfulness, grace and power. We are called to hope — and to hope means to step out together, knowing that it is God who makes us 'one'; we are not alone and with God's help, nothing that comes against us can overwhelm us. We will come out stronger the other side of our difficulties.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What do you like about this reading?
- When you think about a 'calling to marriage', what does that mean for you?
- What for you are the foundations of a strong, lifelong marriage?
- What has helped you to be strong in your life so far?
- How are you going to build your marriage — your friendship, communication and physical relationship? Tell each other your thoughts.
- Making time for each other regularly helps build a life-long marriage — but lots of demands can get in the way. How are you going to plan for time together to have fun, talk together, putting all the distractions and demands aside?
- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good one for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

M N-7 Ephesians 5:2a, 21-33 (long form) or 5:2a, 25-32 (short form)
This mystery has many implications and I am saying it applies to Christ and the Church.

St Paul's letter to the Ephesians

This letter is full of encouragement about living out a Christian life. At its heart is the most important message of all — that we are unconditionally loved by God, and that we can give, receive and enjoy love throughout our lives, particularly as married couples, and over time, growing stronger. There are so many blessings from God, including the ability to live in love, listen to our consciences, connect thought with action and have a sense of unity and purpose in family life and relationships, knowing we are loved.

In this passage

St Paul says we are to be Christ-like in our self-emptying, in words and actions. We must love the other as we love and look after ourselves. God unites us and makes us 'one' — we are part of each other. To be truly compassionate is to 'suffer with' — as 'one' body, so for example, if one of the partners in the marriage is hurting for some reason, the other is so absolutely with them that they too hurt. Another word that might help here is 'companionship'. We share life together, whatever it brings. We are to nourish and look after one another — and this is a great mystery, St Paul says, because the mutual self-giving love of a husband and wife is a sign of how Christ loves his Body, the church.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What might it mean to 'make sacrifices' for one another or 'give way' to one another in your marriage? How can you work through selfishness and move from 'my way' to 'our way'?
- How do you know when your partner is hurting, or has some emotional need? How do you show your tender care for one another? How do you show respect for one another?
- In a marriage, two become one — so what might it mean to say that if you 'love one another', you 'love yourself'?
- What does it mean for you to be leaving/have left your own families of origin, your parents, and to set up your own household? What's going to help you to do this?
- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good reading for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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This reading is given in a long and short form — either may be chosen.

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Looking at the Text

+ N-8 Philippians 4:4-9
The God of peace will be with you.

St Paul's letter to the Philippians

St Paul writes full of great joy alongside practical advice for everyday living and relationships. He says that our strength will come from living with joy, looking on the bright side, even when things happen that try to steal our joy. It's more than an emotional high. Rather, the joy Paul speaks of is very deep, all mixed in with any sorrow or difficulty that comes our way, helping us to live in hope. And this 'joy' is rooted in God's love and joy.

In this passage

We have the word 'happy' and 'happiness' describing a wonderful state of mind, knowing that God is very close, and we have nothing to fear or be anxious about. If we do have particular needs or concerns, St Paul says simply, 'pray for it', and then wait for the peace that God gives — a peace beyond words and understanding that will help us get through whatever it is we are facing. He urges us to fill our minds with good things! The challenge is how to sift through the vast array of communication demanding our attention, and consciously put aside anything that is draining of energy and stops us living our life together to the full. Concentrate on what is life-giving and rings true. This will mean listening carefully to one another.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What makes you really happy? What have been some of the happiest events or times for you?
- What makes you anxious? Can you share your thoughts and feelings?
- Think of a good marriage you know. What do you admire about it? What would you say are the really good things in a married life together?
- Perhaps talk together or write down anything you want to pray for — any particular needs for yourselves, your relationship, your families. And spend a short time in prayer together asking God for these things in a very simple, open way. You might like to finish praying the words:

May the peace of God, which is so much greater than we can understand, guard our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus. Amen.

- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good reading for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

N-9 Colossians 3:12-17

Over all these, to keep them together and complete them, put on love.

St Paul's letter to the Colossians

St Paul is writing to the former Jews, new Christians of Colossae, affirming God's enormous love and repeating some of the earliest teachings of the Christian faith, bringing his readers back to Christ, his life, suffering, death and resurrection being at the heart of everything we hope, believe, trust and do as Christians. It is a mix of instruction in faith, warnings against false teaching and great encouragement on the way of love which is the way of Christ.

In this passage

St Paul urges a real sincerity in our relationship. To sustain a loving relationship, we are to be full of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and tireless patience — always ready to forgive one another too. A tall order! And what will help us to live out this self-emptying, grateful love — the love that looks out to the other, always wanting the best for them ahead of our own needs? Accordingly, to know we can love like this because we are first loved by God, and in order to let the 'message of Christ find a home' in us, we need to be open to that message of love. The Holy Spirit helps us hear this message and learn to live it: firstly through our reflection on the scriptures; secondly, through mixing and talking with our families and friends and people in the parish community, observing, and asking them to say what gives their life meaning; thirdly, through coming to Church and joining in the liturgy of the Church and being touched by the words and gestures, the silences and actions, and learning to deepen prayer ourselves as individual and as a couple; and finally, we hear the message and learn to live it through 'serving' or doing things for others — first our partner, but then more widely, wherever there is need. How will we know when the message of Christ is at home in us? St Paul reassures us, saying let peace be the 'umpire' in your hearts and minds. If you have a sense of peace when making choices and taking decisions about your life together, you are on the right track!

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What qualities do you most admire in one another? What do you most love about each other?
- Why are you getting married in a Catholic Christian setting? What is central about the message of Christ for you? What does this extract from the letter to the Colossians tell you about the message of Christ?
- How can your family and friends support you in your marriage? What about the parish where you are getting married? What about the parish near to where you live?

- What do you think you both bring to the life of your families, and the wider community? You might ask your parents and families what they think your love for each other brings to them!
- Having read through the passage a few times, and shared what strikes you in particular, what do you think God might be saying to you through these words? How does this help you in your preparation for marriage?
- How would you describe 'prayer' for you? When and where might you pray? What help would you like? Where might you find it?
- What do you like about this passage? Why might it be a good reading for your wedding?

Looking at the Text

+ N-10 Hebrews 13:1-4a, 5-6b
Marriage is to be honoured by all.

The letter to the Hebrews

It is not known who wrote the letter to the Hebrews. However, it is written to believers who are under pressure to return to their former Jewish faith, or to mix in Judaism with their Christianity. The author strongly affirms the new ‘covenant’ relationship that Christians have with God. Through his life, suffering, death and resurrection, Jesus makes and fulfills the Covenant, uniting everything in God’s original plan of relationship with him. The ‘covenant’ we have with God through Jesus is an enduring, faithful, life-long, fruitful bond based on the eternal well-spring of love. Our marriage bond is an ‘echo’ or ‘sign’ of this bond — it too is enduring, faithful, life-long and fruitful.

In this passage

We are asked to love each other as family and to be hospitable in the truest sense of the word — to be open, and to share in a selfless way what we have with those in need. This includes people who are bound up in any way: prisoners through illness or circumstance, and anyone who is being badly treated. At the heart of the reading, we find a sentence specifically about respecting or ‘honouring’ marriage. In the Catholic Christian tradition, marriage is honoured as a sacrament of the church — in other words, it is one of the ways in which the members of the church celebrate and live out God’s loving action within our human existence. To give marriage the honour and respect it deserves, couples are required to enter the married state based on a solid preparation — one that will help them sustain a strong, loving, life-long and fruitful relationship. Your preparation integrates the relational and spiritual dimensions, recognising the holistic nature of living out daily married life. You can’t separate out one aspect from another and say ‘this is holy’ and this is ‘ordinary’. The whole of our vowed life as a married couple is ‘holy’. It’s based on saying ‘yes’ to one another in front of our witnesses — the priest, our families and friends, and the vows we make to love and cherish one another, for better for worse, in sickness and health, until death. It’s holy to be unselfish and get up in the night and feed the baby; it’s holy to say no to what you want in order to serve your partner’s needs; it’s holy to look after one another and your family; it’s holy to be content with what you have and to share it. Holiness in marriage and in family life is unselfish love in action. Impossible? The letter to the Hebrews reassures us ‘God himself has said: I will not fail you or desert you’ and so we can say with confidence ‘With the Lord to help me, I fear nothing’ and we can live our radical calling.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the ‘Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way’ in the introduction ‘Choosing your Wedding readings’.

Further Reflection

Following the ‘slow reading’ process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- You have chosen to get married in a Catholic church. What difference does this make?
- Think of a marriage that you respect. What is it about that marriage that draws your respect? What do you think is going to help you sustain your own marriage?

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- Together, you may like to look at the questions you will be asked and the vows you are going to make to one another in the wedding service. Your priest can help you here.
 - Have you come without any pressure from anyone, freely and wholeheartedly to enter into marriage?
 - Are you prepared to love and honour each other as long as you both shall live?
 - Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?
 - ‘I take you to be my wife/husband.
to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish
till death do us part.’
 - ‘Receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity’

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

M N-11 1 Peter 3:1-9

You should all agree among yourselves and be sympathetic; love the brothers.

The first letter of St Peter

St Peter is writing to new Christians, giving practical and spiritual advice on how to live out their new life in Jesus, received through baptism, especially when the going gets tough, being patient and hopeful through trials. In our turn, this letter encourages us to live in hope in Jesus Christ, and to develop our lives together in ways that are good, patient and loving, even when we are going through difficulties.

This particular passage speaks of the ‘inner’ person being more precious than any outside show. Yes, you find each other physically attractive, but more importantly you find each other attractive on the ‘inside’. We love the other person for their character, their attitudes, their kindness and compassion, their consideration and respect of others. The reading gives pointers on how both partners should treat each other, with great tenderness and respect. It was written in a time and culture so different from our own — we live in a world of increasing equality — but when we read between the lines, we find the nuggets of treasure in the text.

The word ‘obedience’ has its roots in the Latin, ‘ob’ to and ‘audire’ to listen, or ‘obedire’, to pay attention to or listen to. In a relationship today the word ‘obedience’ would be not so much ‘doing what we are told’, but more giving way to one another, choosing to want what the other person wants out of love for them. Obedience in a relationship is about mutuality and equality, both partners being respectful of the other, listening to each other, and sorting out disputes, or working out the way forward together in a particular situation.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the ‘Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way’ in the introduction ‘Choosing your Wedding readings’.

Further Reflection

Following the ‘slow reading’ process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Talk together about the words ‘obedience’ and ‘equality’. What does it mean to be equal partners in your relationship, and to give way to one another out of love?
- Try swapping the words ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ in the text, and see what difference it makes.
- As your relationship has grown, what would you say are the ‘inner’ qualities that attract you to one another?
- How do you show consideration and respect for one another?
- What do you like about this reading? Why would it be a good reading to have at your wedding?

Note about the Reading

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Looking at the Text

N-12 1 John 3:18-24

Our love is to be something real and active.

The first letter of St John

This letter reflects on many of the themes of John's Gospel — including light and darkness, living as God's children, and specifically, the greatest commandments of faith in Jesus and loving one another as he loves us. In keeping these commandments, we will share the life that Jesus himself shares with the Father. This is a great mystery, beyond words and understanding — it is the mystery that is made real in the ordinary everyday living out of love that God, who is love, enables us to do.

In this passage

We hear that our love is to be real — not just talk. And our conscience will help us to discern if we are living out this real love. If we can feel 'at peace' in our conscience — our hearts and minds — peace that we are living in a loving way, we are probably getting something right! St John says we can ask God for all the help we need to live out our love, knowing that God pours out the gift of the Holy Spirit for just that purpose.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What does it mean for our love not to be just words or mere talk? Talk together about the many different ways you can and do make your love for one another real.
- What do you think about 'conscience' — how would you describe it? How does it work?
- How do you know you are living out real love? And how do you know when you are not?
- God is love and wants to help us live in love. What sort of things would you like to ask God's help with in your own relationship? For now? And for the months and years to come?
- You may like to pray the last sentence, repeating it together a few times: *'We know that he lives in us, by the Spirit that he has given us'.*

Looking at the Text

N-13 1 John 4:7-12
God is love

The first letter of St John

This letter reflects on many of the themes of John's Gospel — including light and darkness, living as God's children, and specifically, the greatest commandments of faith in Jesus and loving one another as he loves us. In keeping these commandments, we share in the life that Jesus himself shares with the Father. This is a great mystery, beyond words and understanding — it is the mystery that is made real in the ordinary everyday living out of love that God, who is love, enables us to do.

In this passage

St John says *God is love!* God's immeasurable love is shown to us through Jesus coming into the world, living totally for others, and through his self-offering in life, suffering and death, and in rising from the dead. He takes away the power of every dark, selfish, oppressive thought or action across time and space — everything that gets in the way of love. Through entering into the life he offers us through baptism we are free, enabled to live lives of love as God intended from the beginning. A couple living in love has the utter reassurance that God is with them, living in them through their love. Your love for each other wells up from a source deep inside — and that comes from God! An amazing mystery only glimpsed in the living of it!

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- How did you first know that he or she was the one for you? What was it that most attracted you to your partner? What's it like to be in love?
- How do you show your love for one another in little daily words and actions?
- Given the demands of busy lives, how are you going to make time for building your married relationship, becoming more 'inter-dependent' sharing your lives, rather than living independently, once you are married?
- What are the most important ways of sustaining your relationship?
- What do you like about this reading? Why would it be a good one for your wedding?

Looking at the Text

N-14 Revelation 19:1, 5-9a

Happy are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The Book of Revelation

The Apocalypse is also known as the ‘Book of Revelation’, because it sums up and ‘reveals’ or ‘unveils’ the whole message of hope of the Christian mysteries, that helps us to understand and live well in our present times. It is a strange and rather baffling book full of symbolism, with disturbing, weird and wonderful characters and images — but overall, it is to encourage! It gives a vision of a new way of being, achieved through Christ, where the weak are strong and the oppressed become powerful, set free from dark, dominating systems. We are shown a vision of a ‘new heaven and a new earth’, separated by a very thin ‘veil’, and brought into ‘communion’ together, through Jesus Christ’s continuing eternal presence and action through, with and in his Body, the Church, whenever we gather to celebrate the Church’s worship in the Liturgy (the Mass and the Sacraments, the prayer of the Church), when the past and the future break into the present. Every Mass is a celebration of Christ present with his Body, the Church, in anticipation of the ‘Supper of the Lamb’ that we are all called to at the end of time.

In this passage

We hear tell of such a gathering of the whole ‘crowd’ of heaven singing the great hymn of praise, Alleluia! We have the image of a great liturgy of heaven and earth together, celebrating the good news of bridegroom and bride. This is a common theme for describing the relationship of Christ with his Body, the people of the Church — as bridegroom and bride. It is rooted in the Old Testament theme of God’s covenant relationship with his people, a bond of enduring, faithful, fruitful love. For Catholics, the marriage bond of the couple, lifelong, faithful, and fruitful, is a sign of the bond of Christ and his love for his people, the Church. We hear in the words of the priest just before we receive communion at Mass, ‘Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb’. Our wedding liturgy and our married life is to be a sign of God’s invitation to all to a relationship of love. Your wedding will be a time of great celebration. Not only you as a couple will be bursting with joy, but also your family and friends and the wider community too. Something wonderful is beginning through your commitment to one another in marriage!

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the ‘Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way’ in the introduction ‘Choosing your Wedding readings’.

Further Reflection

Following the ‘slow reading’ process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Who are the people you are inviting to your wedding? Can you picture the huge crowd in heaven and the crowd of family and friends coming to your wedding, together?
- Everyone will be joining in the celebration wholeheartedly supporting you. Music and sacred songs or hymns will add greatly to the joy and help everyone present to express their love and support. What hymns/sacred songs, and music are you going to choose?

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- The reading speaks of the ‘white’ dress being a sign of the ‘good deeds’ of the people. Talk together about the ‘good people’ who have helped you to know about love, firstly as a child growing up — perhaps your grandparents, or parents, or close friends? And as an adult? How have these people been examples to you of what a loving relationship is? What have you learnt from them? It might help you to think of your own wedding dress as a symbol of all the goodness of people in your own lives.

Note about the Reading

Readings from the Book of Revelation are traditionally used in the Easter Season.

Responsorial Psalms

Usually the first reading in the wedding service is followed by a psalm. This is known as the 'Responsorial Psalm' because it is a way of saying 'Yes, we agree, and we are right behind what that first reading has said'. There are many musical versions of psalms available. The texts come from 'The Book of Psalms' or songs which are part of our Jewish-Christian heritage, at the heart of the Old Testament. We know Jesus himself prayed the psalms. We in our day use these words of our ancestors to respond to the reading from scripture. Someone may sing the psalm verses, and the congregation have a refrain to sing. The *Order of Christian Matrimony* gives you seven choices of psalm. However you may have a psalm that has particular resonance for you, and which you find most fitting for your readings and Gospel, enhancing the whole celebration.

For Reflection

- Look through each psalm choice, and see which speaks most about God's love for you, the love you have for one another, and how God blesses your love. You can ask the same questions of your psalm choice.

Alleluia Verses and Verses before the Gospel (Gospel Acclamation)

The Alleluia verses are a joyful 'shout' that helps everyone prepare to hear the 'Good News' of the Gospel that follows.

For Reflection

The Gospel Acclamation verses are short but powerful. You have five choices. Read them through quietly together. Which strikes you as most appropriate for your wedding and the Gospel you have chosen?

Gospel Readings

Looking at the Text

G-1 Matthew 5:1-12a

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

The Gospel of St Matthew

This is the first of the four gospels, giving an account of Jesus' life and ministry, teaching by word, stories, and example — how to live with others, how to pray, how to grow in wisdom and come close to God. Matthew writes as a Jew for the Jewish Christians in the early days of the Church, proclaiming Jesus as 'Messiah', as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, both the Law and the Prophets.

In this passage

Jesus teaches the crowd about what makes us happy. This teaching is known as 'The Beatitudes', from the word 'blessed' or being 'supremely happy'! As 'attitudes' or 'ways of being', they offer great advice for married couples. Jesus shows us how to live life to the full, perhaps in surprising ways. He says that real happiness comes through loving in a totally unselfish way, seeking the good of the other, in all times and circumstances. Happiness is rooted in being unmaterialistic, being kind, compassionate, generous, gentle and loving. It is a thirst for making decisions carefully together based on wanting to do 'the right thing'. It is discovered through being peacemakers — in your married relationship together, and also being a haven of peace for others who come with their troubles. It is a way of standing firm together, standing up for what you believe, and being there for others, countering loneliness and conflict.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Which 'beatitude' catches your attention? What do you like about it?
- Why do you think it's so easy to ignore the advice here?
- Think of a relationship you admire. Can you say which 'beatitude' is at work here? What is it about their life together that you would like to emulate in your own marriage?
- What are the pressures on your relationship? What helps you 'lean in' to your relationship together? How can you make time for one another to enrich and grow your relationship? For example, replacing screen time with a lovely walk together or a date night? Any other ideas?
- How are you at 'making peace' when you've had a row? What helps?
- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good choice for your wedding?

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Looking at the Text

G-2 Matthew 5:13-16
You are the light of the world.

The Gospel of St Matthew

This is the first of the four gospels, giving an account of Jesus' life and ministry, teaching by word, stories, and example — how to live with others, how to pray, how to grow in wisdom and come close to God. Matthew writes as a Jew for the Jewish Christians in the early days of the Church, proclaiming Jesus as 'Messiah', as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, both the Law and the Prophets.

In this passage

Jesus is teaching about the 'seasoning' in a relationship — what makes it tasty! He goes on to talk about the 'light' of the love and goodness in your relationship, which is not just for one another, but for others around you. Life is tasteless without love. Going through the motions and doing something for your partner or someone else without love can leave them feeling empty, not loved. Love takes effort, and it's easy enough to become selfish and lazy — not saying 'I love you' in simple ways. On your wedding day, your love gives you an extraordinary joy, which is very attractive. It literally shines out and touches everyone present.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What are the things that give energy and flavour to your relationship? How do you show your love for one another in little ways?
- Think of a relationship that really 'shines' out for you. What makes it shine?
- Quite unconsciously, your love will continue to shine out for others, particularly in your own relationship, but also in your relationship with others around you. What are the ways in which you can continue to live out your unselfish love for your husband/wife in married life? Who are the people who most need your loving concern?
- Consider together how you as a couple might get involved in the life of the community in some small way? Is there a particular area of parish life that you could bring your joy and enthusiasm to? e.g. being part of the Sunday assembly for Mass; or coming to the parent-toddler group; enquiring about how the parish helps the housebound or sick; joining the tea & coffee rota, or the welcome team; or asking to train as a Reader or Eucharistic Minister?
- What do you like about this Gospel reading? Why might it be a good choice for your wedding?

Looking at the Text

G-3 Matthew 7:21, 24-29 (long form) or 7:21, 24-25 (short form)
He built his house on rock.

The Gospel of St Matthew

This is the first of the four gospels, giving an account of Jesus' life and ministry, teaching by word, stories, and example — how to live with others, how to pray, how to grow in wisdom and come close to God. Matthew writes as a Jew for the Jewish Christians in the early days of the Church, proclaiming Jesus as 'Messiah', as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, both the Law and the Prophets.

In this passage

Jesus speaks of his followers actively living out his teaching, and this is the foundation or 'rock' for building strong, lasting relationships or 'households'. A 'sensible' couple will build their relationship on this 'rock', so that whatever comes against them, they will stand firm. Building a relationship on 'sand' means they will have trouble holding together when the normal 'storms' that threaten life come along. Active participation through the words and actions of the wedding liturgy itself will be the foundation for your lives together. You will give your free consent to one another in the presence of the priest and your family and friends, and make promises to live together in a faithful, life-long fruitful marriage until death. Within all this, Christ is present and active, and God seals and strengthens your love and unity, pouring out blessings for the strength to live out the sacrament of marriage over your lifetime, You will be building on this 'rock' through your daily acts of faithfulness and love in all the ups and downs of life.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Think of a marriage you admire. What makes it strong? What is it built on?
- What qualities do you see in one another? How are these going to help you build a strong loving relationship over the months and years ahead?
- Building a strong, lasting relationship takes effort. Looking at the wedding service, and the words and actions at the heart of the celebration, what would you say will be the foundation stones or 'rock' upon which to build your marriage together?
 - Have you come without any pressure from anyone, freely and wholeheartedly to enter into marriage?
 - Are you prepared to love and honour each other as long as you both shall live?
 - Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

- ‘I take you to be my wife/husband.
to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish
till death do us part.’
- ‘Receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity.’
- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good choice for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

This reading is given in a long and short form — either may be chosen.

Looking at the Text

M G-4 Matthew 19:3-6

What God has united, man must not divide.

The Gospel of St Matthew

This is the first of the four gospels, giving an account of Jesus' life and ministry, teaching by word, stories, and example — how to live with others, how to pray, how to grow in wisdom and come close to God. Matthew writes as a Jew for the Jewish Christians in the early days of the Church, proclaiming Jesus as 'Messiah', as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, both the Law and the Prophets.

In this passage

Jesus is teaching about the commitment of marriage. Marriage is God's idea, from the beginning, for a man and a woman to be joined together in an exclusive, life-long and fruitful relationship. God pours out his love and blessings, giving strength to combat any human weakness and enabling the couple to live a faithful and joyful life together. In a culture that is sadly lacking in commitment, a couple choosing to get married in church are a great sign of hope and encouragement for everyone. The true happiness born in strong relationships shines out for all. In a life-long commitment, both partners can flourish. Through the exchange of consent and making vows, they are assured in the knowledge that they are loved, and that God has united them, come what may. Each can be honest and vulnerable, trusting in their husband or wife's acceptance of them. In this environment of self-less love, mixed in with faith in God's love and support with them, the couple can live out their vocation, and grow towards being the happy, blessed, fruitful people God made them to be. That sounds idealistic! A marriage is not an easy path, and requires great tenacity and trust too. However, bottom line, it is designed by God to be a way of life that images something of what heaven is, and it is powerful in the living of it.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Generally, what would you say the law is for in our lives? How does it help?
- There are 'laws' in the Church, alongside the blessings, that help us to sustain life-long and fruitful marriages. You might like to talk together about what exclusive 'commitment' means to you. What about 'life-long' commitment? What does it mean to be 'fruitful' in a marriage?
- Think of a marriage you admire. What do you think has made it a 'good' marriage? What are the human qualities that 'join' you together in your relationship?
- Take time to look at the solemn vows you are going to make to one another, and your hopes for your marriage.
 - Have you come without any pressure from anyone, freely and wholeheartedly to enter into marriage?

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- Are you prepared to love and honour each other as long as you both shall live?
- Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?
- ‘I take you to be my wife/husband.
to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish
till death do us part.’
- ‘Receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity.’
- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good choice for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

M = this indicates that this is a reading which speaks explicitly about Marriage. One of the chosen readings must be taken from those which are about Marriage.

Looking at the Text

G-5 Matthew 22:35-40

This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it.

The Gospel of St Matthew

This is the first of the four gospels, giving an account of Jesus' life and ministry, teaching by word, stories, and example — how to live with others, how to pray, how to grow in wisdom and come close to God. Matthew writes as a Jew for the Jewish Christians in the early days of the Church, proclaiming Jesus as 'Messiah', as the fulfilment of the Old Testament, both the Law and the Prophets.

In this passage

Jesus gives us a summary of the whole law found in the Old Testament, joining the two key teachings into one great one — love of God and love of neighbour forming one whole. It might seem too easy to love God and then quietly ignore our neighbour. However, Jesus says this is impossible. If we really love God, and know we are precious in God's sight and loved by God, we are overwhelmed, filled to overflowing with that love. This in turn encourages us out to feel with God's heart, to see with his eyes, to listen with his ears, to touch and heal with his hands, to walk his way in actively loving and serving all those we meet. This begins at home with the people God gives us to love — one another in our marriage, and our families and friends, and moves out to the wider community. The love of God and of one another is inseparable. However, don't miss out the bit 'as yourself'. You too are a precious, loved child of God, and the first step in being able to love is knowing the security of being loved first. You can't give what you haven't received yourself.

Your love for one another in your marriage is a wonderful experience. You know you are loved. You can then love. As the first letter of John tells us, 'God is love and he or she who lives in love, lives in God and God lives in them'. This truth is the heart and strength of your married life.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- Talk together about what it is that first attracted you to one another. Can you finish the sentence many times over, 'I love you because...' or 'I love you when...'
- What are the ways in which you show your 'love with all my heart' to one another?
- Think of a marriage you admire. What do you think has been the 'glue' that has kept them together? Could you have a conversation with them about what makes a good marriage?
- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good one for your wedding?

Looking at the Text

M G-6 Mark 10:6-9

They are no longer two, but one body.

The Gospel of St Mark

St Mark's is the shortest of the four Gospels, presenting the life and ministry of Jesus. It was probably written during a time of persecution of early Christians. St. Mark speaks of the cost of following Christ Jesus, for example, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.' A 'cross' in our marriages might be seen as the ways in which we say 'no' to ourselves in order to say 'yes' to the one we love — it's a good and positive way of experiencing the joy of a life well-lived. Paradoxically, we are happier when we are loving and serving and giving, than when we are fearful and selfish.

Background for this passage

From the account of Creation of human beings, we hear that God made them male and female, in God's own image, and God blessed them and asked them to be fruitful. This is an amazing mystery — that a man and a woman united together in love and marriage says something about God who is love, and God's fruitfulness in creation! There are 'laws' for marriage in the Church, alongside the blessings. These are given to encourage 'stickability', and help us to sustain life-long, fruitful marriages. Here, Jesus is teaching about the commitment of marriage. A man and a woman are joined together and God pours out his love and blessings, giving strength to combat any human weakness, enabling the couple to live a faithful and joyful life together. In a culture that is sadly lacking in commitment, a couple choosing to get married in church are a great sign of hope and encouragement for everyone. The true happiness born in strong relationships shines out for all. In a life-long commitment, both partners can flourish. Through the exchange of consent and making vows, they are assured in the knowledge that they are loved, and that God has united them, come what may. Each can be honest, and vulnerable, trusting in their husband or wife's acceptance of them. In this environment of self-less love, mixed in with faith in God's love and support with them, the couple can live out their vocation, and grow towards being the happy, blessed, fruitful people God made them to be. That sounds idealistic! A marriage is not an easy path, and requires great tenacity and trust too. However, bottom line, it is designed by God to be a way of life that images something of what heaven is, and it is powerful in the living of it.

Questions for further reflection

You might like to talk together about what it has meant for you to leave your 'family of origin', and to begin the process of making your own home as a new 'family unit' together. What does the word 'commitment' mean to you, and 'life-long' commitment? What does it mean for a relationship to be fruitful?

- Think of a marriage you admire. What do you think has made it a 'good' marriage over the years? What are the human qualities that 'join' you both together in your relationship?
- Take time to talk about the promises you are going to make to one another, and your hopes for your life as a 'family unit'.
 - Have you come without any pressure from anyone, freely and wholeheartedly to enter into marriage?

- Are you prepared to love and honour each other as long as you both shall live? Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?
- ‘I take you to be my wife/husband.
to have and to hold from this day forward,
for better, for worse,
for richer, for poorer,
in sickness and in health,
to love and to cherish
till death do us part.’
- ‘Receive this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity.’
- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good choice for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

M = this indicates that this is a reading which speaks explicitly about Marriage. One of the chosen readings must be taken from those which are about Marriage.

Looking at the Text

M G-7 John 2:1-11

This was the first of the signs given by Jesus — at Cana in Galilee.

The Gospel of St John

Central to the gospel of St John are a number of themes. Scholars divide the gospel into two 'books' — the first being 'the book of signs' all about Jesus' public ministry, i.e. the miracles or 'signs' he did, pointing not to himself but to God the Father, and the second, known as 'the book of Glory', showing us Jesus and his relationship with his disciples, from the Last Supper, through to his arrest, suffering, death and resurrection. It is in John's gospel that we find the emphasis on love and loving service, in Jesus' sayings, 'signs' and teaching: 'I give you a new commandment: that you love one another just as I have loved you.'

In this passage

Early on in the gospel of John, we have the first of Jesus's signs, which takes place at a wedding at Cana in Galilee. It is a well-known story, used at weddings over many centuries. It is multi-layered, and not to be taken at face value or you will miss something of its treasure. The story offers a promise that God will be with you in your marriage, and will take your love for one another and transform it into an even more powerful love that radiates out from you to others around you, in your families and communities.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- You might try imagining the scene, who is there, what's the weather like, the food, the table plan, the conversation — perhaps even being in it yourselves as the bride and bridegroom. What is going on? What would it be like to 'run out of wine' at your wedding? What might it feel like to have some new, excellent wine miraculously appear? Why do you think Jesus did it?
- Perhaps to go a little deeper, what might the 'wine' represent in our lives? And what does Jesus do to replenish that 'wine'? Perhaps it could be that Jesus takes the 'water' that is our ordinary selves in our relationship, and somehow without our knowing how, changes our life together in marriage into something very rich, tasty, abundant and life-giving, helping us to come out of ourselves and our selfish ways, and to really enjoy life to the full in a positive and hopeful way. What are your own hopes for your married life together? What will be the 'good wine' in your marriage?
 - Ask yourselves first, and then share together: how does my partner change my water into wine? In what ways has your love for your partner and their love for you changed you?
- What do you particularly like about this reading? Why might you choose it for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

M = this indicates that this is a reading which speaks explicitly about Marriage. One of the chosen readings must be taken from those which are about Marriage.

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Looking at the Text

G-8 John 15:9-12
Remain in my love.

The Gospel of St John

Central to the gospel of St John are a number of themes. Scholars divide the gospel into two ‘books’ — the first being ‘the book of signs’ all about Jesus’ public ministry, i.e. the miracles or ‘signs’ he did, pointing not to himself but to God the Father, and the second, known as ‘the book of Glory’, showing us Jesus and his relationship with his disciples, from the Last Supper, through to his arrest, suffering, death and resurrection. It is in John’s gospel that we find the emphasis on love and loving service, in Jesus’ sayings, ‘signs’ and teaching: ‘I give you a new commandment: that you love one another just as I have loved you.’

In this passage

Jesus is praying for his disciples, and for all who will come after them, believing in him. That is us! He prays that we may remain in his love and be ‘one’ with one another and with him just as Jesus and his Father are one. That is an amazing prayer for marriage — that God will make us so united that we are like Jesus and the Father, ‘One’. And furthermore, it is a tremendous affirmation of Jesus’ love for us. Jesus wants us to know that in our unity, our marriage bond, God and Jesus are with us, helping us to live out our commitment to love, and to be a sign of the love of God for the world.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the ‘Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way’ in the introduction ‘Choosing your Wedding readings’.

Further Reflection

Following the ‘slow reading’ process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- You have chosen to be married in a Catholic church — why is this important to you?
- What are your hopes for your lives together? What is going to help you ‘remain’ in God’s love and in love with one another?
- What strikes you in particular about Jesus’ prayer? Can you hear it as a prayer for your marriage?
- How does it help you knowing that Jesus and the Father are absolutely with you and will remain with you to strengthen you in your marriage?
- In the wedding liturgy, you will make your own solemn prayers and declarations. Have a look at the final ‘triple blessings’, for example. What strikes you? Try praying them out loud together, replacing the ‘you’ with ‘us’.

May God the eternal Father keep us of one heart in love for one another, that the peace of Christ may dwell in us and abide always in our home.

May we be blessed in our children, and have solace in our friends, and enjoy true peace with everyone.

May we be witnesses in the world to God’s charity, so that the afflicted and needy who have known our kindness may one day receive us thankfully into the eternal dwelling of God.

- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good Gospel for your wedding?

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Looking at the Text

G-9 John 15:12-16

What I command you is to love one another.

The Gospel of St John

Central to the gospel of St John are a number of themes. Scholars divide the gospel into two 'books' — the first being 'the book of signs' all about Jesus' public ministry, i.e. the miracles or 'signs' he did, pointing not to himself but to God the Father, and the second, known as 'the book of Glory', showing us Jesus and his relationship with his disciples, from the Last Supper, through to his arrest, suffering, death and resurrection. It is in John's gospel that we find the emphasis on love and loving service, in Jesus' sayings, 'signs' and teaching: 'I give you a new commandment: that you love one another just as I have loved you.'

In this passage

Jesus is asking us to commit to a self-emptying love for one another, just as he has loved us and poured out his life for the world. And when we love as Jesus loves, he calls us his friends, because we are alongside him and know his purpose. His purpose becomes our purpose; his example, our example. We are filled to the brim with his love and sent out to let this great love flow into fruitful self-giving lives of love for others. In marriage, we are called in a particular way to follow Jesus's example of living for the other, always putting their needs before our own, through a life-long, exclusive commitment to one another. It is not selfish or self-seeking but self-emptying, and paradoxically, this way of love is extraordinarily fruitful and leads to happiness and fulfilment, touching the lives of those around us too.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- What is it like to be in love? How did you first meet and what was it that attracted you to one another?
- Think of a marriage you admire. What do you think is it that sustains it? Could you have a conversation with that couple about their marriage and what has made it work?
- What is it to be a 'friend' — what would you say are the qualities of a wonderful friendship?
- What are the skills that help you develop your relationship into something strong and lasting?
- What help do you need and from whom?
- What might it mean for you to 'lay down your life' for the one you love? What sort of unselfish small kindnesses can you think of? What are the bigger acts of kindness you can do for one another?
- What do you like about this reading? Why might you choose it for your wedding?

Looking at the Text:

G-10 John 17:20-26 (long form) or 17:20-23 (short form)
May they be completely one.

The Gospel of St John

Central to the gospel of St John are a number of themes. Scholars divide the gospel into two 'books' — the first being 'the book of signs' all about Jesus' public ministry, i.e. the miracles or 'signs' he did, pointing not to himself but to God the Father, and the second, known as 'the book of Glory', showing us Jesus and his relationship with his disciples, from the Last Supper, through to his arrest, suffering, death and resurrection. It is in John's gospel that we find the emphasis on love and loving service, in Jesus' sayings, 'signs' and teaching: 'I give you a new commandment: that you love one another just as I have loved you.'

In this passage

Jesus is praying for his disciples and for all those who will believe in him down the centuries. It is a great prayer for unity in heart and mind, love and purpose, just as Jesus is completely united with the Father's heart and love and purpose. Jesus promises to give us, in our time and place, everything we need to live a united and faithful life in marriage. Our 'unity' will be a sign to all of the love of God, who from the beginning of time planned for Jesus to enter our history, becoming one of us, to make the love of God known. This great prayer of Jesus is full of mystery. For marriage, it is a promise of God's loving presence in Jesus to remain with us through love, strengthening our relationship and our capacity to live a fruitful life of commitment and fidelity.

Reflecting on Scripture together

Use the 'Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way' in the introduction 'Choosing your Wedding readings'.

Further Reflection

Following the 'slow reading' process, here are some questions for further reflection:

- You have chosen to be married in a Catholic church — why is this important to you?
- What are your hopes for your lives together? What is going to help you 'be so completely one' in God's love and in love with one another?
- What strikes you in particular about Jesus's prayer? Can you hear it as a prayer for your marriage?
- How does it help you knowing that Jesus and the Father are absolutely with you and will remain with you to strengthen you in your marriage?
- In the wedding liturgy, you will make your own solemn prayers and declarations. Have a look at the final 'triple blessings', for example. What strikes you? Try praying them out loud together, replacing the 'you' with 'us'.

May God the eternal Father keep us of one heart in love for one another, that the peace of Christ may dwell in us and abide always in our home. May we be witnesses in the world to God's charity, so that the afflicted and needy who have known our kindness may one day receive us thankfully into the eternal dwelling of God.

- What do you like about this reading? Why might it be a good Gospel for your wedding?

Note about the Reading

This reading is given in a long and short form — either may be chosen.

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Blessing of an Engaged Couple

The Order of Christian Matrimony gives you four choices for use in the blessing of an Engaged couple. This is a wonderful opportunity to bless the couple at this key moment in their lives together, strengthening them in the period of engagement. This can either take place in the parish setting, enabling the community to celebrate their support. Alternatively, it can be celebrated by both families, perhaps finishing with a meal together. In preparation, the couple could be encouraged to reflect on each, and make their choice.

E-1 John 15:9-12

E-2 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

E3 Hosea 2:21-26

E4 Philippians 2:1-5

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