

Choosing your Wedding Readings

This resource aims to help couples to reflect on and choose appropriate Biblical Readings to be proclaimed in the celebration of their marriage in a Catholic Church.

Why do we have readings from the Bible at our wedding?

For those who may be unfamiliar, another name for the 'bible' is 'Sacred Scripture'. The bible is a book of books. There is no neat beginning, middle and end. Stories were told, over thousands of years, in many voices, of God's loving plan for humanity and the life of the world, across different cultures down the ages. In the scriptures, you can find the stories of family life and relationships, faithfulness and betrayal, joy and challenges, in which people are presented with opportunities and invitations, again and again, to make choices that help them live in a happy, fulfilled and trusting relationship with God (who loves people beyond their wildest imagination!) and one another.

The Bible as a 'book of books', is divided into two main parts, each containing books in a variety of styles of writing. The first part of the Bible, the 'Old Testament', contains books of history, law, prophetic guidance, and poetry. The second part, the 'New Testament', contains the four books of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John), together with the Acts of the Apostles or story of the early church, letters to Christians of the first century, and finishing with the Book of Revelation, which 'reveals' more about the love of Jesus Christ and the nature of faith across time and space into eternity.

Catholics and the Bible

For over 1500 years, the stories were mainly told in an oral tradition. We have had 2000 years of commentary on the bible, through scholars, artists and musicians giving their interpretation. Over many years, the original Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic texts have been lovingly, painstakingly translated into the languages of the world. We have had the bible in a number of different English translations for about four hundred years now. However, it wasn't until after the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s that Catholics have been very much encouraged to take up and read the bible for themselves, as a source of guidance and inspiration for life. And as a classic text, the scriptures will never stop speaking into our lives — whatever our lives are like, whatever our circumstances.

The Bible and the liturgy

One of the ways in which the Church encouraged a love of scripture was by increasing the number and selection of readings we hear at Sunday Mass and on other occasions. The Bible is used in the Worship of the Church, in our 'liturgy', including the 'Order of Christian Matrimony' or wedding service.

The Church teaches that 'in the readings God speaks to his people' and shows us the mysteries of God's meaning and purpose for our lives, how much God loves us, the whole mystery of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and how the Spirit of God remains with us to guide and strengthen us every day. We believe that God is 'present' in the Word. We are 'fed' by the Word, in our inner selves, and that Word becomes part of us, helping us grow, helping us love one another, comforting and encouraging us too when the going is tough.

Reading and listening to the Word of God in Scripture helps us to discover what it means to be God's loved children, followers and friends of Jesus Christ his Son, and, in a way difficult to describe, the Word has power to give life and hope to those who listen and make a place for it in their lives.

Jesus says 'If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciples, and you will learn the truth, and the truth will make you free' and again 'My words are spirit and life to those who find them.'

Looking at Scripture

You are encouraged to choose the readings for your wedding service. When you spend time choosing and preparing for the readings at your wedding in this way, you will find they speak very powerfully on the day, to you and all your family and friends. As God promises, the Word puts us in touch with our deepest needs, and not only will it become a light for the path, but it will build our faith, change us and help us grow, like yeast in the dough!

‘The Word of God in Scripture is the source of life and spirituality for the family.’ ‘The Word of God is not only good news in a family’s life, but also helps in making decisions, giving light, when trying to decide what to do in different situations that families face.’ (Preparation Document for the Synod on the Family (34), 2015)

Every individual, every couple, every family can receive from the Word of God. The meaning is not hidden if we just have ears to hear it. It will connect you with God, who is lovingly present to you in your lives, delighting to be ‘at home’ with you.

Choosing Readings for your Wedding

Whatever the form of your wedding service there will be readings from Scripture. Sometimes there might be just one but usually there will be either 2 or 3 passages and the Responsorial Psalm. The Church has already made a selection of suitable readings for weddings from the Gospels, and Old and New Testaments. These are found in the Lectionary, a 3-volume book which contains the given readings for Sundays, weekdays and other celebrations. The readings can also be found and downloaded from the Liturgy Office website.

The structure of the Liturgy of the Word is as follows:

3 Readings	2 Readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Reading <i>(from Old Testament. In Easter Season from Book of Revelation)</i>• Responsorial Psalm• Second Reading <i>(from New Testament)</i>• Gospel Acclamation• Gospel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• First Reading <i>(from Old or New Testament. In Easter Season from Book of Revelation)</i>• Responsorial Psalm• Gospel Acclamation• Gospel

We are, perhaps, most familiar with the 3 Readings format from Sunday Mass but both are possible. The choice may depend on a number of factors: for example, there may be only 2 scripture passages which speak to you, you may have concerns about the length of the liturgy.

On certain days, the readings of the given day may take precedence when there is an important feast (e.g. the Birth of St John the Baptist on 24 June). Your Priest will be able to advise you if this is the case. Even on these days it is possible that one of the readings may be replaced by one about Marriage.

At Weddings between a Catholic and someone who is not a baptised Christian there is some flexibility. The readings may follow the pattern given above or, if circumstances suggest, there can be only one readings (cf. OCM 156).

Resources

This may all sound a bit daunting but there are resources to help you. On the Liturgy Office website can be found:

- A list of all readings given in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*
- The texts of all readings given in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*
- A short Introduction to each reading together with some questions for Reflection.

On the last page of this document is a simple way of reflecting on the readings which you may find helpful.

Ways of choosing your readings

There is not a single best way to choose as each couple is different. If possible, look at all the readings. To do this you will need to take time, a number of weeks, but you may find that having explored and settled on the readings some of the other choices you have to make will be easier. You may also find that friends and families have ideas and suggestions or that your Priest will guide you to consider certain texts.

- You may wish to start by looking at the selection of Gospel readings. First read through them separately and then compare your choices. Perhaps for every section you might identify your 'top 3'.
- At this point you may either:
 - look at another section, the Old Testament Readings, for example;
 - or look at the Gospel reading(s) you have selected in more depth using the reflection process overleaf.
- After this you may look at the New Testament Readings and then the Psalms.

Once you have a shortlist of readings you should check whether any are designated with a capital **M**. This indicates that the reading speaks explicitly about Marriage. It is expected that one of the readings you will choose will be taken from these. Obviously this factor may help the final choice in a shortlist. Where none of your choices include one marked with an **M** you will need to reconsider.

Your Priest will be able to advise and discuss with you your choices, and help you make the final decision about the readings that are going to support you on the day, and in your lives together thereafter.

See page 4 for a simple way of reflecting on your chosen readings.

What next?

Once the readings have been agreed your choices may be helpful when looking at music with the parish organist (etc.). They will also help with providing a musical setting of the psalm.

You will need to choose people to proclaim the readings in the liturgy. Make sure that whoever you choose will be able to proclaim them clearly with understanding. There is a resource on the Liturgy Website to assist with this.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I choose other scripture readings not given here?

Yes, this is possible and should be considered in conjunction with your Priest.

Can I replace one of the readings with a poem about love?

No, other readings may not take the place of scripture readings in the liturgy. However in discussion with your Priest you may find that the text might be used at another point in the liturgy, or at the Reception etc.

Should we print the readings in the service booklet?

Best practice suggests that they should not be included as the readings in the liturgy are meant to be heard proclaimed rather than read-along with. However there may be circumstances where it might be considered, for example, if many of those attending do not have ease with spoken English or if similarly one of the readings is proclaimed in another language.

Reflecting on the Readings

For either your shortlist of readings or the 2 or 3 which you decide upon, we suggest using a very simple process. This helps you to be aware and open, trusting that God speaks, listening, and then responding. Take one reading to start with and be open to it using the following steps.

Reflecting on Scripture together — a simple way

1. **Sit quietly together.** Allow a moment of silence, just to settle and become aware of yourselves, your hopes for your coming marriage and life together. “Here we are, ready to listen”.
2. **Come with a beginner’s mind** — ready to hear the reading as if for the first time, even if you have heard it before. God will speak with a fresh voice to you today. Have confidence.
3. One of you **read it out loud**, slowly and carefully, like taking a slow walk through the park, noticing little things.
4. **Allow a silence again.** Remain open. Ask yourself: ‘What particular word or little phrase or image caught my attention?’ Then simply go back to that word or phrase, or image, and repeat it silently, or look at it carefully, in your mind, over and over for a couple of minutes.
5. Then **read the whole text out loud** again, a second time. (Perhaps the other person now.)
6. **Allow a silence.** I wonder what particular word or phrase caught your attention this time? Same? Different? Again, go back to that word or phrase and repeat it silently in your mind.
7. After a few minutes of this silent repetition of the word or phrase, **quietly begin to share together:** What caught your attention, and why, and begin to talk about your lives for a few minutes, or as long as it takes for both to share.
8. Why do you think this might be a good reading to have at your wedding? **What do you like about it?** How does it speak to you?

This way of reading may seem a bit unusual or difficult at first. Keep going! It is worth it! Take your time.

Tips

- Listen before you speak — to the text first, then to each other. Don’t worry if nothing strikes you on the first two times of hearing it. Read it out loud again. It might just be one word, or one tiny phrase that catches your attention. That’s enough.
- Don’t worry so much about ‘what this means’ or ‘what it is said to mean by someone else’. The question is ‘How do I/we think this word or phrase is speaking to me/us now in my life and our life together?’
- Speak honestly — there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ response. Go with the flow.
- Don’t worry if you think differently to one another — listen, respect each other’s views, talk about it, work through any conflict, and celebrate the differences. Perhaps this different way of seeing things is what you like about each other, and you are happy to live with difference, and to work at difficulties, and even be willing to change if that is what your commitment to each other takes.
- After each reading, you will find a question or two for deeper reflection, which you may find helpful, now, or at a later stage in your life together.

This is one of a series of Liturgy Office resources to support the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.

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