



Old Testament Readings

B1**Male and female he created them.**

Genesis 1:26-28, 31a
(801-1)

A reading from the Book of Genesis

Then God said:

“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.
Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,
the birds of the air, and the cattle,
and over all the wild animals
and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”

God created man in his image;
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, saying:
“Be fertile and multiply;
fill the earth and subdue it.

Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air,
and all the living things that move on the earth.”

God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good.

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

This reading from the book of Genesis affirms what the two of you already know—that the creative and procreative energy of self-giving love is an incredible force for good. People and institutions in every age have believed the body, and sex in particular, to be a human frailty to be wary of, to be dealt with only in hushed whispers, or to be treated as explicitly evil. The two of you certainly do not feel that way. Your love is very special, a beautiful experience—probably the most wonderful thing that has happened so far in your life. Deep down you must be thinking that anything so good must come from God. And you are right.

People have been reading this biblical passage from Genesis for thousands of years. The words and message are clear enough—we came forth from God's creative hand and are fashioned in the divine image and likeness. God, who made our minds, our hearts, and our bodies, finds us and all his creation "very good."

From the beginning God blessed man and woman with the power of bringing

forth new life and the charge of being good stewards of the earth. When as husband and wife you cooperate with God to create new life, a new person, you will do so by sharing the most intimate parts of yourselves: physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Maintaining a healthy, satisfying sex life can be hard work, and it demands of both spouses an ongoing commitment to the good of the other and to the good of the marriage. Parenthood can be even harder. Family life requires patience, hard work, and, above all, self-sacrificing love.

This reading from the story of creation serves as a reminder that you do not face this future alone. God who created you and who invites you to share in the awesome power of creating new life also promises to stand by you. Be confident that the Lord who is love and creator of all that is good will be with you always and in every effort.

B2**The two of them become one body.**

Genesis 2:18-24

(801-2)

A reading from the Book of Genesis

The LORD God said: "It is not good for the man to be alone.
I will make a suitable partner for him."

So the LORD God formed out of the ground
various wild animals and various birds of the air,
and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them;
whatever the man called each of them would be its name.

The man gave names to all the cattle,
all the birds of the air, and all wild animals;
but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man.

So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man,
and while he was asleep,
he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib
that he had taken from the man.

When he brought her to the man, the man said:

"This one, at last, is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;

This one shall be called 'woman,'
for out of 'her man' this one has been taken."

That is why a man leaves his father and mother
and clings to his wife,
and the two of them become one body.

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

"This one, at last!" Adam cries out in wonder and gratitude when God brings Eve to him. Each of us probably felt something similar when we realized we were completely in love with the person we wanted to marry. What an awesome discovery to find a person who—just like Adam encountering Eve—we knew to be a "suitable partner." We felt so grateful and completely alive. This was the one, at last!

In this reading and in the one immediately preceding it, the biblical author teaches us two important truths about man and woman. The first truth is that men and women are created equal as persons. Together, in their maleness and femaleness, they convey the full image of God.

In the second creation account, found in Genesis 2:4–25, from which this reading is taken, we learn the second, equally great truth. Men and women are created as different persons specifically as part of the divine plan. They are made to be male and female precisely so they can live for each other in the totality of their lives and truly be gifts to each other. Their differences, which are rooted in their sexuality, serve to unite them. Their differences are complementary, certainly in a physical sense, but also in the many ways that men and women relate as equal and distinct persons.

In marriage, these two great truths—the equality of persons and the necessity of both sexes—together flourish as a foundational part of God's plan for humanity. When Adam says that Eve is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" he is using an expression that, in effect, means "we are made of the same stuff." In other words,

we are equal as human beings. But, at the same time, Adam makes it clear that he has discovered in the woman a different person to whom he can "cling" and with whom he can "become one body."

Affirming these two truths about equality and difference is fundamental to finding happiness and true fulfillment in married life. Why? Because expressing them in concrete actions is what enables us to make a complete gift of self to our spouse and, at the same time, to receive our spouse totally as a gift. This mutual giving and receiving is what you pledge in the wedding vows.

Will you be a gift that keeps on giving once the wedding is over and the years of married life begin to unfold? At times, you will find it difficult to fully accept your spouse as a gift and also to give yourself as a gift. It is important to remember that, because God brought you together for a purpose, he will surely give you the strength to accomplish that purpose. In the years to come, try to recall that moment when, like Adam, you thought, "At last, this is the one for me!" Hold fast to the joy of your discovery and cherish each other.

B3**In his love for Rebekah, Isaac found solace
after the death of his mother.**

Genesis 24:48-51, 58-67
(801-3)

A reading from the Book of Genesis

The servant of Abraham said to Laban:

"I bowed down in worship to the LORD,
blessing the LORD, the God of my master Abraham,
who had led me on the right road to obtain the daughter of my master's
kinsman for his son.

If, therefore, you have in mind to show true loyalty to my master,
let me know;
but if not, let me know that, too.
I can then proceed accordingly."

Laban and his household said in reply:

"This thing comes from the LORD;
we can say nothing to you either for or against it.

Here is Rebekah, ready for you;
take her with you,
that she may become the wife of your master's son,
as the LORD has said."

So they called Rebekah and asked her,

"Do you wish to go with this man?"

She answered, "I do."

At this they allowed their sister Rebekah and her nurse to take leave,
along with Abraham's servant and his men.

Invoking a blessing on Rebekah, they said:

"Sister, may you grow
into thousands of myriads;
And may your descendants gain possession
of the gates of their enemies!"

Then Rebekah and her maids started out;
they mounted their camels and followed the man.

So the servant took Rebekah and went on his way.

Meanwhile Isaac had gone from Beer-lahai-roi
and was living in the region of the Negeb.

One day toward evening he went out . . . in the field,
and as he looked around, he noticed that camels were approaching.

Rebekah, too, was looking about, and when she saw him,
she alighted from her camel and asked the servant,

"Who is the man out there, walking through the fields toward us?"

"That is my master," replied the servant.

Then she covered herself with her veil.

The servant recounted to Isaac all the things he had done.

Then Isaac took Rebekah into his tent;

he married her, and thus she became his wife.
In his love for her Isaac found solace
after the death of his mother Sarah.

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

The story of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah seems worlds apart from the way most people in our part of the world think about marriage. It is a story from the ancient Near East, a world governed by rules about clan, bloodline, and household. Peering past the differences of four thousand years, we can see five themes from this story that help us think about marriage today.

1. *Marriage affects the extended family.*

Abraham sent his servant on a long journey to find a wife for his son Isaac. He understood that it was important for his son to marry a woman who shared his beliefs so that they would carry on the covenant with God. Marriage brings families together—sometimes from greatly divergent cultures—because two people discover a deep bond to which they are called to say yes.

2. *Marriage affects the entire community.*

In the biblical story, both Isaac and Rebekah are from wealthy families, and so their marriage is in some ways like a royal wedding today, impacting all those who are part of the clan. Even for ordinary couples, marriage will have an impact on the way they relate to a wider community. Decisions about where to live, where and when to work, how to spend free time and money, where to send children to school, and so on, grow out of married life. Marriage has a ripple effect throughout a church, a neighborhood, and even a nation.

3. *Marriage is something God does.*

Most prominent in the story is the idea that God has a hand in leading Abraham's servant to Rebekah, and in helping Laban see that "this thing comes from the Lord." Our Catholic tradition carries forward this ancient insight, believing that marriage is created by God as a particular way of building a kingdom of love and justice.

4. *Marriage is a vocation.*

We use the term *vocation* (or "calling") as a way of talking about our response to what God is doing through us. Laban's words reveal that he recognizes that God is the author of the story and that we are all actors in it. We reach our joy and freedom by saying yes to the calling of God moving in our lives.

5. *Marriage is a solace, a comfort.*

The closing lines of the story point to how we understand the meaning of vocation: it is God's way of moving us toward love. Isaac, grieved by his mother's death, finds solace in Rebekah. And while the story—like much ancient literature of the Middle East—focuses more on the male characters, we can imagine that Rebekah's willingness to meet Isaac meant that she too found great consolation. We call that consolation *grace*—God's free gift of love that enables wives and husbands to love each other through all the comforts and challenges of life.

B4

Tobit 7:6-14
(801-4)

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

A reading from the Book of Tobit

Raphael and Tobiah entered the house of Raguel and greeted him.
Raguel sprang up and kissed Tobiah, shedding tears of joy.
But when he heard that Tobit had lost his eyesight,
he was grieved and wept aloud.
He said to Tobiah:
"My child, God bless you!
You are the son of a noble and good father.
But what a terrible misfortune
that such a righteous and charitable man
should be afflicted with blindness!"
He continued to weep in the arms of his kinsman Tobiah.
His wife Edna also wept for Tobit;
and even their daughter Sarah began to weep.
Afterward, Raguel slaughtered a ram from the flock
and gave them a cordial reception.
When they had bathed and reclined to eat,
Tobiah said to Raphael, "Brother Azariah,
ask Raguel to let me marry my kinswoman Sarah."
Raguel overheard the words; so he said to the boy:
"Eat and drink and be merry tonight,
for no man is more entitled to marry my daughter Sarah
than you, brother.
Besides, not even I have the right to give her to anyone but you,
because you are my closest relative.
But I will explain the situation to you very frankly.
I have given her in marriage to seven men,
all of whom were kinsmen of ours,
and all died on the very night they approached her.
But now, son, eat and drink.
I am sure the Lord will look after you both."
Tobiah answered, "I will eat or drink nothing
until you set aside what belongs to me."
Raguel said to him: "I will do it.
She is yours according to the decree of the Book of Moses.
Your marriage to her has been decided in heaven!
Take your kinswoman;
from now on you are her love,
and she is your beloved.
She is yours today and ever after.
And tonight, son, may the Lord of heaven prosper you both.
May he grant you mercy and peace."
Then Raguel called his daughter Sarah, and she came to him.
He took her by the hand and gave her to Tobiah with the words:
"Take her according to the law.

According to the decree written in the Book of Moses she is your wife.
Take her and bring her back safely to your father.
And may the God of heaven grant both of you peace and prosperity.”
He then called her mother and told her to bring a scroll,
so that he might draw up a marriage contract
stating that he gave Sarah to Tobiah as his wife
according to the decree of the Mosaic law.
Her mother brought the scroll,
and he drew up the contract,
to which they affixed their seals.
Afterward they began to eat and drink.

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

Applying an ancient text to our current situation is often difficult, but this reading offers several valuable lessons for young couples today.

First, notice the importance of family in this scene. Both of Sarah's parents are involved in some fashion. Her father Raguel formally hands her in marriage to Tobiah and blesses the young couple and her mother Edna helps prepare materials for the marriage contract.

Today, many couples embark on their new life together by themselves, as if their prior relationships must now take a back seat. But Tobiah and Sarah show us that this new relationship does not mean we discard old ones. Rather, married life has a communal dimension. Love is meant to be shared, and a healthy marriage is one where the love of two people radiates outward, spreading love to others and receiving love

back in return.

Although strange to our world view, Tobiah's desire to marry his blood relative would have been commonplace in ancient Israel. Marrying someone of the same family or clan helped to ensure that people remained committed to the Lord and to the religious precepts of Judaism. In our modern religiously pluralistic society, this concern is not as prevalent. Catholics who marry non-Catholics can still display a robust faith.

Regardless of creed, we should keep in mind that each of us is ultimately seeking union with God. A successful marriage, like all relationships, is one where we help each other come closer to that goal. This is a great challenge for us, for we are called to inspire our beloved spouse and to embody God's love for him or her. It is comforting to know that this person whom we hold dear is doing the same for us.

B5**Allow us to live together to a happy old age.**

Tobit 8:4b-8
(801-5)

A reading from the Book of Tobit

On their wedding night Tobiah arose from bed and said to his wife,
"Sister, get up. Let us pray and beg our Lord
to have mercy on us and to grant us deliverance."

Sarah got up, and they started to pray
and beg that deliverance might be theirs.

They began with these words:

"Blessed are you, O God of our fathers;
praised be your name forever and ever.

Let the heavens and all your creation
praise you forever.

You made Adam and you gave him his wife Eve
to be his help and support;
and from these two the human race descended.

You said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone;
let us make him a partner like himself.'

Now, Lord, you know that I take this wife of mine
not because of lust,
but for a noble purpose.

Call down your mercy on me and on her,
and allow us to live together to a happy old age."

They said together, "Amen, amen."

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

The first thing that the newlyweds do in this reading from the book of Tobit is pray. This may seem odd, but in fact you will marry within a liturgical celebration of the Church—filled with prayer and blessing.

In the biblical story, Tobiah and Sarah have just married and her parents have escorted them to the bridal chamber to spend their first night together. Before retiring for the evening, Tobiah asks his wife to pray with him, and then together they ask the Lord to bless their union. Tobiah and Sarah provide a great example for all newly married couples looking to start their marriage off on the right foot. A good marriage is one where the spouses invite God to play an active role in their lives and to nourish and sustain them for years to come.

Of course, making time for prayer is not always easy. This is true when you are single, and it is even truer when you add another person's schedule, daily concerns, and your mutual need to be together into the mix. Once children enter the picture, your lives can be easily caught up with play dates, soccer practices, piano lessons, and the like. Suddenly your busyness has left little room for prayer. Wise spouses will try to imitate Tobiah and Sarah and pray together, thanking God for his bountiful goodness and asking for his continued blessings. In a successful marriage, communication is a top priority, not only with your spouse but also with your heavenly Father, from whom all good things come.

Although they've only been married for a few hours, Tobiah and Sarah are already thinking like a couple. They pray that deliverance be theirs, that God show mercy on both of them, and that they be allowed to live together to a happy old age. Tobiah likens himself and his wife to Adam and Eve whom God created to be true partners for each other. The Hebrew word for *partner* is *neged*, which means a relationship of equality, harmony, and cooperation. The transition to this new reality can be hard for anyone to make, especially since modern society values individualism so very highly. But being married does not mean that the husband and wife totally extinguish the self; rather, you now enter into a new reality that transcends your individual identity. As spouses you are joined in an unbreakable bond and live in a new kind of partnership. You no longer pursue two distinct paths conjointly but walk the same path together. And all the intimacies and details of daily life belong not to you alone but are shared.

The prayer of Sarah and Tobiah demonstrates a healthy understanding of what it means to walk the same path together. In good times and in bad, may you remember their example and together take your gratitude and need before our faithful God.

B6 **She who fears the LORD is to be praised.**

Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31

(801-6)

A reading from the Book of Proverbs

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

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

The book of Proverbs, written about six centuries before the birth of Jesus, captures the lived wisdom of the people of Israel and their neighbors. It offers practical advice and warnings about how to handle the ups and downs of life, how to raise children, how to conduct business, and how to run a fruitful household. The book closes with the passage we find here, on the rich blessing of a “worthy wife” or a wife of great worth.

The passage presents a fascinating glimpse into the life of a woman in a wealthy household in ancient Israel: she is engaged in the many tasks involved in managing her own family’s life, but she is also involved in the marketplace and in selling things outside her home. Moreover, she is involved in charitable activity, reaching out to those in need. This woman is clearly creative, hardworking, and engaged in the larger community. She sounds not unlike many of the women and men that we encounter every day.

Work is a central feature in every family’s life. Catholic social teaching highlights that the creation of a healthy, happy home is naturally a priority of married couples but that, in the end, families are not solely about themselves and their own flourishing. Families are called, through their work in the marketplace and their charitable activities, to also serve the greater good. They are called to be agents of transformation in the world.

One of the biggest challenges any contemporary family faces is finding the right balance among work in the home, work outside of the home, and church or civic

engagement. Different couples handle this challenge in various ways. Not long ago, it was common for women to take responsibility for work in the home, men to take responsibility for work outside the home, and one or both to engage in some sort of larger civic engagement. There is nothing sacrosanct, however, about this arrangement. Other cultures and other periods of time have worked out alternative arrangements very successfully.

Who will be responsible for which household tasks in your new home? Do you each plan on having an outside job or maintaining a career? Will one person’s job take priority over the other’s? How will your household contribute to the bettering of the larger community? How do you hope to manage parenting roles and responsibilities? No couple has every question resolved as they begin their marriage, and truly they cannot. Things change, shifting your hopes and dreams and all your careful planning. Even so, respectfully honoring the dignity of work—both the tasks of household management and your outside jobs—and valuing the contributions both of you make will help you find deep reward in your labors.

B7

Song of Songs 2:8-10, 14, 16a; 8:6-7a
(801-7)

Stern as death is love.**A reading from the Song of Songs**

Hark! my lover—here he comes
springing across the mountains,
leaping across the hills.

My lover is like a gazelle
or a young stag.

Here he stands behind our wall,
gazing through the windows,
peering through the lattices.

My lover speaks; he says to me,
“Arise, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one, and come!

“O my dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the secret recesses of the cliff,

Let me see you,
let me hear your voice,

For your voice is sweet,
and you are lovely.”

My lover belongs to me and I to him.
He says to me:

“Set me as a seal on your heart,
as a seal on your arm;

For stern as death is love,
relentless as the nether-world is devotion;
its flames are a blazing fire.

Deep waters cannot quench love,
nor floods sweep it away.”

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

The Song of Songs (or Canticle of Canticles, or Song of Solomon) is a beautiful love poem attributed to Solomon, the king of Israel in the tenth century BCE. It was probably actually written a few centuries later. Its highly erotic language made some early commentators wonder whether it really belonged in the Bible at all, especially since there is no mention of God and its imagery is rather explicitly sexual. In light of these facts, it is particularly interesting to consider how Rabbi Akiba, who was writing just a few decades after the time of Jesus, thought about this poem. He saw it as absolutely central to the meaning of the whole of scripture, because it is the story of hearts on fire for love.

In the Jewish tradition, the Song of Songs is read during the season of Passover, the season that recollects the story of God leading Israel out of Egypt toward the Promised Land. Passover recalls the hardships of the Jewish people as they wandered homeless in the desert. It seems perhaps an odd time to introduce the theme of erotic love. But the rabbis, in their wisdom, understood that it was this kind of powerful love that led God to reach out to Israel: the story of love is the inner story that celebrates the outer story of the Exodus from Egypt. God so loved the nation of Israel that he was willing to rescue it and bring it home, even when its love for God faltered.

It is interesting for Christians to consider, in light of this rabbinic reading, how

Jesus' suffering and death—the Passion—took place during the Passover celebration. The word *passion* comes from a Latin verb that means “to suffer,” and this idea makes sense when we think about what love entails. Passionate love is a single-minded devotion to the object of one's desire, to the extent that one is willing to take on any hardship for the sake of that love. Think about Romeo and Juliet, or Tristan and Isolde—classic stories of lovers sacrificing everything out of love.

Early in many relationships, the experience of passionate love is surprising, enthralling, and overwhelming. It can be confusing, then, when ordinary life circumstances make it hard to sustain that feeling. Jobs, financial issues, concerns about family or home—all these things take our energy and time away from the all-encompassing feeling of passion.

The author of the First Letter of John tells us that God is love (4:8). Saint Augustine suggests we seek first not a feeling we associate with love but rather to know God and find our love in knowing him. A spouse is, in the Catholic understanding of marriage, the sacrament or sacred sign of God's love for us. Over time the passion, the feelings, will arise in ever-deepening ways from that love.

B8

Sirach 26:1-4, 13-16

(801-8)

Like the sun rising in the LORD's heavens,
the beauty of a virtuous wife is the
radiance of her home.

A reading from the Book of Sirach

Blessed the husband of a good wife,
twice-lengthened are his days;
A worthy wife brings joy to her husband,
peaceful and full is his life.
A good wife is a generous gift
bestowed upon him who fears the LORD;
Be he rich or poor, his heart is content,
and a smile is ever on his face.

A gracious wife delights her husband,
her thoughtfulness puts flesh on his bones;
A gift from the LORD is her governed speech,
and her firm virtue is of surpassing worth.
Choicest of blessings is a modest wife,
priceless her chaste soul.
A holy and decent woman adds grace upon grace;
indeed, no price is worthy of her temperate soul.
Like the sun rising in the LORD's heavens,
the beauty of a virtuous wife is the radiance of her home.

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

How can we know we have found the right one? In other times and places people married for more practical reasons, but today most of us want to marry our "soulmate." The writer of the book of Sirach was a second-century BCE Jewish teacher who counseled his male students to value character over all else when choosing a wife. If he were teaching today, he might add warnings about the fleeting nature of romance, and he would likely talk about character as something that is important to seek in both husbands and wives.

But what is good character? Between the verses shown in this reading, there are verses where the author of the book of Sirach describes the vices of a really bad wife: she is envious, angry, prone to drunkenness, lustful, headstrong, and impulsive. In contrast, this excerpt shows that a virtuous wife is humble, slow to anger, faithful, disciplined enough to run an orderly home, and full of grace.

But is a spouse with good character enough to sustain a marriage? One contemporary theologian likes to scandalize his students by saying, "You always marry the wrong person." He does not mean to discourage them from getting to know someone well before proposing marriage, but we cannot know everything about someone. People change over time. Economic, cultural, and religious realities change, too. We

simply cannot anticipate serious illness, job loss, infertility, or other struggles that we or our children might face. At times, a spouse may seem to be "the wrong person"—one whose interests, ideas, or temperament do not match up with ours. Yet, if we have chosen well, his or her good character will be a source of grace in the good times when we feel blessed and in bad times when we have to stretch to be the person our mate deserves.

Two people of strong character come together in Christian marriage not simply to pursue a romance but also to build a life. Together, they create a home and a rhythm of living centered around persons rather than material things. Together, they decide how to prioritize commitments to marriage, work, children, elders, the neighborhood, schools, and the community. Together, they make their home a place of peace, joy, and welcome.

Sirach's vision is not quite as romantic as soulmates who fall in love at first sight and know they will always be together in blissful tranquility. But if we choose people of good character to marry, perhaps, like the husband in this passage, we will be grateful to have by our side a really good person, a partner whose faithful presence is as beautiful as "the sun rising in the LORD's heavens."

B9

Jeremiah 31:31-32a, 33-34a
(801-9)

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

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah

The days are coming, says the LORD,
when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel
and the house of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers:
the day I took them by the hand
to lead them forth from the land of Egypt.

But this is the covenant which I will make
with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD.

I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts;
I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

No longer will they have need to teach their friends and relatives
how to know the LORD.

All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the LORD.

The word of the Lord.

The Word Brought Home

Many of the agreements people make are conditional transactions: I'll do this if you do that. In this system, rules are central. Following them ensures harmony. It is the way society functions and does business. But it is not the best way to treat the promises we make in marriage.

The prophet Jeremiah reminded the people of Israel that being in a relationship with God was more than just about following rules. It was about remembering to whom one belonged. In the old covenant, God gave rules in the Ten Commandments and in the Law of Moses. But time and time again, the people broke them and turned to other gods. Yet, as many times as the Israelites were unfaithful, God always called them back. His desire for his people was so great that God made a new promise, one based not on rules but on love. In this new covenant, God promised to be with them, no matter what. God would never forget his own, and in response to this unconditional love, God's people would remember that they belonged to God.

This new covenant, then, would need only one rule—one that would not need to be taught because God's people would change from the inside out. The new covenant would be written on their hearts so they could not forget it.

No matter how much you love each other, there will come times in your relationship when you will fall short. It is simply the reality of being human. There will

be little mistakes now and then. There may be big ones, too. Making a promise or a covenant cannot prevent this. But it does give you hope.

If you can remember that you belong to each other and to God, there will always be hope for healing. If you can remember the things that first drew you to each other, there can be hope for a new beginning. If you can remember that your life together means that you are no longer alone, that you belong to another in love, then you can work through whatever challenges you will face together. You need not rely on a list of rules. Instead, you can rely on your love for each other and on God's love for you.

As you prepare to make your promises to each other, let your hearts be open so that God can write his law upon them. Savor the memories you have created with each other, and write those on your hearts each day.

Just as God has made a covenant with you, so too does the Church. You belong to us, and we belong to you. We will not always be perfect, but we will always strive to remember the promise we make to you on your wedding day—to love you no matter what and to help you remember that God does the same.