

MARRIAGE MATTERS



This online Word.doc book ***MARRIAGE MATTERS*** is a collection of 60-word snippets, adapted from the Sunday Mass Scripture Reading reflections found in ***I AM WITH YOU Year A***. These can be placed in a newsletter, bulletin, website or blog. Simply 'cut and paste' and apply the relevant week's reflection to the medium you're using. Our desire through this book is to support, encourage, inspire, challenge and motivate couples to deepen their relationship with one another and with God.

It is for use by organisations, parishes and dioceses, nationally and internationally. Its sole purpose is to enhance relationships and heighten the profile of Marriage and its sanctity and significance in the life of the family, the Church, communities and society as a whole.

Every blessing from the *Two In One Flesh* group

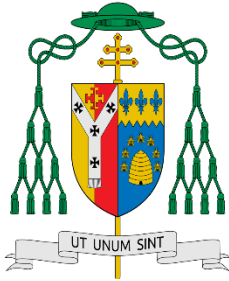
MARRIAGE MATTERS

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FOREWORD



In his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis offers a profound insight into the joy of Christian marriage and reminds us of its place at the heart of the Church's life. Christian marriage, he observes, 'is a sign of how much Christ loved his Church in the covenant sealed on the cross, yet it also makes that love present in the communion of the spouses. By becoming one flesh, they embody the espousal of our human nature by the Son of God'.

As we know, the Holy Scriptures feed and nourish our faith and help us to grow in our relationship with God and one another. It is for this reason that I am immensely grateful to all those involved in *Marriage Matters* who have collaborated on this series of scriptural reflections. I know that these reflections will enable married couples to focus on the richness of God's Word that we hear proclaimed during the Sundays of the Year and to experience the deep joy of God's love expressed through the Sacrament of Marriage.

+ Bernard Longley

Archbishop of Birmingham

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First Sunday of Advent (Isaiah 2:1-5 Romans 13:11-14: Matthew 24:37-44)

Walk in the light of the Lord

God's Word is clear – we can only be certain of each current moment in our day-to-day lives. To live as couples in the 'present moment' more often, we need to apply ourselves to today's call from Jesus to "stay awake". Also St Paul tells us, "the time has come: you must wake up now", because now is all we have.

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Second Sunday of Advent (Isaiah 11:1-10 Romans 15:4-9 Matthew 3:1-12)

Advent – a new beginning for us?

Today, Isaiah talks about trust and Matthew focuses on forgiveness. Advent is the opportunity to discover new ways to help our partner to trust us and to share themselves. Our prayer can be that we drop our defences, become more vulnerable and have the courage to open ourselves to be able to really listen, to share and to change.

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Third Sunday of Advent (Isaiah 35:1-6, 10 James 5:7-10 Matthew 11:2-11)

Cherish the gift

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus' coming. When Jesus came, the Magi brought gifts. We are preparing gifts for family and friends. When you married, and every day since, you have gifted yourself...entrusted yourselves ...to each other; do you still cherish the gift? How much has trust helped you on your journey together? Thank the Lord!

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Fourth Sunday of Advent (Isaiah 7:10-14 Romans 1:1-7 Matthew 1:18-25)

Taking courage from love

The Gospel relates how Joseph overcame his serious doubts about Mary – and married her! She too had faced her own fears about the future – and said "Yes!" We too can have doubts and lack confidence in the future, but like Mary and Joseph we can take courage from our love for each other and God's love for us too.

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Christmas Day (Midnight Mass) (Isaiah 9:1-7 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14)

Excitement and joy

Mary knew the excitement and joy of this special day; Joseph too. He and Mary were 'together' beginning a new journey, and no doubt believed all was going to be well. We, too, like Mary and Joseph, need to be open to the joy and excitements of new beginnings 'together', especially when they involve experiences that are totally new.

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The Holy Family (Ecclesiastes 3:2-6, 12-14 Col 3:12-21 Matthew 2:13-15, 17-23)

Be kind and gentle when we are making decisions

The readings today challenge us to listen sensitively to each other; to be prepared to let go of our own desires and to be deeply aware of each other's thoughts and feelings as we make decisions together. For this we need to ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to the gifts of compassion and understanding, courage and hopefulness.

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Mary, Mother of God (Numbers 6:22-27 Galatians 4:4-7 Luke 2:16-21)

A new title

On our wedding day we received a new and special title of 'Husband' and 'Wife'. These titles announce to our family and friends our unique and special place in God's plan for us, His Church, and the world. In celebrating this Feast Day let us remember who we are and, like Mary, 'treasure and ponder it in our hearts'.

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Second Sunday of Christmas (Eccles 24:1-2.8-12 Ephesians 1:3-6,15-18 John 1:1-18)

He chose us to be holy and spotless

He chose us "*to be holy and spotless and to live through love in his presence*". '*Holy and spotless*'....with all the messiness of our lives...clothes, toys, all over the floor, washing up in the sink? Yes. '*Holy!*'...'*through loving*'. So, whether cleaning up the mess or working to earn money, you are doing loving things. You are '*holier*' than you think!

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The Epiphany of the Lord (Isaiah 60:1-6 Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6 Matthew 2:1-12)

Give every fibre of our being

The gift we can give to Jesus and to one another is ourselves. No matter how long we have been married, let us still enjoy unwrapping the gift of self. Just as, through the grace of God, the 'wise men' went another way, not the world's way, so can we, by giving our whole selves, every fibre of our being.

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The Baptism of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7 Acts 10:34-38 Matthew 3:13-17)

You are my chosen one

Today, Isaiah and Matthew talk of Jesus being 'the Chosen One' and 'the Beloved'. So often, we are aware of the times when our partner annoys us. We need to develop a sensitivity so that, when we are tempted to be critical, we remember that this is my 'chosen one' and look for ways to affirm our partner, our 'beloved'.

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Ash Wednesday (Joel 2:12-18 2 Corinthians 5:20-6.2 Matthew 6:1-6,16-18)

Turn anew to each other

Our loving, compassionate, merciful and forgiving Father is always saying '*come back to me*', 'repent and be reconciled to me and to each other'. In our marriage, issues or hurts can result in 'losing' each other. It's time to '*come back*' to each other, be compassionate and forgiving....and back to our loving Father in the Sacrament of Reconciliation!

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First Sunday of Lent (Genesis 2:7-9; 3: 1-7 Romans 5:12-19 Matthew 4:1-11)

Avoid independence

Today, both Eve and Jesus are tempted to become independent, to turn away from the love of God. In marriage, we can think we have a right to fulfil our own desires without considering our partner, but we need to share these deepest hopes and dreams, and be prepared to hear the impact on our loved one and our relationship.

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Second Sunday of Lent (Genesis 12:1-4a 2 Timothy 1:8-10 Matthew 17:1-9)

Transformed by our love

Sometimes life is hard and we can get lost in the daily grind of making ends meet, of getting things done. Then, suddenly, a change occurs through a simple show of affection: a kiss, a touch, a loving glance from my beloved! In little gestures like these, we reveal again our love for each other and our relationship is transformed!

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Third Sunday of Lent (Exodus 17:3-7 Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 John 4:5-15, 19-26, 39-42)

Find our 'living water'

Jesus' message to the woman at the well reminds us of His first miracle at Cana where He changed water into wine. Today, He promises us "living water where we will never be thirsty again...a spring inside...welling up to eternal life". When His grace is poured into us, into our marriages, it can overflow, strengthening us, reaching out to others.

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Fourth Sunday of Lent (1 Sam 16:1, 6-7, 10-13 Eph 5:8-14 John 9:1, 6-9,13-17, 34-38)

Stop and see, be aware

God was aware of David's adultery with Bethsheba, Uriah's wife, and how he arranged Uriah's murder to cover his sin. Amid political and business 'cover ups' in today's world, it's important to 'stop and see' – the beauty of nature, the beauty and goodness of your spouse. Don't be too busy to recall the joys you have brought to each other.

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Fifth Sunday of Lent (Ezekiel 37:12-14 Romans 8:8-11 John 11:1-45)

The Lord will lead us back together

Ezekiel's words apply to us when we are going through tough times in our relationship, when intimacy, physical or otherwise, seems impossible. At such times, Jesus weeps for us as He did for Lazarus. He will bring us back together if we ask Him and are willing to be vulnerable enough to explore together the changes we need to make.

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Palm Sunday (Isaiah 50:4-7 Philippians 2:6-11 Matthew 26:14-27, 66)

Challenged when we witness how others love

St Paul recognises the amazing humility of Jesus who accepts death on the cross out of love for God and us. We wonder and are challenged by the joy of a friend who daily visits his wife who has dementia; in his great love he feeds her, puts her to bed each evening, prays with her. Could we love like this?

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Easter Sunday (Acts 10:34, 37-43 Colossians 3:1-4 John 20:1-9)

Love our spouse just as they are

The different behaviour patterns of Jesus' friends are well illustrated in these Scriptures. Jesus loved each of them exactly as they were, just as He loves each of us. Our challenge is to really love our spouse, just as they are, with all the differences that we have. It's a lifelong journey, but like Jesus' friends, our understanding can grow.

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Second Sunday of Easter (Acts 2:42-47 1 Peter 1:3-9 John 20:19-31)

Togetherness

Our 'togetherness' in what we do and say is a 'sign' of our love and a source of joy for us. Sometimes, like Thomas, we can be stubborn, with an attitude of 'I'll believe it when I see it' creating a sense of separation and distance. But together we have the power to stop, reflect, be forgiven, and begin again.

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Third Sunday of Easter (Acts 2:14, 22-28 1 Peter 1:17-21 Luke 24:13-35)

How well do we listen to each other?

As Jesus walked to Emmaus, he listened carefully to His disciples and experienced their grief. An important part of our relationship is listening. We may disagree with our partner's thoughts and judgments but they are part of who this person is. We need to experience him/her and convey the joy of discovering the person he/she is.

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Fourth Sunday of Easter (Acts 2:14, 36-41 1 Peter 2:20-25 John 10:1-10)

Feeding your sheep

John 10:10 describes us as 'sheep'. God watches over and feeds us with his Word, and in the Eucharist. With God's help we have created a few more sheep, so we pray for His help, read books, use the internet to protect our children from the harm done by the 'media' and many of today 'addictions'. That's being good shepherds.

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Fifth Sunday of Easter (Acts 6:1-7 1 Peter 2:4-9 John 14:1-12)

I am in you and you are in me

Jesus says, "To have seen me is to have seen the Father". In our married life, through the visible sign of the way we love each other, when people meet one of us we can be a sign that 'when seeing me, you see the one I love, in me and with me', thus emulating Jesus' relationship with His Father.

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Sixth Sunday of Easter (Acts 8:5-8, 14-17 1 Peter 3:15-18 John 14:15-21)

Listen to Jesus within ourselves and within our partner

Jesus is in me and in you! In marriage we are especially called to honour that presence in our spouse every day. There may be times when we hurt each other or take each other for granted, leading to feelings of jealousy and resentment, often to arguments. At times like this the call is for forgiveness, for healing, for affirmation.

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Seventh Sunday of Easter The Ascension (Acts 1:1-11 Ephesians 1:17-23 Matt 28:16-20)

Filled with hope

Today's readings tell us of the end and the beginning of something new and exciting in the life of the young Church. When we married, we were filled with both excitement and trepidation for our future together. But like the disciples, the Spirit of the risen Lord has been with us since we became "Little Church" on our wedding day.

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Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11 1 Corinthians 12:3-7, 12-13 John 20:19-23)

The Spirit works in all sorts of different ways

Years ago, on a Marriage Encounter weekend, we had a real experience of the Spirit working “in all sorts of different ways in different people”, not in Church documents, but in real life. We were like the disciples at Pentecost, “filled with joy when they saw the Lord”, and we heard our own native language, deep inside each of us.

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Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 49:3 1 Corinthians 1:1-3 John 1:29-34)

We need ‘power from on high’

Were Jesus’ fears eased when he heard the Father was ‘*well pleased*’? He was empowered by the Holy Spirit to begin his mission: to bring to the world the Good News of God’s compassion, mercy and forgiveness for our sins. By daily dialogue about concerns and issues and by seeking ‘*help from on high*’, we can overcome our fears.

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Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 8:23-9:3 1 Cor 1:10-13, 17 Matt 4:12-23)

God has a stake in our marriage

Today, we see two aspects of God’s plan for our marriage: ‘... (*I will make*) *their joy increase*’ (Isaiah) and ‘*I will make you fishers of men*’ (Matthew). God wants us to make our love for each other as close to Jesus’ love for us as possible, that all whose lives we touch might experience how much God loves them.

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Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12-13 1 Cor 1:26-31 Matt 5:1-12)

Being human - we are human be-ings, not do-ings

With the ever-increasing pace of life, when do we get a chance ‘to be’? Today, the Word of God is intended to relate more to the deeper aspects of our humanity and the inner essence of our being, and the qualities of our personhood. It’s about the ways we relate to each other in our marriages, our families, our communities.

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Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 58:7-10 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 Matthew 5:13-16)

Unity is the key

When we married, a new flame was lit in our Church, signified by the lighting of a new candle as we made our vows and became “Little Church” together. Now, as we think of our life up to now, we can see how our love has been reflected on to our children, our family and our Church community.

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Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Ecclesiasticus 15:15-20 1 Cor 2:6-10 Matthew 5:17-37)

Making the right choices

Choices! How difficult sometimes to make the right choices. What to eat today, how to save money, what clothes to wear, what we or our children need. For Christians, prayer and a set of Christian values influence the choices we make. Why not ask the Lord’s help to decide what issue is uppermost for us today and dialogue about it?

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Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Lev 19:1-2, 17-18 1 Cor 3:16-23 Matt 5:38-48)

Finding the joy in our sacramental relationship

The joy of courting couples is obvious for all to see. Over the years, excitement can lessen, our independent attitudes strengthen; competition and jealousy creep in. Today Jesus calls us to “...turn the other cheek...”. In confidence share, in trust listen, in faith forgive, so that our spouse will grow in self-worth and the sparkle of joy will reignite.

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Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 49:14-15 1 Cor 4:1-5 Matthew 6:24-34)

Have the heart of a servant towards each other

St Paul said, “People must think of us as Christ’s servants”. In marriage, it’s an invitation to have a servant heart towards each other. Is it easier to give at work, the Church, or elsewhere? Yet “no one can be the slave of two masters”. How big is the challenge to make you and our marriage my number one priority?

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Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Deut 11:18, 26-28,32 Rom 3:21-25, 28 Matt 7:21-27)

Let us build our house on rock to last

Jesus tells the people, and us, to build our houses on rock. With our 'yes' on our wedding day, the foundation stone was laid; each 'yes' since then has strengthened our building. Each time we make love, giving ourselves totally, we are saying 'yes' to the way of life that God has called us to; our intimacy is our strength.

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Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Hosea 6:3-6 Romans 4:18-25 Matthew 9:9-13)

In the little things we glorify God

Today, with our love deeply embedded in our married relationship, the little courtesies, the steadying hand, the linking arm have come to mean so much more than those tiny gestures could ever mean in themselves. We still look forward with excitement to what each new day may bring, offering ...“one sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving which gives glory to God”.

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Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Exodus 19:2-6 Romans 5:6-11 Matthew 9:36-10.8)

Think of all the blessings

Priests offer sacrifice, and are 'mediators' between God and humans. Jesus was a Priest and a 'mediator', sacrificing Himself on the Cross and pleading, "*Father forgive them*". Baptism made us 'sharers' in Christ's Priesthood. At Mass, as a Priestly people, we join in His sacrifice and pray for ourselves and others. So, '*serve the Lord with gladness*', counting our blessings.

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Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Jeremiah 20:10-13 Rom 5:12-15 Matt 10:26-33)

Fear conceals itself...

How easy to become paranoid, to wonder what others might be saying about us. These aspects can be present outside our relationship and within it; at their core is fear! Jesus continuously exhorts the Twelve, "do not be afraid...every hair on your head has been counted". Living our life now in Christ, we will not fear what others think.

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Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (2 Kings: 8-11, 14-16 Rom 6:3-4, 8-11 Matt 10:37-42)

Love grows when you give it away

We have become more aware over the years that the more we love, the more it grows. Our natural instinct is to always put ourselves first. 'To love' stands this mentality on its head! The Gospel says: "Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it." When we experience being loved, we are enabled to love too!

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Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Zech 9:9-10 Rom 8:9, 11-13 Matthew 11:25-30)

'Yoked' to Him we are not overburdened

A 'yoke' keeps oxen together when carrying a heavy load or ploughing a field. On the day you married you chose to be 'yoked' together 'till death us do part'. The burdens of life can lower your spirits and create a barrier to intimacy in your relationship. Jesus says: "Stay 'yoked' to me and I will help you, however heavy the load."

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Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 55:10-11 Rom 8:18-23 Matthew 13:1-23)

Listen to the person behind the words

The stony ground is when we are too engrossed in the telly, reading or working on the computer to listen to our partner. The thorny ground is where we disengage with such but not wanting real involvement, suggest a cuppa as a diversion. We are called to be fertile ground by real listening – hold hands, look in each other's eyes.

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Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wis 12:13, 16-19 Rom 8:26-27 Matt 13:24-43)

Attentive listening

The Gospel today raises questions about our ability 'to listen'. We easily hear criticism in a comment, or a question which often puts us at odds with each other. But if we listen with our hearts, in the way Jesus commanded us to do, we are enabled, in all our relationships, to follow His command "...listen, anyone who has ears".

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Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (1 Kings 3:5, 7-12 Rom 8:28-30 Matt 13:44-52)

Discover what loving really means

Instead of praying for 'treasure', King Solomon prayed for wisdom '*to discern good from evil*'. When discerning what 'loving' really means, you find '*hidden treasure*' in these weekly reflections on Scripture. They will also help you to discover the 'hidden treasure' in each other. Sharing this, you sow 'seeds' of love in the minds and hearts of others.

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Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isa 55:1-3 Rom 8:35, 37-39 Matt 14:13-21)

It can be hard to have compassion sometimes

It's hard to have compassion for my spouse when caught up in my own worries and stress. Jesus moved on from His own sadness to see the need of the crowds; He fed them. We witness to the Good News that nothing can come between us when we nourish each other in all ways - physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

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Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (1 Kings 9:9, 11-13 Rom 9:1-5 Matt 14:22-33)

Walking on water....falling through fear

Peter got out of the boat but, with fear of sinking, he took his eyes off Jesus. Life today is like travelling in a small boat on the rough sea of secularism that mocks religion and seeks to end traditional marriage. Life's storms can change into a gentler breeze when we get out of our boat and walk with Jesus.

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Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isa 56:1, 6-7 Rom 11:13-15, 29-32 Matt 15:21-28)

Trust in each other

When we married, we promised 'to love one another until death do us part'. In this promise we are called to put all our trust in each other, to persevere, no matter what life brings. This theme of trust is evident in the way the Canaanite woman believed that, if she persevered, Jesus would cure her daughter. He did!

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Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 22:19-23 Rom 11:33-36 Matt 16:13-20)

The key to family life

Today's Gospel places keys at the heart of the responsibility Jesus gives Peter. In spite of his weaknesses and failings, because of his faith, he is entrusted with the 'keys' to the kingdom of God. Our married love is entrusted with the 'keys' of our family life. We are the 'rock' upon which the future of our family will be built.

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Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Jer 20:7-9 Romans 12:1-2 Matt 16:21-27)

The 'sign' of growth is change

St Paul urges us to think of God's mercy and change the way we behave so that the will of God is visible in us. As husbands and wives we can help each other in this endeavour, so that a renewed and deeper love is revealed in our relationship and, in turn, reflected out to our family, friends and community.

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Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Ezek 33:7-9 Rom 13:8-10 Matthew 18:15-20)

To listen is to Love

Matthew reminds us of Jesus' promise "...where two or more meet in my name I will be with them". In all the practical ways we look after each other, we are saying; 'your concerns are my concerns'. Nothing is too small or insignificant in our marriage, and my beloved is beside me to call me back to our life together.

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Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Eccles 27:30-28:7 Rom 14:7-9 Matt 18: 21- 35)

The call to forgive

How can I love my spouse and bring life? We are called to set aside resentment, to listen gently to our beloved, seeking understanding. In today's gospel the servant who is forgiven refuses to forgive the man who owes him. God forgives us everything, but are we willing to let go of the hurts we have experienced via our spouse?

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Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 55:6-9 Phil 1:20-24, 27 Matt 20:1-16)

'My thoughts are not your thoughts'

God can put thoughts into our minds, but how can we ensure these make a difference to our lives? St Paul says, "Avoid anything in your everyday lives that would be unworthy of the Gospel of Christ": for example, the need to measure what we contribute within the relationship. Our Sacrament isn't a 50/50 arrangement but a 100%/100% unconditional commitment.

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Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Ezek18: 25-28 Phil 2: 1-11 Matt 21: 28-32)

Maintain a common purpose

Remember our courting days and the long, thrilling conversations we had about our future together. They were part of our falling in love and of establishing a common purpose in married life. St Paul reminds us of the mark of a Christian: "Be united in your convictions and your love, with a common purpose and a common mind."

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Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 5:1-7 Phil 4:6-9 Matt 21:33-43)

Loving and honouring each other and the Lord

When you married you took each other *for better, for worse*. God experienced the 'worse' when his 'bride', the Jewish people, rejected him by worshipping other gods. The 'worse' for you may be when your spouse mocks your beliefs. Have you shared your hurt, let them know your pain? Remember, though, that God has loved the 'worst' in you.

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Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 25:6-10 Phil 4:12-14 Matt 22:1-4)

Add another stitch

God our Father invites us all to His great wedding feast in heaven! In living out our married life, we have been making our wedding garments! It is woven, sewn and stitched with all the little acts of loving kindness, long forgotten, the courtesies in every little action we show toward each other, our children, family and friends.

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Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isa 45:1, 4-6 Thess 1: 1-5 Matt 22:15-21)

We all need each other

The Pharisees tried to trap Jesus: He told them to give to Caesar what belongs to him, “and to God what belongs to God”. The world tells us to look after ourselves and not to need others. As married couples, we know that we are made by God for one another, not needy but needing to give of ourselves entirely.

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Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Exodus 22:20-26 1 Thess 1:5-10 Matt 22:34-40)

How can I best love you today?

In today’s gospel Jesus says love should be at the centre of our lives, so we must ask ‘How can I best love my partner today?’ To know how our partner experiences our love best, we need to explore together whether it is through compliments, special time together, presents or acts of service, or simple hugging and kissing.

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Thirty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time (Mal 1:14 – 2:2, 8-10 1 Thess 2:7-9, 13 Matt 23:1-12)

Do we both work hard and devotedly?

We cannot avoid being challenged by the devotion, protection and love given to the followers of Jesus by St Paul and his companions. Can we say with equal certainty that in living our vows and commitments, we work as hard and devotedly? Yet this is what we married couples are called to strive for in our relationship with each other.

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Thirty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wis 6:12-16 1 Thess 4:13-18 Matt 2:1-13)

Always be ready

Jesus said we must always be ready for His second coming, ready to meet Him. Being ‘ready’ doesn’t mean spending all the time doing religious things. For married couples, being ‘ready’ means being ready to listen to each other, sharing thoughts and feelings. Keep your ‘love tank’ full by thinking of ways he or she can be surprised by love.

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Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Prov 31, 10-13, 19-20, 30-31 1 Thess 5:1-6 Matt 25:14-30)

Our love must be nourished

The parable of the talents could be compared to our marriage and the consequences if we, like the lazy servant, do not work at our relationship. Avoiding conflict can mean that the opportunity for forgiveness and growth is allowed to pass by. Let's not allow our love for each other to simply slip away, but work to keep our life flourishing.

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Last Sunday of the Year - Christ the King (Ezek 34:11-12; 15-17 1 Cor 15:20-26; 28 Matt 25:31-46)

Called to be symbols of the way Jesus loves

Jesus says that those who respond to others are in effect responding to him. Our call as married couples is to be a symbol of Jesus' love for us. In each small way that we show our love: doing little jobs, spending quality time together, listening, forgiving and making up, we are responding to that call and nourishing one other.

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The Immaculate Conception (Genesis 3:9-15, 20 Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12 Luke 1:26-38)

Chosen

God chose Mary to be the mother of His Son. Her life was changed completely! When we married, our lives were changed completely. We were no longer a single man and woman but a husband and wife, a couple! Two new titles and a new mission: to love and cherish each other for the rest of our lives.

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The Presentation of the Lord (Malachi 3:1-4 Hebrews 2:14-18 Luke 2:22-40)

Avoiding issues to 'keep the peace'?

When Mary and Joseph went to the Temple, Simeon blessed them, saying their child would be rejected. When we take our child for baptism, we are given a candle, a reminder 'to keep the flame of faith alive'. This can be difficult, but let us not avoid the issues 'to keep the peace', but grow in listening and trust together.

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St Joseph (2 Sam 7:4-5, 12-14, 16 Rom 4:13, 16-18, 22 Matt 1:16, 18-21, 24 (or Luke 2:41-51))

I will be with you always

Today we hear of hurt – Joseph’s (Matthew) and Mary’s (Luke). Whenever we are hurt, it is important to recall that Jesus said ‘I will be with you always’. For example, in times of difficulty, when we are struggling to make decisions, but see things differently, He is there, giving us the strength and courage to listen lovingly to each other.

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The Annunciation of the Lord (Isaiah 7:1-14 Hebrews 10:4-10 Luke 1:26-38)

Life is full of surprises

When Mary and Joseph were engaged, did they have hopes and dreams for their future life together? But how difficult to make sense of GOD’s plan for their future: pregnant, but not married; baby born in a stable far from home. Yet, they trusted God. In what times or situations did you believe God was with you as a couple?

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Holy Trinity (Exodus 34:4-6, 8-9 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 John 3:16-18)

Be united and live in peace

In today’s readings, God is revealed as full of compassion, tenderness and love for His people. Through the sacrament of marriage, we are called to reflect these qualities through our relationship with each other. When we are irritated and react angrily, it is important that we look at ourselves together, trying to recognise why, and seek to correct the causes.

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Corpus Christi (Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14-16 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 John 6:51-58)

Feed your love

Without food we die! Our wedding promise was to nourish each other so that we bring life to our marriage. We feed each other in all the little countless ways, but particularly in our tender lovemaking, our talking and listening, support and encouragement, particularly in times of doubt and uncertainty. In these ways our marriage will grow and shine.

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The Sacred Heart of Jesus (Deuteronomy 7:6-11 1 John 4:7-16 Matthew 11:25-30)

Anyone who lives in love, lives in God

God speaks today of us being “people consecrated to the Lord...chosen”, because of His love for us. St John calls us married couples to take this message to heart and endeavour to live it. Many of you reading this, like us, probably chose this reading for the day you vowed to love one another “until death us do part”.

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The Birth of John the Baptist (Isaiah 49:1-6 Acts 13:22-26 Luke 1:57-66, 80)

What will this child turn out to be?

People said: *‘what will this child turn out to be?’* when Zechariah named his son John. You have asked the same question. You give birth to your children, house, feed, educate, advise and pray for them, then watch them make their own decisions and mistakes, but keep praying for them. What help have you received at significant times through others?

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Saints Peter and Paul (Acts 12:1-11 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 17-18 Matthew 16:13-19)

The power of love

Peter, the denier, and Paul, the persecutor, both familiar with failure, were overwhelmed by the power of love and gave up their own lives. Let us rejoice in our calling to love as Jesus did, to lay down our lives for each other, willingly and gladly. Our lives might be the only Bible that some people will ever read.

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The Transfiguration of the Lord (Daniel 7:9-10,13-14 2 Peter 1:16-19 Matthew 17:1-9)

Seeing you in a new light

At His Baptism and His Transfiguration, Jesus appeared to His disciples in a new light. That happens in relationships. We are all ‘different’. Our background and experiences affect our responses to situations and reveal different ‘sides’ of our personality. Sharing thoughts and feelings about these can be painful or joyful, yet can lead us to make new and better choices.

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The Assumption (Apocalypse 11:19, 12:1-6, 10 1 Corinthians 15:20-26 Luke 1:39-56)

We are exalted

Today we celebrate that Jesus exalted his mother in special way. As married couples we too can take heart from Mary. Although everything will be changed by the death of one of us, it is not the end! Nothing of our love for each other will be lost, but, as the Lord promised, will be made glorious in heaven.

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The Exaltation of the Holy Cross (Numbers 21:4-9 Philipians 2:6-11 John 3:13-17)

God acts in our lives and our relationships

The God of the Jews, and our God, is different from every other God – He has shown he is a God who ACTS. His greatest ACT of love, His death on the cross, He ACTS to make present in the Eucharist. God acts, and so can you! Act today by using words of affirmation, listening, serving, giving gifts that will be appreciated.

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The Forty Martyrs of England and Wales (Hebrews 11:33-40 John 12:24-26)

Preach what we practise

Who can understand the mind-set of those giving their lives because of their beliefs? Our lives are not challenged so obviously, nevertheless the call is there to witness to what our beliefs are. The criticism of Christians is often 'practise what you preach'; as couples maybe today we need to 'preach what we actually practise' to the world around us.

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All Saints (Apocalypse 7:2-4; 9-14 1 John 3:1-3 Matthew 5:1-12)

We too may go through tough times

Today's Gospel tells us that it is not only when we are strong that we live out God's plan for our marriage. Sometimes, when we are weak, our Sacramental way of life is mainly using our energy to minister to each other. A lot of joy can be found when we walk down a difficult road together.

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All Souls (Isaiah 25:6-9 Romans 5:5-11 John 11:17-27)

Let us remember

Today's celebration of our dead is a reminder of our own inevitable mortality. Our human relationship into which we have invested so much of our lives will, one day, end. Let us look forward to living the rest of our married life to the full, remembering the words of Scripture: "The Lord will wipe away the tears from every cheek..."

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**Thank you for using this resource –
and supporting Marriage in the process**

***Two In One Flesh* group**



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Picture of Archbishop Longley, courtesy of Mazur/catholicchurch.org.uk

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