

The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

TODAY

Deuteronomy 18:15–20
1 Corinthians 7:32–35
Mark 1:21–28

MONDAY

Mark 5:1–20

“... tell them how much the Lord has done for you ...”

TUESDAY

Mark 5:21–43

“... your faith has made you well.”

WEDNESDAY

Mark 6:1–6

“Prophets are not without honor ...”

THURSDAY*

Luke 2:22–40

“... the favor of God was upon him.”

FRIDAY

Mark 6:14–29

“Jesus’ name had become known.”

SATURDAY

Mark 6:30–34

“Come away ... and rest ...”

**Feast of the Presentation of the Lord*

Intimacy and Freedom

It is easy to misunderstand Paul in today’s second reading. He recommends that the Corinthians remain celibate; therefore, we might conclude that there is something wrong with marriage. This is not Paul’s intent. Paul was convinced that Jesus would return during his lifetime. With everything about to change, he felt it was not the time to assume the responsibilities of family life.

Today, we still believe Jesus will come but we do not know when. This allows us to recognize that marriage and celibacy each reveal an important quality of discipleship.

Marriage gives witness to the necessity of intimacy in every person’s life. While, celibacy gives witness to freedom. The celibate person is freer to use his or her time and energy for the service of God’s people because he or she does not have the responsibility of spouse or children.

Marriage and celibacy complement each other because every person needs a combination of intimacy and freedom in their life. The celibate requires intimacy—not the sexual intimacy of marriage—but deep, honest relationships with family and friends. And married people must be free enough to realize that their personhood is larger than the roles of spouse or parent. They have a call beyond family to build God’s Kingdom.

Marriage and celibacy are not in competition. They each witness to an essential truth: the need to connect to another person—the call to serve God’s people.



The Faith of the Church

The dignity and holiness of marriage was affirmed by the bishops of the Second Vatican Council. In the Sacrament of Marriage, Christian spouses are consecrated in the duties and dignity of their calling. Their lives are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope, and charity. They thereby grow in perfection and holiness, giving glory to God (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* 48).



Questions of the Week

Jesus’ dramatic healing in the synagogue invites us to recognize the authority and healing power that can come into our lives through the witness of marriage and celibacy.

Adults

Who has shown me the most effective example of married love or the blessings of celibacy? What have I learned from these witnesses?

Children

Can I see ways in which God is present in the love shown between two married people that I know?

Responding to God's Word . . .

Paul clearly believed that every person has a calling from God. The word "vocation" comes from the Latin root "to call." Every person has a vocation to serve God in a particular way. Some do so through the commitment of marriage. Others do so by remaining single.

We can grow in our vocation by recognizing the witness of the vocations that differ from our own. Those who are celibate must claim the importance of intimacy to which marriage witnesses. They must know that unless they build close relationships, their freedom can become empty and sterile. They can

become selfish bachelors and self-absorbed spinsters.

Married people must recognize the value of freedom to which celibacy witnesses. Without the freedom to extend their love beyond spouse and family, their lives can become narrow and stifling, even oppressive.

Since we all have been called by God, we should not only live the vocation we have been given, but also learn from the example of those who live another calling. By doing this, we can see more clearly the fullness of God's plan and become the people and the church that God calls us to be.

SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

In the home. Spend some time with the person to whom you feel the closest in your family. Share with him or her how your closeness helps you to live more deeply.

In the workplace or in school. Identify someone who is dealing with separation or divorce. Find a way to offer your support.

In the community. Thank God for those with whom you share life and ask God to help you find the right balance of freedom and intimacy in your relationships.



Meditation Moment

The movie *The Exorcist* is based on a true story of a boy from Mount Rainier, Maryland. *Newsweek* magazine wrote of the boy: "After he was admitted to Georgetown University Hospital . . . the boy began to mouth fierce curses in ancient languages and at one point, while strapped helplessly in his bed, long scratches appeared on his body."

The boy survived and now lives near Washington, D.C. This true story recalls how Jesus expelled evil spirits—a sign that God's Kingdom was replacing Satan's Kingdom. It also reminds us that we must finish what Jesus began.

For reflection . . .

What is one way I am working to finish the war against evil that Jesus began?

BE FIRM IN YOUR FAITH
AND RESIST [THE DEVIL].

1 PETER 5:9

FROM *MISSION* BY MARK LINK, SJ

The Prayer of a Witness

Faithful
God, you have made
me a part of the human
community and given me the
power to influence others for good
or ill. Allow me to love those closest
to me in such a way that others can
see the value of intimacy and seek it in
their lives. Allow me to see myself as
an agent of your Kingdom and serve
you so clearly that others may find
the freedom to do your will
with more conviction
and joy. Amen.

Carry this thought in your heart as a
guide for your faith journey this week.

I now am taking this kinswoman
of mine, not because of lust, but
with sincerity. Grant that she
and I may find mercy and that
we may grow old together.

Tobias' Marriage Prayer
Tobit 8:7

Profile in Faith

Tobias and Sarah

The Book of Tobit tells a fascinating story that shows how God works in the ordinary lives of believers. The sacredness of marriage is reflected in a prayer that Tobias prays with his wife, Sarah, on their wedding night.

This prayer can be used by Catholic couples as an option for their wedding liturgy.

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