

Gospel Reading Options

At least one reading that explicitly speaks of Marriage must be chosen as the first reading, Responsorial Psalm, second reading, or Gospel reading. These readings are designated by an asterisk ().*

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

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 5:1-12a

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:
“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely because of me.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

On a wedding day, countless people will wish the newlyweds a “happy marriage” or some other expression of happiness. In this much beloved passage known as the Beatitudes, the word “blessed” can also be rendered as “happy,” or “fortunate.” This most recognizable of passages from Matthew’s gospel admits that real happiness is not some fantasy of perpetual glee, but rather it is found in life’s ordinary mix of bitter and sweet. All marriages experience good times and bad. As Christ’s followers, we are called to consider the spiritual dimensions or the blessedness of all life’s activity.

Further making this a worthy option for the marriage celebration is that this passage clearly states the basics for Christian living. It makes no reference to marriage, yet it is the first major discourse in all the Gospels where Jesus describes what life will be like for his followers. There is a parallel between Jesus beginning his teaching ministry and couples beginning their married lives. Similar to this passage, the nuptial blessing in the marriage rite concludes with the hope of eternal fulfillment by praying, “May you...come at last to the kingdom of heaven.” Both stress that marriage has a cosmic dimension, for its fulfillment is in heaven.

2. You are the light of the world.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus said to his disciples:

“You are the salt of the earth.

But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?

It is no longer good for anything

but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world.

A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden.

Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket;

it is set on a lamp stand,

where it gives light to all in the house.

Just so, your light must shine before others,

that they may see your good deeds

and glorify your heavenly Father.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage, like the ones prior and following, is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that takes up three full chapters of Matthew's gospel. It pertains to Jesus' foundational teachings for all who seek to follow him. Obviously, a particular reference to marriage is not included here. It does state that Christian living is like a light that illumines a world gone dark from the gloom of sin. The stress on the outward nature of the Christian life is a very useful image for married couples. Love for one another should not be contained to themselves. It should seek to be poured out for others. Like the markings of an upstanding person of faith, the marks of a strong marriage are when others are positively affected and benefit from a couple's union. Authentic love translates into good deeds and into glory for God.

3. A wise man built his house on rock.

(Long Form)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 7:21, 24-29

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’
will enter the Kingdom of heaven,
but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them
will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

The rain fell, the floods came,
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.

But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.

And everyone who listens to these words of mine
but does not act on them

will be like a fool who built his house on sand.

The rain fell, the floods came,
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.

And it collapsed and was completely ruined.”

When Jesus finished these words,
the crowds were astonished at his teaching,
for he taught them as one having authority,
and not as their scribes.

The Gospel of the Lord.

OR

A wise man built his house on rock. (Short Form)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 7:21, 24-25

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’
will enter the Kingdom of heaven,
but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them
will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.

The rain fell, the floods came,
and the winds blew and buffeted the house.

But it did not collapse;
it had been set solidly on rock.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage concludes the extensive opening discourse in Matthew’s gospel regarding an overall picture of discipleship. This is why the longer version of the passage concludes with the note about Jesus finishing these words and the crowd being astonished at his teaching. From the Beatitudes to this point, Jesus has spent much time instructing, and he concludes it all by telling his interested followers that they must

put these teachings into actions. The crowd's reaction is astonishment. Discipleship is as much about doing as it is believing. The disciple is to listen first and then act (vs. 24) upon God's Word.

All couples getting married have one eye set on the future. So does Matthew. Just like the opening statement in this passage, Matthew frequently portrays Jesus describing the actions a disciple must undertake to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Many wedding couples will be making plans for a new home together. This passage invites consideration of a spiritual and eternal home. Beginning their marriage in the Church is the start point of a solid foundation. Couples who are wise will continue to nourish their relationship with an active faith life and commitment to the parish community.

The short form (below) ends the passage with the strong image of setting one's house on rock. The image of the house built upon the uncertainty of sand is omitted.

*** 4. *What God has united, man must not separate.***

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 19:3-6

Some Pharisees approached Jesus, and tested him, saying,
"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?"
He said in reply, "Have you not read that from the beginning
the Creator made them male and female and said,
For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother
and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?
So they are no longer two, but one flesh.
Therefore, what God has joined together, man must not separate."
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

As is commonplace in the Gospels, Jesus does not outright answer "Yes," or "No" to a zinging question launched by the Pharisees. After all, they were trying to trip him up. Instead of a simple one word response, Jesus poses a question back. The Pharisees were experts on the law, and they should have easily known the passage from Genesis 2 that Jesus quotes. The first five chapters of the Bible, known as the Pentateuch, were the core of Jewish life during Jesus' lifetime. Jesus does not comment on the lawfulness of divorce, at least not in civil terms. Rather, as he demonstrates a central element of his mission, Jesus raises the stakes to a divine and spiritual reality. He says that "what God has joined" those on earth must not separate. Marriage is a participation in the divine ordering of earthly activities.

This passage is the clearest expression of marriage in the Gospels (a parallel reading is found in Mark 10:2-9). It is the firm foundation for the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage. When selected for the wedding ritual, it will help to highlight the couple's vows which are to last all the days of their lives.

5. *This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it.*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 22:35-40

One of the Pharisees, a scholar of the law, tested Jesus by asking,
“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

He said to him,

“You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart,
with all your soul,
and with all your mind.

This is the greatest and the first commandment.

The second is like it:

You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

The Pharisees are often portrayed in the gospels as micro-managers of the law. There were literally hundreds of laws governing nearly every aspect of life. So, a scholar approaches Jesus and calls him teacher, yet the Pharisee intends to test him. Jesus first quotes Deuteronomy 6:5, the commandment to love God. He doesn't stop there, as he then recites Leviticus 19:18 to love your neighbor. Loving others is like loving God. In fact, loving others is one way to demonstrate our deep love for God. The two are now very closely linked because of this master teaching by Jesus.

At baptism, parents are asked if they are ready and willing to accept the responsibilities to raise the child as Christ has taught us, to love God and love one's neighbor. Proclaiming this Gospel at the wedding liturgy will underscore the very basic mission of a Christian—to throw one's entire heart, mind, and soul into loving God, and then to seek to love all others. It will make a subtle connection between baptism as the first sacrament and this sacrament of matrimony. Marriage is not explicitly noted in this passage, yet the connection is natural. Couples with a genuine commitment to improving their community and the well being of others will especially resonate with this passage.

*** 6. *They are no longer two, but one flesh.***

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark 10:6-9

Jesus said:

“From the beginning of creation,

God made them male and female.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother
and be joined to his wife,

and the two shall become one flesh.

So they are no longer two but one flesh.

Therefore what God has joined together,
no human being must separate.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, contain many of the same stories, just slightly retold from their own perspective. This short reading from Mark is the same as option #4 by St. Matthew in the wedding readings. Jesus reiterates the Hebrew scripture from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, noting that God is the source of creation, making men and women who are designed to become one flesh. The Genesis text speaks of the man being joined to his wife, yet Jesus' final remarks drive the point home that the intent is for both of them to be together inseparably.

This passage reflects the hallmark of any sacrament – they are particular experiences of the Divine. God is doing the joining and no human being must separate it. This final phrase will be heard once again directly after the bride and groom have exchanged their consent and vows when the priest prays, “Let no one separate what God has joined.”

** 7. Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee.*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 2:1-11

There was a wedding in Cana in Galilee,
and the mother of Jesus was there.
Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.
When the wine ran short,
the mother of Jesus said to him,
“They have no wine.”
And Jesus said to her,
“Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.”
His mother said to the servers,
“Do whatever he tells you.”
Now there were six stone water jars there for Jewish ceremonial washings,
each holding twenty to thirty gallons.
Jesus told them,
“Fill the jars with water.”
So they filled them to the brim.
Then he told them,
“Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.”
So they took it.
And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine,
without knowing where it came from
(although the servants who had drawn the water knew),
the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him,
“Everyone serves good wine first,
and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one;
but you have kept the good wine until now.”
Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee
and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.
The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage is traditionally called, “The Wedding Feast at Cana.” Clearly, a wedding is taking place, and not only is Jesus there, but so is his mother, Mary. This makes it attractive to many couples. Yet, more is happening. It’s as if the wedding scene is taking place in the background. In the foreground is a conversation between Mary, the wait staff, and Jesus who reveals a tremendously transformative power.

Embedded in the story is the strength of faith – Mary encourages the servers to do whatever Jesus commands, and it ends with the disciples believing in him. Like the servers, those who demonstrate faith in Christ Jesus will experience good, glorious, and abundant things in this life and especially the next. This text appears early in John’s gospel and is the beginning of Jesus’ many signs. It offers a glimpse of heaven showing the glory of a world to come. The generously overflowing jars of fine wine are symbolic of what Jesus himself offers to us.

Couples who have experienced the transforming power of faith and the abundant presence of Jesus in their lives will enjoy this passage. It encourages them to be like earthen vessels – open to divine transformation whereby their lives are changed to imitate more clearly the ways of Christ.

8. Remain in my love.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 15:9-12

Jesus said to his disciples:

“As the Father loves me, so I also love you.

Remain in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.

“I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete.

This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

As family and friends gather for a wedding ceremony one can sense that the church and the environment is oozing with love. There is great excitement and an overabundance of good will and joyful well wishes for the couple. This passage from John’s gospel builds upon the love that is present as it urges the couple and the community to remain in love.

This passage is part of some words of farewell from Jesus to his disciples. He expresses his love for them before his return to the Father. The Father has loved the Son, who in turn loved the people. Now, the people are to keep alive that love by imitating it in their communities. This kind of love is particular. It is the love expressed by the Triune God. “As the Father loves me, so I love you” (v. 9). God the Father loves God the Son boundlessly, without calculation, condition, or discussion, and absolutely freely. The love of the Father to the Son is a pure expression of liberating selflessness.

Couples who are joyously in love, and see God as the source of that love will be attracted to this passage. This love is not an emotion or a feeling which are always passing, but it is a permanent love that wells up from within the fullness of one’s being. Following the command to love in the selfless ways of the Triune God leads to lasting joy. As couples strive to retain and remain in love, they bring joy to God. Committed, mutual, married love completes divine joy.

9. *This is my commandment: love one another.*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 15:12-16

Jesus said to his disciples:

“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.

No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

I no longer call you slaves,
because a slave does not know what his master is doing.

I have called you friends,
because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.

It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you
and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain,
so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Commentary

This passage is a continuation of the farewell words from the previous selection. Jesus is at the Last Supper, and prepared to depart from his disciples. Though absent physically, his presence will remain, particularly in the expressions of selfless loving that imitate his actions. The sacrificial love of married couples is like a mirror of the selfless way that Christ loved his friends. This is why marriage is a sacrament and is a path to salvation, because the two are participating in an action of Christ Jesus.

Many couples will embrace the image of laying down one’s life for the other spouse. It is tough, and it reinforces the fact that spousal love is to endure until death. This is the action of spouses, and it also the central action of real friendship.

The vocation of all Christians is to be drawn into divine friendship. When believers live as Friends of God, their lives will show it (bear fruit) and they will be encouraged to rely upon that friendship in favorable ways for “whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give you” (v.16). The fruit of the married couple will likely include children who will also be formed to selflessly love and follow Christ’s ways. And the family will together call upon God in their need.

10. That they may be brought to perfection as one.

(Long Form)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 17:20-26

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:

“I pray not only for my disciples,
but also for those who will believe in me through their word,
so that they may all be one,
as you, Father, are in me and I in you,
that they also may be in us,
that the world may believe that you sent me.
And I have given them the glory you gave me,
so that they may be one, as we are one,
I in them and you in me,
that they may be brought to perfection as one,
that the world may know that you sent me,
and that you loved them even as you loved me.
Father, they are your gift to me.
I wish that where I am they also may be with me,
that they may see my glory that you gave me,
because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
Righteous Father, the world also does not know you,
but I know you, and they know that you sent me.
I made known to them your name and I will make it known,
that the love with which you loved me
may be in them and I in them.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

OR

That they may be brought to perfection as one.

(Short Form)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 17:20-23

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:

“Holy Father, I pray not only for these,
but also for those who will believe in me through their word,
so that they may all be one,
as you, Father, are in me and I in you,
that they also may be in us,
that the world may believe that you sent me.
And I have given them the glory you gave me,
so that they may be one, as we are one,
I in them and you in me,
that they may be brought to perfection as one,
that the world may know that you sent me,
and that you loved them even as you loved me.”

The Gospel of the Lord

Commentary

Just before Jesus enters into his passion and death, he prays this prayer for love and unity. He looks up into heaven and desires that the glory of heaven will be made known on earth. His prayer draws upon the profound unity of the Trinity, where God the Father perfectly and fully loves God the Son and they dwell in each other's love.

The Trinity has at times, been described in our tradition this way: The three persons of the Godhead are like a Lover, the Beloved, and the Love between them – corresponding to God the Father, who loves God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit who is the love shared between them. The seamless unity of the Father and Son (the Lover and the Beloved), is a metaphor for the unity that is desired through a sacramental marriage.

As Jesus mystically envisions heavenly glory, he desires that all in his flock are to share heaven with him. Married couples embark on a journey that is to culminate in heaven. They walk alongside each another in their earthly lives, and an indispensable part of life include a spiritual life and an eternal dimension.

This passage might be favored by couples who desire an intense bond, including a strong spiritual unity that can only come from relying upon the Holy Spirit in their relationship. Also, those who have struggled to reconcile differences between themselves, their families, or within their community of faith, might find this a useful passage. Jesus desires the same unity for them, the fullness of which will not be realized until eternity breaks through.

Unless the homilist is drawing from the phrase, “before the foundation of the world” little will be lost using the shorter form (below). It retains the Trinitarian image of unity, and preserves the vision that the community of believers is to be perfectly one.