



New Testament Readings

D1 **What will separate us from the love of Christ?**

Romans 8:31b-35, 37-39
(802-1)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

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,

 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.

The Word Brought Home

A priest walked outside one Sunday during Mass and came upon a couple outside the building's main entrance. The young man was standing with a two-year-old son in his arms. The young woman was sitting on the steps, head bent over and face in her hands. The heat and crowd combined with morning sickness had made her feel faint and dizzy. The compassion of this husband and the distress of his wife more accurately mirror the real world of marriage than any dreamy, trouble-free portrait sketched by romanticists.

Weddings are and should be occasions filled with joy and laughter, bright promise, faith and hope, profound affection, and a fair amount of sobering realism. The union to which you consent with your marriage vows holds many yet-to-be-discovered ups and downs, joys and struggles. And yet, here you are saying yes to that vast mysterious life that is Christian marriage. Your future stretches before you in exciting images of hope, and with probably at least some trepidation. Just what that future holds you will discover together, side by side, keeping each other company through it all.

This reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans reminds us that, come what may, Christ Jesus will be with us as well. This was true for the early Christians who suffered persecution and martyrdom because of their beliefs, and it is just as true for the two of you and for all of us today. Life will bring you pain and sorrow, but

these cannot tear you away from God. As long as your love for Christ remains strong, you can cling to him and to each other through even your darkest times.

Real love, as Saint Paul reminds us, is stronger than death. The husband and wife who truly love each other need fear neither death nor life, neither anything that exists nor anything still to come. Their death-defeating, Cross-conquering mutual love will merely grow through afflictions.

A crucifix in your new home can be a constant reminder of these truths. It tells of Jesus' suffering, his victory, and his love for us. It speaks of the share every couple must have in the Lord's death and resurrection. It reminds us that, with love for Christ and for each other, nothing can come between us.

D2**Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and pleasing to God.**

Romans 12:1-2, 9-18 or 12:1-2, 9-13
(802-2)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

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.

(Longer version: 14-18)

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.

The Word Brought Home

It is dangerous to imagine that you can reform or fix a future spouse. You truly are committing to love and stick by this person forever, warts and all. Even so, people do change—and usually for the better—after falling in love and continuing to grow in that love. Couples, just like friends, influence one another and many times bring out the best in each other. Other relationships and life experiences will also cause each of you to change as you mature in your marriage.

Teenagers infatuated with a first love may start to think about another's needs before their own for the first time in their lives. They buy each other gifts and talk with each other for hours on the telephone or online. They learn about romantic love and about how happiness can come from getting out of oneself and thinking about another first.

The two of you left that tender, important, but premature love behind long ago. Yours is presumably a more secure, lasting type of love that has the happiness of the other as its goal. Your prime desire is to make each other happy; but this may only be possible if you open your hearts to the outside world and become concerned about the well-being and happiness of the other people around you.

In this reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans, we find wonderful coaching for creating a marriage that is hospitable to the wider community in which you will live. Paul instructs his fellow Christians—and now you—to rejoice

in hope, endure in affliction, and persevere in prayer; in other words, to build a strong bond between the two of you. He urges you and all of us to care for and welcome others, "bless" those who do you harm, and to be empathetic, or keep company, with both those who rejoice and those who weep. He urges you not to seek revenge or return one bad deed with another and not to think too highly of yourself. Perhaps the most difficult piece of advice for spouses to remember when married life gets strained is that of Paul urging us to treat one another with the same hospitality that we would welcome from others.

We need have no fears. Welcoming, loving, and caring for others outside the family; giving in the right way; and being involved in other people's lives will not harm the love between husband and wife. When you first loved your partner, you gave; but in the giving, you gained more. As a couple, your love and giving to those outside the home will enable your own love to grow stronger and deeper. Our God is faithful and keeps the promises he has made to us.

D3 Welcome one another as Christ welcomed you.

Romans 15:1b-3a, 5-7, 13

(802-3)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

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,
for 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.

The Word Brought Home

Invitations have been sent or will be sent soon. You are looking forward to welcoming many people at your wedding. Friends may be flying in from across the country, and relatives you have not seen for a while, or maybe do not know very well, are looking forward to the happy day. You are in a hospitable mood now and hopefully will continue that same spirit throughout your married life. Over the years to come, you will welcome extended family, friends, neighbors, and your own children into your home and your married life. You will also learn the fine craft of welcoming your spouse in ever more intimate ways—gently honoring the other's vulnerabilities, fears, and faults and carefully accepting them just as they are, on the really big days as well as in the incidental moments.

This reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans urges you to welcome others "for the glory of God." But what does that mean, for the glory of God? Perhaps the best way to explain this in this context is to say that the glory of God refers to God's innermost, deepest, most essential identity. It is hard to characterize God with human attributes, but that is as close as we can come. Consequently, for Paul to say that welcoming others glorifies God, he means that in authentically welcoming others we give outward expression to the essence of God. What then is the essence of God? In Catholic theological thought, the outward, spiraling love that exists among the three persons of the Trinity is the essence of God, for God *is* love. By welcoming one

another we glorify or make known the essence of God to those around us.

Becoming a welcoming couple comes from your experiences of hospitality up to this point. Learning to be graceful and accept others into your married life will be both exciting and challenging. Your attention in the coming weeks will be on planning the wedding and preparing a home for yourselves as husband and wife, but becoming a welcoming couple and family is a lifetime adventure together.

Welcoming each other as husband and wife means being open to the growth that will occur in each other because of living together. It means accepting and learning to love each other's quirks and annoying habits, right along with the things you really like. Of course, one of the best and most challenging gifts of marriage is the welcoming of children. Nothing quite changes your life like becoming a parent or a stepparent. And as children grow, so must parents.

God is indeed glorified—his innermost being revealed—in the hospitality shown between spouses and by married couples to those with whom they interact every day. Set your hearts on this, then, so that you may know peace and joy and hope eternal: "Welcome one another, as Christ welcomed you."

D4**Your body is a temple of the Spirit.**

1 Corinthians 6:13c-15a, 17-20
(802-4)

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

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.

The Word Brought Home

Even in this digital age, it is hard to imagine being satisfied with an exclusively virtual relationship. Plenty of people meet online and even get to know each other through technology, but inevitably they want to meet in person. To put it simply: there is something about physical presence that cannot be replaced.

Paul's observations about the body are not primarily about issuing criticisms of people who take their bodies for granted. He is calling attention to something that God has done: given us the gift of life through the gift of the body. Our bodies are "members of Christ," meaning that they are caught up in the same mystery of God becoming flesh that Christians celebrate in the Eucharist.

For Paul, the body was sacred. The human body of Jesus was the place where God became most immediately present to people. God had been present through his prophets and through the scriptures, which gave Israel a law and a way of life. But in Jesus Christ, God made people see that the human body is, in the words of Saint Augustine, "capable of God"—that is, capable of manifesting the reality of God.

Paul's exhortations to the church at Corinth, then, were about helping them to realize how followers of Jesus should regard their bodies. There were some, it seemed, who wanted to say that bodies no longer mattered, since in death we will no longer need bodies. But Paul observed that, if

bodies didn't matter, God would not have raised Jesus from the dead.

Theologians reflecting on the gospels centuries later came to an important understanding; one that has shaped Christian doctrine about Jesus ever since. They described the Incarnation—the "taking flesh" that the Holy Spirit accomplished in Mary's womb—as Jesus' being fully human and fully divine. What this means is that everything human, including our bodies, is sacred and able to be a vessel for God. It is no surprise, then, that Paul urges the Corinthians to "glorify God in your body." Far from a critique, then, this is a wonderful opportunity!

Though sometimes we may get the sense that our bodies are just bundles of tissue seeking stimuli (like chocolate, wine, or sex), Paul suggests that our bodies can make us saints. Our bodies can comfort a friend with a hug, show concern for an elderly relative with a gentle touch, and help a newborn baby know that she is safe. Perhaps most surprisingly, Paul points to an idea at the root of marriage: that our sexual bodies can heal the loneliness of the other and even, at certain times, bring forth new life.

By being joined to Christ, our bodies become the ways in which Christ himself touches others in love. Let us pray, then, that all our desires—those of our minds, our hearts, and even our bodies—might glorify God.

D5**If I do not have love, I gain nothing.**

1 Corinthians 12:31–13:8a
(802-5)

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

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.

The Word Brought Home

Saint Paul wrote this famous passage on love for the Christian community of Corinth in the middle of the first century. Founded only a few years earlier, the Corinthian church enjoyed but a brief honeymoon before finding itself embroiled in a number of contentious issues that threatened to disintegrate its union. The attraction among the members faded to the point that they had a hard time breaking bread with one another. Paul wanted to wean them away from the notion of love as feeling and to remind them that mature love is an act of the will. Love may begin with an intense desire to be with one another, but if it is to last, it will require a series of daily behaviors that sustain and deepen the relationship—like being patient and kind and not being jealous, pompous, inflated, rude, or selfish. Love, as Paul writes, endures all things. What a claim he makes!

We all know that there is an almost irresistible attraction between partners as they fall in love that is absolutely necessary for nourishing the budding relationship—just as necessary as milk is to an infant. We can hardly stand to be apart. Our bodies hunger for the touch of the other. Our minds percolate in the presence of the other. Laughter comes more readily; hearts beat faster. The attraction knits us together as a couple and helps us to grow. It is the beginning of love, and the energy is incredibly powerful.

But as time goes on, attraction can wax and wane. Our wider culture—which often

conflates attraction and love—perceives this change as a danger. If we no longer *feel* the same intense attraction toward each other, it must mean something is wrong or even that the marriage is over. In reality, however, it may simply mean that the relationship has matured to the point where it no longer needs attraction to bind it together. While attraction remains good and desirable in marriage, ultimately, love is not a feeling but an act of the will.

When mutual love matures and the almost frantic attraction of the first days eases, a husband and wife may find it less necessary to speak, to touch, and to look for chances to connect emotionally, physically, or spiritually. They may no longer seek eagerly to communicate in the same ways that they needed to at the outset. Connecting and loving come in subtler and yet deeper ways.

Consider your relationship. You are likely somewhere between the frenzy of new love and the maturity of many years together. Neither of you is likely to consistently live up to all of Saint Paul's descriptions of love in this reading. But you are so very blessed, because marriage is a school for the maturing of love, if we allow it to be. Every day it gives us the chance to practice virtue and overcome vices. Welcome with confidence the many shades and seasons of love, for—as Saint Paul reminds us—love endures.

D6 **This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference
Ephesians 5:2a, 21–33 or 5:2a, 25–32 to Christ and the Church.**
(802-6)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

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.

(Shorter version: 2a, 25–32)

[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.

(For longer version: verse 33)

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.

The Word Brought Home

This reading causes many winks, elbow nudges, and rolling of eyes when people hear it in church. Hearing that a wife should be subordinate to her husband because he is her “head” doesn’t fit with our twenty-first-century sensibilities, nor with our grasp of what makes a healthy marriage. But as with all biblical texts, we need to accept that this letter was written for a group of Christians that belonged to a different time and culture than we do. The passage actually points to a quite radical code of household behavior that marked the early Christian communities: husbands and wives were to be “subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.” In other words, there was to be mutual serving and giving over to the needs of the other in order to show the world who Christ was.

The deeply entrenched social order of the day certainly left husbands in positions of authority to which their wives did not have access, and Saint Paul was not trying to change that basic order. But that does not mean that the Bible calls Christians to follow the same culture-bound pattern today. Rather, Paul was trying to tell his readers that their households should be marked by a new code of conduct, a new way of living as married couples: he called them to mutual respect and love. Both of these would have been as strange to his listeners as the text seems to us today at first read. This was a quite radical teaching then. It was a new way for men to be heads of their households, yes, but it was also a new way

for women to exist in the home—as mutually responsible for the well-being of the marriage and the household. For both husbands and wives to be called to partnership was indeed a new reality, a distinctively Christian way of being married.

So what does mutuality in marriage look like, and how does that kind of union become a sign or sacrament of God’s love in the world? One way to think about it is through the lens of a small ritual action we see each time we go to Mass. As the priest readies the bread and wine for the Eucharistic Prayer, he pours just a bit of water into the chalice and prays in silence, “By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” Drops of water disappear into wine. The two mix and become one. This holy comingling symbolizes a mysterious blending of the divine and human in Jesus Christ. In this simple action, we glimpse Christ as a kind of marriage between God and us, between the spiritual and the material, between this world and the next. By joining your lives together in Christ, your relationship and your marriage also become a sign of the unity of heaven and earth and of the unending love of God for all creation.

D7**The God of peace will be with you.**

Philippians 4:4-9
(802-7)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians

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.

D8**And over all these put on love,
that is, the bond of perfection.**

Colossians 3:12-17
(802-8)

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians

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.

The Word Brought Home

We seek peace with all our hearts, but it often eludes us. We are forever trying to establish, sustain, or restore it within ourselves, in our relationships, and throughout our world. Knowing our desires, Jesus offers peace as his final gift to us. On the night before he died he told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27).

In these two scripture readings Saint Paul writes to communities that are not entirely at peace. Not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, his gift has already begun to slip through the grasp of his followers. They are challenged from the outside by persecution, but there is also dissension from within over certain beliefs and practices. So Paul instructs them about restoring and maintaining peace within their relationships. He tells them simply, "Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you."

Paul's instructions are just as relevant to married couples today as they were to the early Christian communities. Because conflict is a part of every marriage, peacemaking is a necessity. Marital therapists say that most couples fight about the same things: finances, children, family relationships, and balancing home and work responsibilities. Why do these conflicts lead to marital breakdown for some but not for others? The difference between success and

failure lies not in what couples fight about but rather in how they handle those inevitable conflicts.

In your marriage preparation you probably received practical advice about conflict resolution and communications skills to help you deal with the problems and tensions that arise in married life. It is important to learn how to "fight fair" and to distinguish between conflicts that can be solved and those that can only be managed. These are skills you can learn in order to "let the peace of Christ control your hearts" in married life. They can also be the foundation of a marriage built on the Christian virtues of compassion, kindness, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness.

A *virtue* is a habitual way of acting. It is a disposition toward what is good. It is a choice we make to open ourselves to God's love and become instruments of that love in our daily actions. By acquiring and practicing virtues, we follow the path to Christian holiness. Each virtue is a specific expression of love, which itself sums up all the virtues. So, as you begin your journey of married love, decide to build your relationship on these Christian virtues. Then you will experience "the peace into which you were also called," especially when conflict arises.

D9**Let marriage be held in honor by all.**

Hebrews 13:1-4a, 5-6b

(802-9)

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

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.

The Word Brought Home

In thinking of hospitality, most of us imagine something like the perfectly manicured living rooms in a home decor catalog or someone like Martha Stewart and her enterprise of “good things.” Or maybe you picture the greeter at the doors of the local shopping outlet. But what does the Letter to the Hebrews mean when it advises us to not neglect hospitality?

Biblical hospitality is essentially about helping others, especially strangers, get to where they need to be on their journey. Travel in ancient times was often a risky endeavor, and travelers depended on the kindness of those they met along the way for food, shelter, and rest before they continued on to their destination. In some cultures, people were obligated to invite travelers into their homes and offer them refreshment. In the course of this exchange, the host would also discover the travelers’ purpose and destination and give them some gift that would help them along their way. In return, the guests promised to bring no harm to the home of the host. Not only did this keep travelers safe, but it also ensured the good of the community.

The story in the book of Genesis of Abraham and Sarah, who invited three travelers into their home and fed them with the best they had to offer, is a good example of this system of hospitality. These three visitors turned out to be God’s angels, and it was not the host couple but rather the angels who gave the gift. They brought the happy news to the elderly Abraham and

Sarah that Sarah would bear a son—one who would continue their family line and eventually lead to another couple: Mary and Joseph and their son Jesus. In a real way, these angels disguised as strangers helped Abraham and Sarah get to where they needed to be—patriarch and matriarch of the line of David from which Jesus Christ was born.

To offer hospitality, then, is to bring blessing to others so they can be who they are meant to be. This kind of hospitality continues what God first did for humankind when he created the heavens and the earth. God didn’t just make a place for us to survive; he made a place where we could thrive and become the people God intended us to be.

Hospitality that enables people to thrive enables them to feel comfortable and at home, helps them discover their destination or destiny, and supports them on their way there. To put it simply, hospitality is creating sacred space for another. When this becomes our goal, then all the other concerns of homemaking—issues of money, possessions, and parenting—fall into place.

As you make your home together, attend to the ways you create sacred space for each other and for those who come to you on their journey. May your home—and everywhere you spend time together—become a place of blessing where friends and strangers alike become their best and truest selves.

D10

1 Peter 3:1-9
(802-10)

**Be of one mind, sympathetic, loving
toward one another.**

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

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.

The Word Brought Home

The original intention of the author of this reading can easily be lost in assumptions and debates about gender roles. Some interpret 1 Peter and similar New Testament texts to be advocating limited roles for women and men as preordained by God. These texts have even been used to justify violence, especially against women who have refused to be "subordinate." There are, of course, richer strains of meaning for couples to mine in this text, otherwise the Church would not offer it for use at your wedding.

This reading offers an interesting glimpse into Christian communities trying to figure out their relationship with the larger world in the late first century. The passage suggests that many early Christian women were in marriages with non-Christians. That is what the author means in the opening lines about some husbands "disobeying the word." These women were in positions of little influence within the patriarchal structure of ancient Roman society, but rather than believe them to be powerless, the author of the letter challenges them to model virtue and service in such a way that their husbands will be "won over" to the Christian faith. Similar to maxims in Matthew's gospel regarding "going the extra mile" or "turning the other cheek," the author coaches these women to spread the Gospel by being just a bit subversive. Precisely by living in harmony with their spouses and modeling kindness, respect, and peaceable relationships, these women could show their husbands the way

to Christ. This passage is not advocating that the patriarchal social ordering of the ancient world be followed today but rather it is saying that modeling Christian living is the best way to invite others to follow Christ.

There will likely be many times in your marriage when you feel trapped between a rock and a hard place. These times might come about because of an unwelcome job change, an unanticipated pregnancy, a grave diagnosis, a natural disaster, or a pattern of behavior that you see as problematic but your spouse does not. Peter's words in this reading remind us that, even in circumstances where we seem to have no escape, we can still choose how we face the difficulty. We can choose to handle the hard times with grace, patient endurance, and creative problem solving or with grumbling, self-pity, and passivity. This freedom to choose can never be taken away from us and our Christian calling demands that we do so.

How do you as individuals and as a couple respond to adversity? Do you assume a certain powerlessness, or do you seek creative ways to make your situation better? Are you, as the author of 1 Peter coaches, "of one mind, sympathetic toward one another, compassionate, humble," and are you able to return insult with blessing? In other words, do your behaviors toward each other and those around you—especially in hardship—model Christian living and provide others with a glimpse of Christ Jesus?

D11**Love in deed and in truth.**

1 John 3:18-24
(802-11)

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John

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.

D12**God is love.**

1 John 4:7-12
(802-12)

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John

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.

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The Word Brought Home

Soon you will stand before family, friends, and the Church's representative to face each other, join hands, and promise to share your lives together. This is a permanent commitment to love and honor in good times and in bad, in poverty and in plenty, in sickness and in health, for better or for worse. These are serious words and solemn vows—too serious and too solemn, perhaps, for some in our modern world.

Demographics show us that fewer and fewer people in the developed world get married and that, when they do, close to half of them divorce. Many people ask, "Why marry? Why not simply live together? Why commit yourself to anything more binding than a mutual agreement, a promise to maintain a living-together relationship only so long as it remains acceptable to both partners?" This argument has a certain logic. After all, why should couples who are no longer compatible wage a daily battle against and end up destroying each other? But it has a major weakness also.

A great part of the joy of an engagement and a marriage is the sense of security that goes with it; a feeling of being loved, wanted, and needed; and a realization that someone cares for you on a permanent basis. Only in the stress and strain

of a permanent commitment does the real character of each person develop. The love and responsibilities demanded by such an enduring promise supply an opportunity for the full depth of a relationship between husband and wife to materialize. Authentic intimacy, depth of character, and profound, self-giving love develop in couples only with the long and steady flow of years, weathering together the storms of life, and cherishing the good times with joyful celebration.

All of this is dull, impractical, unrealistic talk for the two of you in love! Your marriage will never fail; your love, never waver; and your commitment, never be questioned. In these blissful but sometimes blind days of courtship, you naturally think only in terms of forever. However, the alarming divorce rate, the talk about temporary commitments, and the lack of support in our culture for the preservation of marriage should make you approach your marriage with eyes wide open. A marriage that lasts for life demands hard work, faithfulness, good humor, and gentle kindness. Remaining together for life requires that you cling to God's grace, peace, and enduring love.

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D13

Revelation 19:1, 5-9a
(802-13)

**Blessed are those who have been called
to the wedding feast of the Lamb.****A reading from the Book of Revelation**

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.

The Word Brought Home

The book of Revelation describes the fall of Babylon as a triumph of God's justice over oppression and greed. The word "Alleluia" appears in the New Testament only in Revelation 19, in celebration of God's justice and deliverance. Redemption and healing have come to God's people. When the author of Revelation tries to describe what God's reign looks like, he uses the image of a wedding banquet. Like the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians (5:23-32), the author sees marriage as a revelation of God's love to humanity.

Revelation is a book of prophecy, but it also offered words of encouragement to the early Christians. The author says that "the good deeds of the saints" make up the dress of the bride of Christ. The goodness of Christians makes the Church ready to become the bride of Christ. With the unity of the Lamb and the Christian community, the reign of God has begun.

So, too, with the union of any bride and groom, the reign of God comes a little closer. Justice, deliverance, redemption, and healing are made visible in the calling together of man and woman in marriage. At a wedding, the crowd gathers to sing "Alleluia," and to affirm the goodness of this marriage. The Church teaches us that the whole assembly together actively gives praise and thanks to God during any liturgical celebration. This pertains in a particular way to a wedding, where two families come together and friends from various corners

of your lives are asked to witness (give assent to) your marriage.

There are many ways for couples to emphasize the important role of the assembly in their wedding ceremony: family and friends might be invited to sit together without concern for a "bride's side" and a "groom's side"; greeters can provide guests with a simple printed program or worship aid containing the order of the service, readings, and hymns, encouraging everyone to participate; and trained lectors and eucharistic ministers might be recruited from among your family members and friends.

There is cultural pressure to make your wedding day as a day when everything is perfect, and it is absolutely appropriate to dress up and make things beautiful to celebrate your love for each other. It is also good to ponder how you can celebrate your marriage as the beginning of a new community of disciples devoted to doing your part in bringing God's reign of justice a little closer. For example, out of concern for social justice, some brides and grooms are choosing minimal expenditure on clothing, decorations, and the reception and taking a collection for the poor during the liturgy. Like the wedding in this reading from Revelation, your wedding can be a celebration of love within a community that rejoices in God's triumph and hopes for a better world.