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Uniting Word & World

For Sunday, August 23, 2015

There Is Love

## This Sunday's Scripture Readings

21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/082315.cfm>

Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b

Ephesians 5:21-32

John 6:60-69



In the years that I was involved in liturgy planning for weddings, engaged couples almost invariably wanted to include a secular song as part of the ceremony. Often it would have been a song they heard on their first date, one they may have danced to, or one with some other special meaning to it. Almost invariably, the lyrics' shallow and saccharine images of love fell short of the depth and meaning of the love they would be vowing to each other before God and the Church. In those instances, we would try to explain why the song was inappropriate and suggest some

other time it might be played either before or after Mass or at the reception.

There was one secular song, however, that I was glad to include in the wedding Mass. It was [Wedding Song \(There is Love\)](#) by Paul Stookey of Peter, Paul and Mary. Though it was a well-known song, it drew heavily from Scripture. I was always impressed by how it connected the texts on marriage with Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." It is a beautiful way of expressing the truth that the love of man and woman in the sacrament of matrimony makes both Christ and the Church present. In so doing, it accomplishes what no other secular song and, frankly, few other liturgical songs can—elevating a romantic image of love to its full sacramental reality.

As it turns out, this popular song was written for [the wedding Mass](#) of Paul Stookey's bandmate, at Saint Mary's Church in Willmar, Minnesota. In fact, because the song relied so heavily upon Scripture, Stookey declined to receive any royalties for it assigning it instead to the public domain.

Marriage as the sacramental image of Christ and the Church is the theme of this Sunday's second reading from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. The line which so grates on us in today's

society, "Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord" is balanced by the command to husbands to "...love your wives, even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her." Both husband and wife are to submit to one another, putting the needs of the other before their own, striving to live the love that makes Christ and the Church present in the union of their lives and of their flesh. Christ promises to be present whenever two or three are gathered in his name. However, in the sacrament of marriage, that presence is even more profoundly imaged in the sacrifices a husband and wife make for each other in their daily lives. For a world in which love is reduced to the romantic feelings it produces and marriage is treated merely as a government-recognized union, the love of a man and woman which draws its strength from Christ and perseveres through hardship can be truly countercultural and transformative.

Another compelling lyric in Paul Stookey's song is the line, "Woman draws her life from man and gives it back again." Reflecting on this lyric through the years, I have always understood it as focusing on the bodily realities of marriage. In their sexual unions, woman and man give themselves totally to one another. From that union springs new life which, long after they have passed away, will bear witness to their love. In the daily chores of family life, they will feed and clothe each other. Through their bodies they will soothe each other in pain and sickness. In old age, they will care for each other's bodies. These realities of married life challenge our culture to see the soul of intimacy not in romantic feelings but in the real, daily giving of oneself, body and soul, to our beloved.

This Sunday will end the reading of the Bread of Life discourse that we as a church have been praying over and meditating on these past few weeks. Jesus makes the shocking claim that he will give us his body as food. Throughout the centuries, many have wanted to spiritualize these words, reducing them to a metaphor. However, we have come to believe that Jesus meant what he said. Just as he allowed his body to be broken on the cross, just so his risen body is now broken for us in the Eucharist and we partake in a real union with him through the sacramental sign of bread. Marriage is also a sacrament, like baptism and the Eucharist. Christ becomes truly present when a man gives his body to his wife and a wife gives her body to her husband. "There is love," not just intensity of feeling but the real, sacrificial gift of oneself to another. And where there is love, there is God. Not a God who is only comfortable in spiritual realms but who communicates himself to us in the flesh.

Douglas Sousa, STL

## PRAYER

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Heavenly Father,  
we thank you for your tremendous gift of the Sacrament of Marriage.  
Enable us to grow in our intimacy with You and with each other.  
Teach us the beauty of forgiveness  
so that we may become more and more one  
in heart, mind and body.  
Strengthen our communication with each other,  
and help us become living signs of your love.  
Help us to be examples of commitment, love, and service  
to our families and children.  
Make us a sign of the unity which Jesus prays for at the Last Supper.  
We open ourselves to the guidance of your Holy Spirit,

Who empowers us to love in Jesus' name and walk in His footsteps.  
Amen.

—*Prayer for World Marriage Day, Worldwide Marriage Encounter.*

## **NOTICES**

### **WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES**

In preparation for the upcoming World Meeting of Families — Philadelphia 2015, LPi has created a cover for parishes to use to encourage prayers for its success. The cover is available at no charge via LPi's [Art & Media Portal](#). Current customers can find more versions by logging in and searching keyword "WMOF."

### **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE CARE OF CREATION**

Pope Francis has announced an annual World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, to be celebrated on September 1. You can view the announcement [here](#).

LPi has created a bulletin cover for the day of prayer; download it from our home page at [www.4LPi.com](http://www.4LPi.com).

### **WORLD YOUTH DAY 2016, Krakow**

Registration for the 2016 World Youth Day officially began on July 26, 2015. For information on registering for WYD, visit <http://www.krakow2016.com/en/informacje-en>. You can also find more information and resources from the USCCB at <http://www.usccb.org/about/world-youth-day/wydusa-news-and-updates.cfm>.

***Visit the LPi website for information on services and publications to build a vibrant parish.***

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