

On a wedding day, walking up the aisle of this cathedral takes a while because of its length, but every couple has already walked a long path before they take those final steps toward the altar. That's especially true of James and Eileen, who both come from Catholic families, one American, the other Canadian. They met each other when they were young because their fathers were friends and vacationed together in neighboring cabins in Canada. In fact, Eileen's father was the founder of the deVeber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research in Ontario. James and Eileen lost touch with each other, but four years ago they rediscovered their old friendship—as many others have done—through social media.

They learned that in the interim they had both faced serious personal challenges, which they had overcome, though they still relied on the support of friends. James had a reawakening of his faith after a freak rock climbing accident when he survived a 200-foot fall that mysteriously also turned him into a water colorist. The deepening of his Catholic faith became one reason Eileen felt attracted to him. Eileen's first marriage brought her two sons and a great deal of wisdom. Now after long internal journeys of personal growth and long external journeys from Michigan and Ontario, after James capped an online relationship with an online proposal, mailing Eileen an engagement ring, after James landed a job with the US Park Service in Independence, Missouri, and Eileen secured a fiancé visa from the US embassy, they finally found their way toward each other, into this cathedral, and up the aisle.

Tobiah and Sarah, the protagonists of today's first reading, could join the account of their relationship to such stories of long journeys toward unusual wedding days. Tobiah's father Tobit suffered blindness from a freak accident not when he fell dropping like a bird but when bird droppings fell into his eyes. The angel Raphael accompanied Tobiah on a journey to find a fish required for the appropriate medicine for his father. Tobit's dog followed them all on the way. The angel also arranged for Sarah and Tobiah to meet, and they fell in love.

There was one problem: Sarah had been married before. Seven times. Each husband mysteriously died in bed on the wedding night. But if Tobiah still wanted her, she was all his. He still wanted her, and he decided on a strategy that any God-fearing groom would take: Before they went to bed, he prayed. That's the beautiful prayer that makes today's first reading. It fits any engaged couple even today, including those who do not fear for their life. Tobiah concludes with these words, "Now, Lord, you know that I take this wife of mine not because of lust, but for a noble purpose. Call down your mercy on me and on her, and allow us to live together to a happy old age."

Eileen and James, that's our prayer for you. God has brought you on a path as twisted as a shamrock on a windy day. May he make straight the road that lies before you. As you have used the varied experiences of your life to bring joy to your partner, may you also bring joy to those who come to know you as a couple. When the way ahead seems steep, give others the confidence that the end of any path worth taking leads to bliss.