

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 C**. 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.

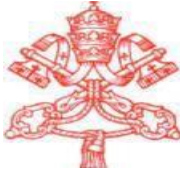
Every blessing from the *Two In One Flesh* group

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It is an essential part of the Church's duty to support and assist spouses in family prayer, attentive hearing of the word of God, and knowledge of the Bible. We know that every Christian home ought to have a Bible in a worthy place to be used for regular reading and prayer. So it is with joy that I welcome this latest initiative of the British group *Two in One Flesh* in providing brief online scriptural reflections on sacramental marital love in the light of the Sunday readings for Year B. Such a resource as MARRIAGE MATTERS comes at a timely moment in the life of the Church when there is fresh attention on the centrality of marriage in her mission. The Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* declares that "it must never be forgotten that the word of God is at the very origin of marriage" and that fidelity to God's word leads us to point out that marriage is in many ways under attack". It reminds us "the Word of God is a precious support amid the difficulties which arise in marriage and in family life". I pray that all who use this resource especially spouses will find renewed hope and trust in God's fidelity to them as couples and that like His precious Word, it will enable them to remain alive and active in their commitment to one another.

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✉ Jean Laffitte
Secretary

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FOREWORD

**Bishop Peter Doyle
Chair
Bishops' Conference
Marriage and Family Life Committee
England & Wales**



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At the end of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015 on the Vocation and Mission of the Family, the Synod Fathers asked the Holy Father “to evaluate the opportunity to offer a document on the family so that in the family, the domestic Church, Christ, the light of the world, may shine ever more brightly.”

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In the summary of their own reflections, the Synod Fathers wrote, “The personal encounter with Christ through reading the Word of God together at home constitutes an inspired source of daily living for couples.”

MARRIAGE MATTERS, along with the IAWY series of reflections, offer a wonderful resource to couples to help them relate to the Sunday scripture readings and so enhance their love for one another.

With every blessing,

+ Peter

Bishop of Northampton Chair of the Bishops' Conference Marriage and Family Life Committee

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First Sunday of Advent (Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thess 3:12-4:2; Luke 21:25-28,34-36)

Keeping the star of our love burning brightly

Jeremiah's joy reminds us of the weeks before our wedding, a time when we were deeply aware of our love for one another. Since then, many cares have threatened to divert us from that love and it has sometimes been necessary to make a special effort to share, listen and forgive to keep the star of our love burning brightly.

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Second Sunday of Advent (Baruch 5:1-9; Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11; Luke 3:1-6)

Smoothing out rough ways...to welcome You

Paul speaks of our '*partnership in the Gospel*' and prays that our love continues growing. He wants us to '*come to true discernment*' about our choices. Luke's Gospel challenges us as married couples: are we enabling each other to '*prepare a way for the Lord*'? Are there 'paths' that need '*straightening*' or 'rough' attitudes/behaviours that need to be made smooth?

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Third Sunday of Advent (Zephaniah 3:14-18; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:10-18)

Rejoice in God's gift

Today we are invited to 'Rejoice' and recognise 'God is in our midst'. This theme of celebration is manifest in our love and acceptance of each other. Though our life will fade with the passing years, the love we have for each other will continue to grow. We are always God's delight, His gift to His people.

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Fourth Sunday of Advent (Micah 5:1-4; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-44)

The welcome sound of the return of our loved one

Today we hear of Mary's time away visiting Elizabeth. This might remind us of times we face spending extended periods on our own. At first it may seem liberating, but loneliness can soon kick in. How loving then our return home is! Maybe the challenge here is ensuring that demonstrating our love and affection is not restricted to such occasions.

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

Peace to His people on earth: see the beauty

As we celebrate God's gift of His Son Jesus, we give each other gifts as tokens of our love: but do we recognise the beauty of our own humanity and the gift of our spouse? Let us thank God today for the joy, fun, humour, gentleness and sensitivity we experience through our husband/wife and each of our family and friends.

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The Holy Family (Ecclesiasticus 3:2-6, 12-14; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:41-52)

We grow, we change

Mary and Joseph had forgotten that Jesus was growing and maturing into a young man! The story illustrates how subtle are the changes which happen in relationships. As Mary and Joseph had to return to Jerusalem to find Jesus, we too must return to each other continually so we can grow into the deeply loving couple we dreamed of becoming.

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

The enormity of our calling as couples

Today we celebrate Mary as Mother of God. 'How can this be?': her initial question to the angel. How can we understand our calling as married couples? To be a sign of God's love in the world, loving, honouring, cherishing until 'death do us part' is a huge challenge. May Mary's daily 'yes' encourage us to 'ponder it in our hearts'.

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Second Sunday after Christmas (Ecclesiasticus 24: 1-2, 8-12; Eph 1: 3-6, 15-18; John 1: 1-18)

Married wisdom

Paul's letter tells us "*...the Father of glory give you a spirit of wisdom and perception*". We married couples need wisdom to be our guide through our life together. We need a wisdom that can grow and affect those around us, providing a unique joy if we are open to experience "*...the rich glories...*" that have been given to us.

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

Gifts to each other

Epiphany means manifestation or revealing. The Wise Men brought Jesus gifts: gold, revealing his kingship, frankincense his Priesthood and myrrh his dying. On our wedding day, and every day since, we have 'gifted' ourselves to each other, and to others, unwrapping daily the 'gold' of our love, the incense of our prayers, and the myrrh of our dying to self.

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The Baptism of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Luke 3:15-16, 21-22)

Being what we promised to be

Today's feast tells us who Jesus really is; it calls us to be what we promised at our wedding – a sign to the world of God's love for all of us. At the core of this commitment is the undertaking to trust our spouse with who we really are – feelings, thoughts, ideas; all that makes us who we are today.

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

When making efforts in our marriage, motivation is the key

Jesus makes it clear in Matthew's Gospel that whatever efforts we make, motivation is the key. It is not "*to win human admiration*" or help us feel better. Paul says "*We are ambassadors for Christ*", so whatever we decide for this joyful season of Lent regarding putting each other first, it needs to be directed toward giving glory to God.

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First Sunday of Lent (Deuteronomy 26:4-10; Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13)

We seek each other

Today's Gospel reminds us that there is more to our life as married couples than we see. Our desire for each other has a deeper yearning – to be loved and accepted for who we are. In this season of Lent let us be led by the Spirit to resist the temptation to lead individual and separate lives within our marriages.

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Second Sunday of Lent (Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18; Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 9:28-36)

A real presence through listening

Jesus was transfigured and was in communion with His Father, and His companions were overwhelmed, hearing the Father's voice. We can hear the voice of Jesus now – but can we listen to Him? Let's start by listening to each other, not just ears, but eyes, hearts, our whole being, becoming really present to each other, 'a real presence', every day.

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The Third Sunday of Lent (Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15; 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13: 1-9)

What's in a name?

Yahweh means 'I am who I am'. Names bring to mind the person, and what they mean to you. Our God – Three Persons, created me, loves me, redeemed me, makes me holy, and is compassionate, merciful and forgiving. Just as MY Jack, MY Jill has shown me the same love, we have tried to show it to our children.

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The Fourth Sunday of Lent (Joshua 5: 9-12; 2 Corinthians 5: 17-21; Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32)

The need for gratitude and trust

The Gospel illustrates the Father's amazing forgiveness but the elder brother reacts angrily and is resentful and self-righteous. At times when we feel hurt and resentful and life seems unfair, and tensions rise, we can blame each other. Jesus' message is to trust in our husband/wife, to look for their loving ways and to ask forgiveness for our own faults.

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Fifth Sunday of Lent (Isaiah 43:16-21; Philippians 3:8-14; John 8:1-11)

Let joy fill our hearts

Today is the first day of the rest of our lives! It is vital that we don't carry past hurts with us, and are able to forgive and move on. We need to look at our faults and failings and seek forgiveness of each other first. This gives life and hope for our relationship. Let us strive for perfection – together.

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Palm Sunday (The Lord's Passion) (Isaiah 50:4-7; Philippians 2:6-11; Luke 22:14 – 23:56)

The Kingdom of God is a lifestyle choice

Today's readings are deeply moving, calling us to what? Can we stand up for our marriages; make lifestyle choices, putting our marriage first? Joseph of Arimathea stood up for what he believed in, when others had run away. He lived in '*hope of seeing the Kingdom of God*'. This kingdom is among us; let us choose it today – for us.

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

Giving each other new life

Today's theme is new life. It reminds us of our promise to be a source of life to each other every day in tenderness, understanding, encouragement and praise, yet also by forgiving our spouse particularly when he/she is vulnerable and full of self-doubt. Today is a good day to thank God for all the life we have received.

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Second Sunday of Easter (Acts 5:12-16; Revelation 1: 9-13, 17-19; John 20:19-31)

Taking time out for our relationship

On Easter Sunday night the risen Jesus greets the Apostles saying '*Peace be with you*'. How can we find peace in such a hectic world? We are called to make time for our relationship with God, and make a diary entry for our personal relationship. Listening and dialogue build intimacy and peace – with each other and with God.

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Third Sunday of Easter (Acts 5:27-32, 40-41; Revelation 5:11-14; John 21:1-19)

Things change, miracles happen

Today's Scripture speaks into the heart of our marriage relationship. When Jesus comes into Peter's life and work, just as He comes into ours, things change, 'miracles' happen: He invites, serves and asks profound questions: "*do you love me?*". He challenges: "*feed... look after...*". Peter found forgiveness and a commissioning; so can we when responding to His call: "*follow me*".

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Fourth Sunday of Easter (Acts 13: 14, 43-52; Revelation 7: 9, 14-17; John 10: 27-30)

We are a light to the world

Most people, when they get married, think their married life is a private affair but Jesus calls us to be a light to the world as a couple. Through our gentleness and tenderness, our readiness to forgive each other, people we meet can experience some qualities of God's love for them. Living in this way is the vocation of marriage.

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Fifth Sunday of Easter (Acts 14:21-27; Revelation 21:1-5; John 13:31-35)

Today is all we have

We as a couple are unique - a one off! No other couple is quite like us. We can share the load, lighten the burden, and double the joys! Jesus said 'Love one another as I have loved you'. Just as I care for myself, I must care for you too in the same way. Let us celebrate our coupleness.

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Sixth Sunday of Easter (Acts 15:1-2, 22-29; Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23; John 14:23-29)

Love is the fundamental requirement

Eastertide is a time for us as couples to celebrate the reality of our love as being a reflection of the presence of God, who is Love. It is a time for us to recognise more readily the risen Lord is alive in us, with us, and present in the many and various ways we try to share our love.

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Seventh Sunday of Easter The Ascension (Acts 7: 55-60; Rev 22: 12-14 16-17, 20; Jn 17:20-26)

Open to receive

'That the love with which you loved me may be in them and so that I may be in them' – the prayer of Jesus before returning to the Father. God made us to be channels of His love – wife to husband, vice versa, parents to children. Our openness to His love enables it to flow out through us to others.

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Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11; Romans 8:8-17; John 14:15-16, 23-26)

The Holy Spirit is always there to help us

On our wedding day we were full of life and joy and visibly reflected the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. But He has also been present at other times in our lives: difficult times such as rejection by others, financial difficulties, mental and physical illness. By asking for His strength, He has kept us strong and close.

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Second Sunday in Ordinary time (Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11; John 2:1-11)

Our marriages are blessed with gifts

Just like the bride and groom at Cana, our marriages are blessed with gifts. Every day we are given the grace to live our marriage vows: loving, cherishing and honouring each other in sickness and health, whether money is flowing or frozen. Each time we embrace each other and our own personal circumstances, we are letting God's glory be seen.

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Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:12-30; Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21)

A new creation

On our wedding day you and I became us! I am still me, you are still you, but we are now linked together in a unique relationship. When we share ourselves completely with each other, we are enabled to speak with the authority of faith, hope and love. In this context we bring the Good News of marriage to everyone.

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Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Cor 12:31-13:13; Luke 4:21-30)

We reflect God's love

Through our marriage we become a living flesh and blood sacrament of our Church! Saint Paul says 'be ambitious for the higher gifts'. Our love isn't just a warm feeling but an action; it flourishes in being given attention to and nurtured. In this way we become a sacramental 'sign' of God's love for our children, family, friends and Church.

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Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 6: 1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11)

Follow your dream

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. His glory fills the whole earth.' Isaiah was sustained by his vision of God in glory; Paul by his vision of Jesus. On our wedding days we had a dream for our future together. The grace of God has sustained that vision through many struggles. Let's always seek to follow our dream.

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Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Jeremiah 17: 5-8; 1 Corinthians 15: 12, 16-20 Luke 6: 17, 20-26)

Our calling is to love one another

Does 'the world speak well of me'? God wants us to use our talents to fulfil His plan, not for our own glory. His plan for marriage is that we love each other before everything else, which means listening deeply. When I focus on doing any job I need to ask: 'How do you need to be loved just now?'

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Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (1 Sam 26:2,7-9,12-13,22-23; 1 Cor 15:45-49; Luke 6:27-38)

An unconditional way of life

Today's Scripture sets out a blueprint for life: love enemies, bless those who curse you, turn the other cheek, give without expecting anything in return, don't judge or condemn. When marrying and promising 'to have and to hold', 'for better for worse', we said yes to this way of life: an unconditional acceptance of one another without counting the cost!

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Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Ecclesiasticus 27:4-7; 1 Corinthians 15:54-58; Luke 6:39-45)

Praise and thanksgiving

Actions speak louder than words! As married couples we rely on each other for help and support but sometimes we are not listening or paying attention. The Gospel today reminds us that to accuse each other is hypocritical, whereas when we encourage one another, we help each other to build up ...'that store of goodness in her/his heart'.

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Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (1 Kings 8:41-43; Galatians 1:1-2, 6-10; Luke 7:1-10)

Come and see

How do people see us as a couple? Are we a sign to the wider world of the Good News about marriage? Our relationship should be an open invitation to 'come and see'. When we treat each other with love day by day, other people are attracted by the hidden message of the Good News.

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Tenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (1 Kings 17:17-24; Galatians 1:11-19; Luke 7:11-17)

The ghosts of the past

'How enthusiastic I was for the traditions of my ancestors.' Those same traditions led Paul to persecute Christians, and prevented some people accepting Jesus. When we married, we each brought the 'baggage' of our past experience of life. It can cause strong feelings to 'pop up'. Exploring 'difference' helps us to let go of the past, and continue to change.

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Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (2 Sam 12:7-10, 13; Gal 2:16, 19-21; Luke 7:36 – 8:3)

Seeking forgiveness helps us to love more

David, *'flew into a rage'* at some perceived injustice, without recognising his own failure. Do we? It is painful to acknowledge our own failings. Today, let's look at the ways in which we might be behaving in a hypocritical, judgemental and pharisaical way towards each other and seek forgiveness. Then we can love and experience more of God's loving blessings.

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Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Zechariah 12: 10-11; Galatians 3: 26-29; Luke 9: 18-24)

I am yours!

Today Jesus tells His disciples "anyone who loses his life for my sake will save it". This is also true in our marriages and is a guide for how to live as a married couple. This brings new life to us and we become a 'sign' of the love of the Lord for His church and the world.

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Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Kings 19:16, 19-21; Galatians 5:1, 13-18; Luke 9:51-62)

We are called to life in all its fullness

St Paul says “*when Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free*”. We are free to think, to choose and to act. Have we chosen to work out our salvation within our marriage? Our ongoing challenge is to live now and to CHOOSE LIFE in all its fullness, to stamp out self-indulgence and embrace the true freedom of love.

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Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 66:10-14; Gal 6:14-18; Luke 10:1-12, 17-20)

Romance is at the core of our calling

The theme of today’s readings is rejoicing. Those who have had to be away from home know the thrill of returning – the hug, the kiss and perhaps making love. But when every day is much like any other, we can lose the spark and we need to remember that romance is at the very core of our calling.

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Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Deut 30:10-14; Col 1:15-20; Luke 10:25-37)

Bandaging each other’s wounds

The Good Samaritan ‘*went up and bandaged his wounds, pouring wine and oil on them*’. On the journey of life we wound ourselves and each other by our words, actions and omissions: our angry words, the withdrawal of affection, the broken promise. Open, honest dialogue ‘oils’ intimacy and we bind up each other’s wounds by asking and granting forgiveness.

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Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Genesis 18:1-10; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42)

Choosing ‘the better part’ is listening

The Gospel relates the different ways Martha and Mary behaved. We too can fall into such patterns of behaviour. It’s human nature to “*worry and fret over so many things*”. Today’s Scripture calls us to really listen, then, like Mary, we can choose “*the better part*”. Let us recommit today to deepening our level of listening in our marriage.

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Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Gen 18: 20-32; Colossians 2: 12-24; Luke 11: 1-13)

We are called to trust each other with ourselves

Trust is the theme for today and as married couples we are called to trust each other enough to become 'two in one flesh'. We need to listen sensitively to one another and to share our innermost thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams, joys, sorrows, worries and anxieties in such a way that we might both be fully human and fully alive.

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Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2: 21-23; Col 3: 1-5, 9-11; Luke 12: 13-21)

To love as God loves

It's easy to be drawn into the world's plan for material success and lose sight of why we married each other. Slightly changing the words of the Gospel we might read, 'Fool, who will benefit from this hoard when your married love has died?' Let us work hard at making us rich in love for each other and with God.

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Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wisdom 18:6-9; Heb 11:1-2, 8-9; Luke 12:32-48)

Too tired to love! Where is our treasure?

Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. It is easy to get life out of balance and let other activities be more important than loving our spouse, and then falling into bed too tired to talk or make love. If our love is the most important thing in our lives, we must spend prime time together daily.

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Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10; Hebrews 12:1-4; Luke 12:49-53)

Our Sacrament: a sign of grace

When we married we entered into a Covenant of unconditional love, summed up in the vows we made to each other. By imitating Jesus' unconditional love for his bride, the Church, we became a Sacrament – a sacred sign of God's love for all to see. Living out our 'life-style choice' is made possible only by 'the graces of the Sacrament'.

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Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (Isaiah 66: 18-21; Hebrews 12: 5-7; Luke 13: 22-30)

Our calling is to be a sign of God's love

Married couples have a special calling to evangelise. God created man and woman to live intimately together so that the people we meet see a living example of His love for each of us. Many of us at some time have seen a couple together and felt intense joy or sensitivity in them – living examples of His love for us.

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Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Eccl 3:17-20, 28-29; Heb 12:18-19, 22-24; Luke 14:1, 7-14)

Raised by our love

We live in a world where self-promotion is at the heart of many superficial relationships. But ours is a New Covenant of love – Jesus refers to this in the Gospel. In this unique relationship we seek to encourage and raise each other higher. When we fail, as inevitably we do, He calls us to ask forgiveness of each other.

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Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wisdom 9:13-18; Phil 9-10, 12-17; Luke 14:25-33)

Consent to love God above all else; seek to not force anything

Today, Jesus sets out the cost of discipleship: "*none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up all his possessions*". Throughout His life and in dying for us, Jesus demonstrated a self-emptying way of loving. As His disciples, our call is to follow Him by putting each other first; thereby dying to selfishness and setting ourselves free.

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Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; 1 Tim 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-32)

Driving together on the way to heaven

The readings contain a sense of hope. His forgiveness seems never ending and His mercy shows no limits. He never stops 'rescuing' us as the lost sheep of His flock, or 'finding' us, like the widow's mite, when we feel lost within our marriage. God's way of working is like a 'SATNAV', with the destination set as eternal life.

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Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Amos 8: 4-7; 1 Timothy 2: 1-8; Luke 16: 1-13)

Money, money, money ...not much changes!

Dishonest traders, crippling taxes, money lenders and unpaid debts – things haven't changed much since the time of Amos. Honesty and trust are vital regarding all forms of wealth. Let us ask God for the gift of wisdom when deciding together how to use our money, wealth or scarcity. Dishonesty about money shows lack of trust and often leads to divorce.

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Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Amos 6:1, 4-7; 1 Tim 6:11-16; Luke 16:19-31)

Beware of complacency and compensating

Today we are warned about being complacent. Too often, we think everything is fine in our lives and then we realise we've drifted apart and feel isolated from our spouse; the atmosphere is strained; it is lonely in bed. The danger is to compensate with activities outside our marriage instead of sitting down, holding hands and getting back together again.

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Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (Hab 1: 2-3, 2: 2-4; 2 Tim 1: 6-8, 13-14; Luke 17: 5-10)

Guard our love

Today St. Paul reminds us *"you have been entrusted to look after something precious, guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us"*. For us this means we are the guardians of each other! We live that out by always striving to be tender lovers, gentle and kindly friends, and courageous, loyal supporters of each other.

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Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (2 Kings 5:14-17; 2 Timothy 2:8-13; Luke 17:11-19)

Healing miracles in our marriage...He is there!

God knows we need healing! Daily He performs, through the Holy Spirit, large and small healing 'miracles'. When we look carefully and sensitively at what happens in our marriages, we can detect God alive and active within us. As we learn to choose to co-operate with His grace and mercy, He becomes evident in our lives. Let's always thank Him.

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Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Exodus 17: 8-13; 2 Timothy 3: 14- 4: 2; Luke 18: 1-8)

Prayer is essential for a deeper loving

Today, Jesus encourages us to pray often and never lose heart. Praying together is a time for thanking God for His presence with us and for the blessing of our love for each other. We ask God to help us to forgive hurts, to share ourselves more deeply and to listen better. In darkness, pain or joy, He is there.

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Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Eccles 35:12-14,16-19; 2 Tim 4:6-8,16-18; Luke 18:9-14)

Piercing the clouds with our humble prayers

'The humble man's prayers pierce the clouds.' That is why Jesus said the prayers of the repentant tax collector won God's favour, and why the judgmental attitudes of the Pharisees didn't. There is a bit of the Pharisee in all of us; humility is knowing the truth about ourselves. Proud people deceive themselves; let us grow in humility together.

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Thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wisdom 11:22-12:2; Thess 1:11-2:2; Luke 19:1-10)

The call to praise and affirm each other

Jesus affirmed Zacchaeus by going to his house for a meal. How often is our focus on what we want our spouse to do rather than on how can we bring him/her life and joy? A daily reflection on where we need ask for forgiveness and on how we can affirm our spouse for something, brings us both new life.

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Thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time (Macc 7: 1-2, 9-14; 2 Thess 2:16-3:5; Luke 20:27-38)

Rejoice, our reward is great in heaven

Today we are asked to believe in God's untiring love. When we married we said ... 'til death us do part'; this helps us live in sure and certain hope of eternal life as He promised. We seek to not be distracted by outside pressures, but to turn to each other in our difficulties and to listen with open hearts.

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Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time (Malachi 3:19-20; 2 Thes 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19)

Go on quietly working at our marriage, stand before God together

In marriage, one partner can work hard at the relationship, the other take it for granted. When both work at it, marriage can be the most marvellous relationship possible. Today, take time to stand before God together and '*the sun of righteousness will shine out with healing in its rays*'. We all need this healing. Let's reaffirm our vows today.

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Last Sunday in Ordinary Time: Christ the King (2 Sam 5:1-3; Col 1:11-20; Luke 23:35-43)

Let us radiate His life and light and goodness

'Today you will be with me in paradise' – Jesus' words as He hung on the cross; even in His agony, He still chose only to love. Through Him, we are given the strength to bear anything joyfully; with the saints we *'inherit the light'*. Today, let us radiate His life, light and goodness, acknowledging Him as our Lord and King.

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

Our 'yes' to each other

Mary said 'yes' without any idea about the joys and sufferings that being Jesus' mother would bring. Like her, we said 'yes' to each other without knowing what lay ahead. Like Mary, for us there have been joys and very hard times but we made our commitment and Jesus helps us keep it even if sometimes He seems far away.

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

Lighting candles

All religions use candles. In the home, candles can create intimacy, and help us to celebrate. Jesus called himself 'the light of the world'. His words and actions shone the light of truth on the darkness of sin. At our children's baptism we were called to be a 'light' for them. May our couple love be light in the world?

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Saint Joseph (2 Samuel 7:4-5, 12-14, 16; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21, 24; or Luke 2:41-51)

Together we can...

Without Joseph's choices the salvation story would have been very different. Like Mary, his 'yes' reflects that his highest priority was responding to God's will. Joseph's behaviour sets a good example for husbands. Stretching our imagination a little, we could conclude that because of this couple's decision to say YES, in faith to God, the course of history powerfully changed.

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The Annunciation of the Lord (Isaiah 7:10-14, 8:10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1: 26-38)

To 'obey' is to really listen

In the Gospel the angel said to Mary "*Do not be afraid...you are to bear a son*". Mary was bewildered, but she listened to God's invitation and she said 'yes'. We too must learn to listen with our hearts, for then we will be open to giving and receiving when discussing difficult issues in our relationship, and finding our 'yes'.

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Holy Trinity (Proverbs 8:22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15)

Called to 'mirror' God

One way we 'mirror' the love of the Trinity is by becoming pro-creators with God of new life – our children, bringing new life to our own relationship! As we accept astonishing responsibility, we receive amazing blessings! The Gospel ends: ..."*the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, which has been given to us.*"

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Corpus Christi (Genesis 14:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Luke 9:11-17)

Memories of You

Memories enable us to make the past present. At family gatherings we remember things we have shared together. At funerals we remember all that the person meant to us. At the family Eucharist the past is made present as we remember what Abraham, Melchizedek, Moses, and Jesus did. Let us seek to create God/good memories for ourselves and our children.

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The Sacred Heart of Jesus (Ezekiel 34:11-16; Romans 5:5-11; Luke 15:3-7)

Love and forgiveness go together

Today's readings are about love and forgiveness. Our most desolate times are when we have caused hurt to one another. The silence is unbearable and every task seems difficult. At these times, we are called to set aside our own hurt, be responsible about our own part in the distance between us and ask for forgiveness.

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The Birth of John the Baptist (Jeremiah 1: 4-10; 1 Peter 1:8-12; Luke 1:5-17)

Discovering our true selves

We read today of God calling His prophets. What is our prophetic calling? The Church teaches that each of us can only discover our true self through 'sincere self-giving'. Isn't that what marriage is all about? Not for us to 'cry in the wilderness' but through our intimacy, seeking to love unconditionally; that's our way of spreading the Good News.

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

Our time together is limited; take every opportunity to love

We are called by God like Peter and Paul. In our case it is to grow in love and unity but, like them, our life of loving each other will end, so it's important to take every opportunity to love. When we experience being apart, it is not time for blame or self pity but time for listening and understanding.

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The Transfiguration of the Lord (Daniel 7: 9-10, 13-14; 2 Peter 1: 16-19 Luke 9:28-36)

We have been 'changed'

On our wedding day we were changed when, as two single people, we became one couple. We started out on a new, different life, first as husband and wife, and later as mother and father. Instead of two single people in love, we were transformed into a Sacramental couple, reflecting, in some way, the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain.

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The Assumption (Rev 11:19; 12:1-6, 10; 1 Cor 15:20-26; Luke 1:39-56)

Being thankful for the good times

Our Lady is blessed because she kept the commitment she made at the Annunciation. We are blessed for the ways we reach out to each other. Sometimes this leads to a moment of deep joy: just being alone together on the settee when the television is off. What about a prayer every night in thanks for the good times?

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The Triumph (or Exaltation) of the Cross (Number 21: 4-9; Philippians 2: 6-11; John 3: 13-17)

Do not be afraid

When difficulties assail us we can have the courage to take our lead from Jesus; the paradox of the cross can be a sign for us. When we are at our weakest and most vulnerable, the love of our spouse can lift us up, make us whole again and strong enough to continue the beautiful life we have been given.

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

Have courage

Over time, the word 'martyr' has lost its original meaning, which is 'to witness', to stand up for what we believe in conscience. In our matrimonial commitment to 'die to self for the sake of the other' we too bear witness to the beauty and holiness of our sacramental love for our family, our friends, our Church and the world.

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

Do we recognise our sanctity?

Are we married couples among the blessed? St Paul called the members of those churches he visited, saints; he also compared the union of husband and wife with that of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Are we not 'poor in spirit...gentle...those who mourn...those who hunger and thirst for what is right...merciful...pure in heart and peacemakers' in our own relationship?

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All Souls (Isaiah 25:6-9; Romans 5:5-11; John 6:37-40)

Praying as a couple

This Feast Day reminds us to pray for the dead. It's consoling to know when we die others will be praying for us. As married people, our life can be testing. Prayer together as a couple can be encouraging and unifying. We could ask the Saints, in heaven and on earth, to pray for us as we pray for them.

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