Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“That day there was joy for all the Jews who lived in Nineveh” (Tobit 11:17).

Tb 11:5-17; *Mk 12:35-37*

The scholars who put together the lectionary, the great cycles of shared Scripture readings in the church's liturgy, may have decided to plug in a short and peculiar Gospel today about Jesus' messianic identity because the real draw is the moving tale of the Book of Tobit.

Today's first reading completes the story of Tobit, a fastidious and righteous man living in exile in Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, who goes blind from bird droppings while sleeping in his garden. He sends his son Tobias on an errand to recover a debt, but the young man is diverted to an encounter with relatives whose daughter is being tormented by a jealous demon killing all her husbands on their respective wedding nights.

Tobias is accompanied by a disguised archangel, Raphael, and a wandering dog. Along the way they catch a fish whose gall will heal Tobit's blindness at the end of the story. They enter the house where Sarah lives, the afflicted daughter of Raguel and Edna, who desperately welcome Tobias as the potential eighth groom. Netflix has not discovered this tale yet, but it would make an engaging story for its charm, drama and characters.

It is a story filled with glimpses of culture, patriarchal marriage protocols, hospitality and beautiful prayers that couples today often use in their weddings. The happy ending for both Sarah and Tobit makes this ancient folk tale a model for faith and trust in God's providence.

For today's reflection, I recommend reading the Book of Tobit as your own adventure into the lively faith of its author and original audiences. If you read from a Catholic Bible, you will find this story among the Apocrypha.