

Spiritual Ponderings about a WWME Weekend

Fr. Tom Pastorius

Father Tom Pastorius, associate pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Valley Park (the ninth largest parish in the St. Louis Archdiocese with 2,700 families,) participated in a Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend on August 11-13, 2006. The following column written by Fr. Pastorius, called "Spiritual Ponderings," appeared September 17th in the Sacred Heart church bulletin:

The second weekend of August I was able to participate in a Marriage Encounter weekend. Some of you might be asking, "Why would a priest go to a Marriage Encounter weekend?" There are a couple of reasons.

- First, I knew that Father Rosy was one of the presenters and I thought it would be a good opportunity to do something again with him. We all know keeping up friendships is hard work in today's busy world, so I look for things to do with friends.
- The second reason is that I know there is a deep relationship between all of the vocations. I know that I would not be a good priest, if I did not have the support and example of good married people in my life.
- The third reason is that from time to time, people come to me for counseling, and I wanted to see and experience Marriage Encounter before I recommend it, also with the hope of learning from it some secrets to pass on to married couples.

My Marriage Encounter experience was very valuable experience. As each couple left the room to discuss the given topic in the outline manner (I do not want to get too technical on things here because, I think Marriage Encounter needs to be experienced to fully understand the value of its manner), I talked to Father Rosy about the same issues with a slightly different spin on it.

The couples and Father Rosy really impressed me with their honesty and sincerity. The great spiritual writer, Henri Nouwen in many of his books talks about what the Christian minister brings to the table that professional doctors, psychologists, etc. do not; that is, him or herself – a radical honesty of who they are in the light of their faith. Each one of the presenters shared with us his or herself in such a way that you knew they wanted what was best for us, even if it meant personal embarrassment or recalling a past hurt. It was really spiritually uplifting.

The couples who attended the retreat seemed to move from a "what did I get myself into" spirit to a "this is really helping my marriage and I have not been this close to my spouse in years" spirit. It was quite uplifting to witness.

I would truly recommend going on a Marriage Encounter weekend for it will take a good marriage and make it a great marriage. It will help counteract some of the bad habits that we can fall into and inspire a person to renew his or her commitment to their marriage and family.