

Enrichment on Sacramental Love

By Gini Augustine

A mirror, even a small shard of reflecting glass, can bounce light into the darkest corners of a room. The darkness is pierced by the light, and that which was invisible is made known.

With an all-encompassing sense of wonder and awe, the presenters at a recent enrichment began to shine that mirror into the darker corners of a topic that is generally left alone. In the words of a popular 1990s rock song they basically said, "Let's Talk About Sex!"

Arriving in Salina for a Marriage Enrichment session in early June, two presenting couples and a priest offered their insight and humor to this very timely subject. Fr. Paul Oborny, recently retired and living in Wichita; Bob and Jane Adams of Wyoming; and Clark and Amy Schafer of Wichita met with about 30 married couples for a deeper look at the spiritual dimension of married love.



Bob & Jane Adams and Fr. Paul Oborny



Clark & Amy Schafer and Fr. Paul Oborny

This enrichment was open to all those married couples who have been "encountered" in some way, either through Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Retrouvaille or Engaged Encounter. Couples attending came from Wyoming and from a goodly portion of Kansas

as well. Kansas couples journeyed from the Kansas City area, from Garden City, western Kansas, the Salina area, and the Wichita area to attend.

Basing their presentation on a theme that is “causing such a stir,” as Jane said, they spoke about something known as “The Theology of the Body.” This topic was first presented by Pope John Paul II in a series of 129 short weekly talks from 1979 to 1984. By the very depth of his intelligence, however, the pope’s talks were not easily understood and assimilated by the general public. Only in recent years have others refined the writings to bring them down to a level that most people could comprehend. This topic is catching people’s attention nationwide.

Focusing on ideas from the Christopher West book, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, the presenters began to illuminate the key points. These ideas are “totally scripture based,” Jane commented, “but they are a new way of understanding those scriptures—a way of choosing to love the way God loves.” The importance of marriage is underscored throughout the Bible, she noted, from the first man and woman in Genesis to the understanding of Christ united with his church in the book of Revelation.

In various ways, the presenters shared passages and themes from the Bible and from Church teachings, comparing Christ’s desire to be one with humanity to the way a person desires true union with a beloved spouse. They emphasized the vast difference between what society portrays as “love” and the Catholic view of “love.”

To illustrate the difference, Clark noted that television, music and internet programs are saturated with sexual themes. “Hooking up” is viewed as the acceptable norm, with people engaging in casual sex with no commitments whatsoever. A self-centered “disposable view of marriage” is constantly promoted. When he began to truly understand the Church’s teachings, however, he was able to view sex as a “gift of self, leading to extraordinary...peacefulness” within.

Fr. Oborny put it in a different way. Referring to the church’s teaching on marriage as a sacrament, a pure sign of God’s love for his people, Fr. Oborny noted that people today are fooling themselves into believing that real love could be so shallow and self-centered. It’s a lot like driving a car with four flat tires and thinking that’s normal, he said. They aren’t even aware of how good it could really be.

“This gives us new hope for our kids and for future generations, because of what we have learned,” Clark noted. “We need to help them learn that the gift of love mirrors the image of the Trinity.”

In a Catholic wedding, the couple never actually says, “I do.” Instead, they make sacred promises one to the other, saying that they have come to this moment freely and they now offer themselves completely to one another. They declare their unlimited faithfulness to one another and their desire to live fruitfully as God himself deems right and good. They are saying that their love is unconditional, that they are prepared to accept this sacrament and to become a “mystical sign,” added Fr. Oborny. “It’s not so much that you receive a sacrament as you become a sacrament,” Fr. added. “You are consecrated into something new.”

Amy agreed, noting that a couple's decision to love faithfully can be compared to God's covenant with his people. "Being faithful has to mean choosing to love and remaining true to everything we promised to each other on our wedding day, no matter what," she said.

Throughout the day's session, presenters continued to provide a variety of personal reflections and comparisons to help the couples begin to understand the Theology of the Body. They admitted that they were both intrigued and somewhat bewildered when they first began their study about this deeper, richer meaning of married love. Still, they chose to continue. As they studied, their enthusiasm began to grow. They knew they absolutely must share this deeper understanding with others as well.



The Group

"It's exciting and powerful," Bob said. "It's like trying to take a drink out of a fire hose. We're learning that marriage is a wonderful adventure that feeds both of us so we can [go out and] feed the world."

"It's like catching a glimpse of the Grand Canyon," Fr. Oborny noted. "It just makes you want more."



Small Group Sharing