

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

The Mystery of Marriage

Lately, more people I know are finding their marriages are in trouble. I have one friend whose wife has decided that the marriage just isn't working. She thinks they are too incompatible. The problem, she's told him, is unsolvable; she doesn't want to go into counseling, even for the sake of their three young children. She wants only to get out and get on with her life.

My friend is stunned. His faith is being sorely tested, and we've spent many hours together trying to pick over the remnants of his marriage, seeking some strands of hope.

Another friend, a woman who lives in Florida, is facing a very different crisis. Her husband has decided he wants to spend his life with someone else. She's tried to understand, tried to forgive, even tried briefly to reconcile with him. But it just didn't work. She wrote me and my wife an email explaining her problem and confessing that now, more than ever, she feels she needs God.

She's not Catholic. In fact, she hasn't been to church, any church, in a long time. But she wrote us that she just bought a new Bible, and a book, *Christianity for Dummies*. Did we have any advice?

It's difficult to understand someone else's marriage, especially one that has gone horribly wrong. It's like an episode of a TV murder mystery. You find yourself piecing together bits of evidence: You remember hard looks or exasperated sighs, and wonder if they were telltale clues of trouble. Marriage is not a science—though, certainly, alchemy is involved—but it is an art, and it is also a job, probably one of the most demanding jobs on earth. And—again—it is, above all, a mystery. It is comprised of two imperfect people, charting an uncertain course, into murky and constantly shifting waters.

Some can navigate the storms and currents, adjusting their sails through good seas and bad. Others, for whatever reason, can't. The marriage hits the rocks and sinks. And how that happens, or doesn't, is part of the mystery. I think the best and most successful marriages have one critical element, though: grace.

They carry a spark of the divine. It comes from prayer. Or it comes from knowing, from the deepest part of your heart, how to love. Or it comes perhaps from simply wanting to let grace into your life, and into your marriage, and seeking ways to welcome it. But I don't think you can be happily married without it. And I don't think you can find peace without it, either.

And that is why I suggested to my friend in Florida that she seek, somehow, ways to bring grace into her life. Find a church. Seek out a minister. Look for a community to pray with, and worship with, and laugh with, and cry with. I also suggested that she crack open the Psalms. There is nothing you are going through, I told her, that isn't in there. Anyone seeking closer kinship to Christ can find it by praying the Psalms, and praying with Him—and together beseeching The Father for help.

I don't know how either of these stories will end. They are unsolvable mysteries. But as we mark, once again, World Marriage Day, it's important to remember how precious marriage is, how mysterious it is—and how imperiled it is, too.

It takes two to make marriage work. But it also takes patience and practice—and, if nothing else, above all else, it takes prayer.

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