

A JOY-FILLED VISION OF LOVE

Ecclesia Reflections
based on the
Sunday Gospels
and the
Joy of Love



FORMAT

1. Pray and sing – (Ecclesia Hymn below)
2. Gospel from Sundays 1 through 5 Year A
 - a. Read the gospel from the Bible or the Sunday Missal
3. The Joy of Love Made Simple. (Available from the Catholic Bookshop)
 - a. Read the quotations
4. Read and discuss the reflections.
5. Call to Action
 - a. Discuss the actions suggested or formulate concrete and achievable actions for participants of the group.
6. Pray

The facilitator of the group should ensure that all members are made to feel welcome and given an opportunity to contribute during discussions. A small prayer focus with the Bible and a candle is recommended. It is best to meet in the week preceding the Sunday.

ECCLESIA HYMN.

My God loves me.	My God loves me,
His love will never end.	his faithful love endures.
He rests within my heart	And I will live like a child
for my God loves me.	held in love secure.
His gentle hand	The joys of love
he stretches over me.	as offerings now we bring.
Though storm-clouds threaten the	The pains of love will be lost
day	in the praise we sing.
he will set me free.	

REFERENCE BOOKS.

- Bible (B) or Sunday Missal Year A
- The Joy of Love Made Simple for Christian Couples, Pastors, Youth and Laity.(JL) Pauline Press

WEEK ONE – THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

PRAYER: Father, creator of unfailing light, give that same light to those who call to you. May our lips praise you; our lives proclaim your goodness; our work give you honour, and our voices celebrate you for ever.

MATTHEW 4 :1-11

Themes from the Gospel

- Power
- Control
- Self sufficiency
- Adulation

Jesus overcomes these by being the opposite.

THE JOY OF LOVE: TOUSSAINT KAFARHIRE, SJ

The challenges that confront marriage and family life are multiple, including excessive individualism, unbridled consumerism, commercialisation of sex, abuse of the human body and a superficial culture that asserts its claims in overt opposition, even hostility to the traditional values of marriage and family. This culture assumes many disguises and it is often based on a false understanding of the meaning of freedom and personal choice. It easily blurs the boundaries between personal freedom and arbitrariness, on the one hand, and profound truths, solid values, deep morals, and upright principles, on the other. Even within the realm of marriage and family life, there are boundaries. Not everything is possible or permissible. We need to acknowledge that a tension exists between the levity with which contemporary global cultures view marriage, manifested, for example, in the fleetingness of marital commitment and the stability of vows and exclusivity of communion that the Church teaches and promotes between spouses.

REFLECTION:

The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness embrace and challenge all of our human weaknesses. Essentially these are the consequence of our self-centeredness and our human selfishness. These temptations are our need to be in control and self-sufficient, our desire for power and our longing for

affirmation and adulation. Jesus overcomes these temptations in our humanity by being the very opposite of them. Thus he opens the way for us too to resist these human weaknesses, by our becoming more and more who he is.

Such human weakness manifests itself in ways in which we live our lives-in our relationships and how we view the world. Equally it undermines our sense of marriage and our family life. It down plays their value and significance. This significance is expressed in the teaching of the Church.

The world tends to see marriage (and being part of a family) as a stumbling block to having power, losing control and self-sufficiency. We may find ourselves looking for adulation from the 'world' by denigrating marriage. The temptations we face in our relationships- marriage and interpersonal family relationships are to be controlling, self-sufficient, seeking to exercise power over others and looking for adulation. Jesus calls us to be the very opposite of this as spouses – to look for how we can be a gift of self to one another, to strive to be of one heart in all our decision-making and to seek to put the other first. In our families too, as parents we may be tempted to be too controlling. All family members need to be able to put self aside for the good of the rest of the household. In our communities we need to uphold the dignity of marriage, of women and of children. This is important not only in how we act, but in how we speak too.

POINTS TO PONDER:

- Identify the human weaknesses in the temptations of Jesus
- How do these affect us personally
- How do they undermine our sense of marriage and family life

ACTION

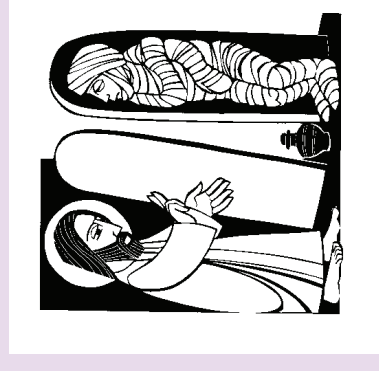
- What can we do to promote the value of marriage and family life.

INTERCESSIONS

Let us praise our loving Redeemer, who gained for us this season of grace, and pray to him, saying:
Lord, create a new spirit in us.

CLOSING PRAYERS OF BLESSING.

Now may the God of peace
who brought our Lord Jesus back from the dead,
the great Shepherd of the sheep,
by the blood of the eternal covenant,
make us complete in everything good
so that we may do his will,
and that which is pleasing in his sight.
May the peace of God which passes all understanding
keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
and may the Father
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,
according to the riches of God's glory,
grant us to be strengthened with might
through God's Spirit in our inner being,
that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith;
and being rooted and grounded in love,
may we be able to comprehend and to know with all the saints
what is the breadth and length and height and depth,
of the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,
and that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. **Amen.**



way of living this dimension of marital spirituality consists in offering hospitality. Remembering that family life is a journey made in this world and not in heaven is a help against unrealistic demands of perfection in relationships and against harshly judging those who struggle.

REFLECTION:

Lazarus, close friend of Jesus and brother of Martha and Mary, died and was buried and entombed. Jesus waited four days before coming to Bethany. It is here that Jesus reveals himself to Martha as the resurrection and the life and then raises Lazarus from the dead. In so doing, he is showing all his desire that we should have life in its fullness, now and eternally. In turn we need to be those who give life to others and create the opportunity for them to live more fully.

Couples are called to give life and to care for it, in their relationship, their family and the world. In this way they are living the resurrection of Jesus in the here and now. Marriage is the biblical image of God's relationship to us. Couples, through the unity of their covenant relationship are called to reveal Christ's love for the Church

All of this is possible in the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to believe that the Holy Spirit is able to take us beyond our limitations and weaknesses and to raise us to life, empowering us to grow into the ideal of marriage and family.

POINTS TO PONDER

- Does Martha's faith in the resurrection resonate with you?
- Is the resurrection a central aspect of your own faith and spirituality?
- Do you have a real sense of being a 'life-giver' in all your family relationships?

ACTION

- As a group or as a Parish we need to look at what we need to do to bring life to others – individuals, married couples, families, widow/ers, the divorced and marginalised?

Christ, our life, through baptism we were buried with you and rose to life with you, — may we walk today in newness of life.

Lord, create a new spirit in us.

Lord, you have brought blessings to all mankind, — bring us to share your concern for the good of all.

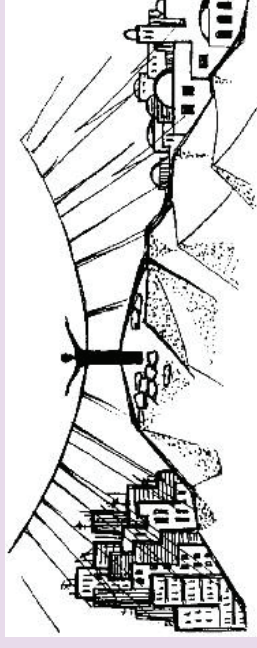
Lord, create a new spirit in us.

May we work together to build up the earthly city, — with our eyes fixed on the city that lasts for ever.

Lord, create a new spirit in us.

Healer of body and soul, cure the sickness of our spirit, — so that we may grow in holiness through your constant care.

Lord, create a new spirit in us.



WEEK TWO – THE TRANSFIGURATION

PRAYER: O God,

who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son,
be pleased, we pray,
to nourish us inwardly by your word,
that, with spiritual sight made pure,
we may rejoice to behold your glory.
Amen.

MATTHEW 17:1-9

Themes from the Gospel

- Jesus reveals His glory. We have a glimpse of the Divine
- He shows us the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets

Do we recognise this?

THE JOY OF LOVE: INGRID VORNER SA

Love of God and love of neighbour as lived by married people is characterised by some specific traits that stem from married and family life with its particular circumstances. The Trinity dwells not only in the heart of every family member, the Trinity dwells within the love of the spouses. Thus marital spirituality is a spirituality of supernatural communion. For married people, family life, far from hindering them to grow in the life of the Spirit, is the way God is using to lead them to ever deeper union with the Divine. This is because family life demands spouses constantly to grow in openness of heart and sincerity which inspired by love. In families centred on Christ, his way through suffering and death on the cross to resurrection will enlighten every instance of their lives. They will be able to undergo difficulties in union with Christ suffering on the cross, dark hours in union with Christ experiencing abandonment, and moments of joy and celebration as well as their sexuality as a sharing in his risen life. Praying together as a family is a particularly important means for family members to express and nourish their faith in the mystery of Easter. Family prayer reaches its summit in the family's communal sharing in the Eucharist. There is a close link between the Eucharist, the sacrament of the covenant, and marriage – which is meant to reflect that same covenant.

WEEK FIVE – LAZARUS IS RAISED

PRAYER: All praise to God the Father who brought his chosen people to rebirth from imperishable seed through his eternal Word. Let us ask him as his children:

Lord, be gracious to your people.

God of mercy, hear the prayers we offer for all your people,
— may they hunger for your word more than for bodily food.
Lord, be gracious to your people.

Give us a sincere and active love for our own nation and for all mankind,
— may we work always to build a world of peace and goodness.
Lord, be gracious to your people.

JOHN 11:1-45

Themes from the Gospel

- Lazarus died, was buried and then raised to life by Jesus
- Mary and Martha had faith in Jesus to do something for Lazarus
- Martha is brought to the belief in the resurrection

Resurrection into glory – the wedding banquet of the Kingdom

THE JOY OF LIVING: INGRID VORNER SA

Couples are called to give life and to care for life. By expressing their conjugal love the spouses reflect for one another the comforting love of God. Part of their vocation is to help the family members to grow towards the fullness God has meant for them. In giving to their loved ones the full and selfless attention they merit, they follow the model of Jesus who in perfect freedom and openness was fully present to every person he encountered. To be completely attentive to the other, thus acknowledging his or her infinite dignity as someone immensely loved by God, gives rise to tenderness which is expressed in a special way in the loving care exercised in dealing with the limitations of the other and which is able to kindle in the other the joy of being loved. The spouses' vocation to fruitfulness is not limited to generating life within the family and to care for it, but includes the call to be open to people outside the family, to care for them, and to seek their happiness. A particularly important

1. That Christ the light of the world may ever shine through the unity and charity of his Church and her leaders, especially Pope Francis and Archbishop Stephen, let us pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*
2. That Christ the light of the world may cast out rivalry and the worship of power from the minds of the leaders of nations, let us pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*
3. That Christ the light of the world may kindle hope in the hearts of those who know that death is near, let us pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*
4. That Christ the light of the world may renew our faith as we practice prayer, fasting, and generosity, let us pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*
5. That Christ the light of the world may raise the dead to eternal glory, let us pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Leader: Father, your Son continues to reveal his saving truth. As we offer these prayers for others, deepen our response to his revelation. We ask this, through Christ our Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*



(Especially for couples) Marital spirituality is marked by the spouses experience of belonging completely to a single other person, their spouse. Their common life is grounded in their decision to accept the challenge of undertaking their life-journey together with this other person in mutual support, determined to grow old together. Their marital fidelity reflects God's own faithfulness. At the same time, marriage requires the willingness of both spouses to realise that neither is the possession of the other, to respect the very personal relationship of the partner with God who is the true Creator of both of them and to accept that the other cannot satisfy all needs, but only the love of God can give complete fulfilment. Both exclusivity and interior freedom are necessary characteristics of the spouses' love of one another.

REFLECTION:

In his Transfiguration, Jesus allows his disciples to see His glory – this is a glorious Theophany or revelation of the actual glory of God. In His radiance and light and in the voice of the Father coming from the overshadowing cloud: “This is my beloved son with whom I am well-pleased, listen to him”, Jesus is preparing them for the scandal and awfulness of the cross. He is not only revealed as the Beloved Son, but shows them a glimpse of what resurrection will be like.

For us now, this moment is an encouragement to move from the temptations we face to the overall triumph over sin and death. If we strive to live in Him, then we will attain the glory of His perfect life. Although we experience the challenges facing marriage and family life, we must not lose sight of the ideal-vision of marriage and family. Instead of discouragement because this ideal is seldom achieved (which is in itself a temptation) we need to believe that we can strive to grow towards the ideal as in the Transfiguration. Marriage and the living as part of a family or family-like community are a continuing work of realising the Vision.

POINTS TO PONDER

- Looking at the reaction of the disciples to the Transfiguration, put yourself in the scene of the Transfiguration and honestly consider what your reaction world have been?

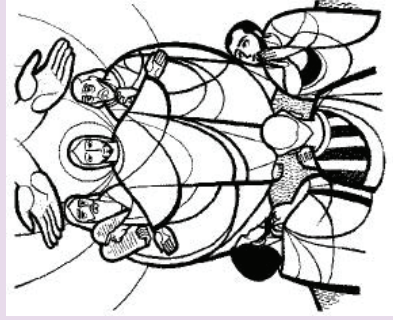
- Can you relate to the ideals of Marriage, of what Family life should be? Is this inspiring to you?

ACTION

- Discuss what we can do to support couples, families and communities to strive for the ideal?

PRAYER:

You revealed your glory and presence in your beloved Son, Jesus the Christ. In receiving our prayers and our discussions today, reveal the glory and presence of your Spirit alive in the world today, free us from all doubts, and so empower us to act as a transfigured people. Amen



their attack on his truthfulness only serve to deepen his newfound faith conviction until he is brought to believe in Jesus as the light of the world.

A significant aspect of the growth of couples and families is the gift of forgiveness and healing. Both are essential in resolving problems, dealing with issues and moving beyond conflicts. Honesty and a willingness to grow are equally important, if a couple and a family are to move forward. We need to embrace the responsibility we have as the faith community to support couples and families, to be instruments of forgiveness and healing and to be an inspiration to them by our love and concern. As much as we reach out to others, we need others to reach out to us, so that there is a mutuality of concern and growth.

Jesus needs to be the centre of this process. All life and light comes from Him and he desires that we all should have life and wholeness.

POINTS TO PONDER.

- Consider all the dimensions of healing that the man born blind experiences.
- What areas in me and my relationships especially in the family context need to be healed?
- How do we grow in faith and into the life of Jesus through mutual support?
- As Church, are we open to the 'blind' ie open to all?

ACTION

- Discuss ways we can, as a Parish, set up a process to reach out to couples and families in need of healing?

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Leader: Healed of his blindness, the man born blind proclaims, "Lord, I believe!" With that faith in Christ the light of the world, we come to the Father in prayer.

WEEK FOUR – THE MAN BORN BLIND

PRAYER: Father you enlighten all who come into the world. Fill our hearts with the light of your gospel that our thoughts may please you and our love be sincere. Amen

John 9: 1-41

THEMES FROM THE GOSPEL

- Jesus healed and restored the man to normal life.
- Jesus brings him to light
- He accepts the healing of Jesus in simplicity
- He is brought to faith by his healing

Do we believe that Jesus can heal our marriages and our families?

THE JOY OF LOVE: INGRID VORNER SA

Crises form part of the life of every family. They are not reasons to give up on marriage but rather an invitation to grow by taking up the challenge. It is important not to conceal or flee problems, but to face them together. Hence it is vital for the couple to develop a culture of openness to one another, of deep and sincere dialogue with one another. Crises are occasions to renew the love of the partner, to reaffirm the choice once made. Failures and mistakes call for resolve to forgive and to attempt reconciliation as well as acknowledgement of ones own contribution to the situation. When the problems are rooted in emotional immaturity due to unhappy experiences in childhood or adolescence or in a person's lack of experience of unconditional love, a process of healing and liberation has to take place. In every case, it is necessary to realise that if the conflict is to be resolved, both partners have to grow and not just one.

REFLECTION:

In healing the man born blind, Jesus does more than restore his sight, he gives him back the possibility of a full and normal life. What is remarkable, is the way in which, in simplicity of faith, the man accepts that his healing comes from God, even though he does not know who the man is that healed him. The religious leaders refuse to believe, their condemnation of the man and

WEEK THREE – THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

PRAYER: Father all powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. When he asked the woman of Samaria for water to drink, Christ had already prepared her for the gift of faith. In his thirst to receive her faith, he awakened in her heart the fire of your love. Grant that we too may be prepared by Jesus to receive the same gift of faith. Amen

JOHN 4:5-42

Themes from the Gospel

- The acceptance by Jesus of the woman in her less than perfect state
- Jesus who leads her to honestly face the reality of her life, and
- Through this for her to recognise who He is and to then believe in Him

THE JOY OF LOVE: AGBONKHIANMEGHE E OROBATOR SJ

Human beings have weaknesses and flaws. Some couples opt to co-habitate, while others are content with civil unions or traditional marriage. Sometimes they may break a relationship and enter into another almost as quickly as they broke off the previous one. For various reasons some people opt not to celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony or prefer to wait before approaching the altar. We need to keep in mind that not every situation is the same. What makes people act the way they do or make certain choices may vary. It is not all black and white. Therefore, it takes careful and patient discernment to understand the factors, circumstances or conditions that influence choices, decisions and actions. For example, while some couples may understand and appreciate the significance of the Sacrament of Matrimony, they may take time to gradually and fully embrace it. The grace of God leads couples towards the sacramental celebration of their union. Anyone who falls short of this ideal is not to be condemned and cast off from the community. Rather each person is to be accompanied with mercy, respect, charity and compassion in order to enable him/her to participate more fully in the sacramental life of the Christian community. In any case, as Church, our priority should be to make room for

everyone to feel at home and apply the healing balm of mercy rather than formulate hasty and harsh judgements.

REFLECTION:

Jesus chooses to encounter the Samaritan woman at the well by asking her to give Him something to drink. Although he knows her life to be far from perfect, He is present to her and lovingly draws her to face the reality of her life and to recognise who He is – offering her living water. The encounter with Jesus is transforming for the Samaritan woman. Here is a man, the Christ, who has accepted her in her less than perfect state and who has opened himself to her to bring her to faith. This does not mean that her life is automatically changed to perfection! It is, however, redirected towards a new goal.

In the same way, Jesus is with all couples and families, drawing them to growth within their less than ideal situations. The Church is, likewise, calling all of us to accompany couples and families and to discern with them the need for growth and maturity in their relationships. So often families are so stuck in their conflicted relationships and imperfections that they cannot see a way out – they have given up trying.

We have to encourage them to reach out and accept the love and mercy of Jesus, to see that growth is the norm. We as community need to be there to help them to achieve this.

POINTS TO PONDER.

- Look at the way that Jesus is there for the woman, even when she is incapable of understanding him, or even resisting him.
- How accepting am I of others – individuals, couples, families – that are less than the perfect ideal? Am I prepared to accompany them?
- Am I open to where God is leading me, my marriage, my family, my relationships?

ACTION

- Discuss ways that we as a group can be ready and able to help others to discern where God is leading them?

PRAYING WITH THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
I feel so thirsty and dry.
I am seeking love, never satisfied at what I find.
Always yearning, thirsting for more.
I thirst and hunger for something I can't name.
Will I ever be satisfied?
Help me to understand this longing.
The pain weighs as heavy as the noonday sun.
My chest carries an empty jar of a heart.
Lead me to the waters of your wisdom, O God,
that I may learn how to truly live again.
Amen.

