

Homily - 7th Sunday Ordinary Time

Janet Paone is an actress in the Twin Cities. I met Janet in the summer of 2007 when she was playing the part of Golda in a production of *Fiddler on the Roof* - a show in which one of my sons was also appearing. Janet is an excellent actress, in fact she was one of the original Church Basement Ladies in the popular show of the same name. Because she is such an accomplished actress, her audiences do not realize that Janet is legally blind. Not only is she legally blind but at the time of this production, 4 1/2 years ago, her health was failing and she was badly in need of a kidney transplant.

John Vaughn, the actor who played the lead role of Tevye in the production, did not know Janet, or any of the cast, when the show began rehearsals. One evening, after rehearsal, he asked Janet how she was doing and she offhandedly commented, "Oh, I'm okay. I'm hanging in there, but I need a kidney." John asked her what was going on. When she told him, he replied, "Well you can have one of my kidneys." Janet passed this off as just a casual remark, but John persisted. In the next few days, he contacted her clinic and arranged for preliminary tests. The test results showed him to be a potential donor, although, further testing would be needed to determine whether he was actually a match for Janet. Then, in early August, the show ended, and the two of them went their separate ways.

Four months later, Janet's regular check-up indicated that she had reached a crisis point and would have to start dialysis immediately. By then, she had been on a transplant waiting list for nearly 2 years. Ironically, the very next day, Janet heard from John - for the first time since the show had closed. He called to tell her that he had finally been able to schedule the battery of tests needed to determine whether he might be a possible match for her. When he asked how she was doing, she told him the latest developments, and then in jest asked, "Is that kidney still available?"

The further battery of tests proved that John was a successful match, and on November 27, 2007 (less than 6 months from the time they had met) Janet received John's gift of a kidney. Janet said, "Everything just lined up so perfectly, it was completely in the hands of God." John's gift was the miracle that Janet had been waiting for. It gave her new life. John told her, that in return, the true gift she could give him was her good health.

Miracles still happen, though we may not always recognize them as the miracles they are. This modern day miracle reminds me of today's gospel. The paralyzed man who needed a miracle to be cured and believed that Jesus could make it happen. His friends who were willing to go to any lengths, including ripping up someone else's roof, to get him to the healer. And the faith they all had that Jesus would heal him.

This gospel has a message for each of us today. In one way or another, we all suffer from some sort of paralysis that imprisons us and keeps us from reaching our God-given potential. Deep in our hearts we each have some need for healing – be it in our relationships, in our families, in our work places, or in our marriages. A few of us could even use a modern day miracle

Today, we mark World Marriage Sunday, as we do each year in Mid-February. A few years ago, the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops established a marriage initiative to affirm the sacrament of marriage, and if you read last week's diocesan newspaper *The Witness* you would know that a marriage initiative has been launched in the Dubuque Diocese. Improving and supporting the marriages of their people has become an important priority for the bishops.

This weekend, in which we affirm marriage, is also the last weekend before Lent begins. We all know that Lent is a time for fasting, almsgiving and prayer. As such it is also a time for change - a time to rejuvenate and be reborn, a time to shed our sinful nature and burst out of our restrictive cocoons. It is an opportune time to zero in on improving ourselves and our relationships. Only a few minutes each day and a slight shift in our attitude and focus could create the miracle that is needed to bring the real change God wants in our lives.

Since we are focusing on marriage today and looking ahead to Lent, those of us who are married might want to make our marriage our Lenten focus. If you are married, consider one of these few suggestions for your Lenten journey:

- 1. Take Time for one another.** Unfortunately, many marriages get only left-over time - after jobs, kids, friends, activities, meetings, you-name-it. A marriage deserves prime-time. Change your priorities for the next 6 weeks – regularly fast from doing something for yourself, or with another, and spend that time with your partner. Give your marriage prime-time, quality-time instead of left-over time this Lent.
- 2. Don't try to change or remake your spouse** - as tempting as that may be. Remember that's God's job. The only person I can change is myself. So transform yourself not your spouse. Give your spouse a better you.
- 3. If you don't already, pray with your spouse each day.** Thank God each day for something that you appreciate about your spouse or are thankful for in your marriage.
- 4. Do something to enrich your marriage.** If you need ideas, check out the USCCB website foryourmarriage.org. - details are in today's bulletin.

5. Remember the power of touch. Hug and kiss your spouse every day.

Unfortunately, we, tend to fall into such a routine that we, sometimes, are more like ships passing in the night than loving partners.

6. Tell your spouse that you love him/her every day. Don't assume that he/she knows it. (Your spouse wants to hear the words.)

A few years ago, I was leading a communion service at a local care center. As I remember, the gospel reading had something to do with love and I used that theme in my homily. There was an elderly couple in attendance. She had suffered a stroke, and he lovingly pushed her wheelchair into the chapel each week for the communion service. At the end of the service, he came up to me with tears in his eyes and said that in their 60 years of marriage, he had never let a day go by without telling his wife that he loved her and she had done the same. What a powerful witness. Although, they have both passed on, they continue to be an inspiration and a challenge to me. Since then, I make sure that I never let a day go by without telling my wife (Kay) that I love her.

7. Finally, as a couple - reach out and do something for someone else. Love gets stale if it's hoarded. Love is meant to be shared.

Christ's Church is a community of believers called to many different vocations. Each of us is called to a particular vocation, but we do not live that vocation in isolation. The vocation of marriage is not just for the married couples in the community but for the entire community. Their love, service and witness have a powerful impact on all whom they encounter- be it their children, their extended families, their friends, their neighbors, their fellow workers. We all gain from the way they live their vocation. (Marriage is not a private endeavor.)

In her book *A Theology of Christian Marriage* theologian Julie Hanlon Rubio says: Married love crystallizes the love of the larger church community. Married couples must be strong, because the community needs their strength. They must persevere in love, because the community needs to see God's love actualized among His people.

Perhaps the real miracle for the community is that the love of the married couples in the community mirrors Christ's love for His Church. In the way that they live out their love, we are given a glimpse of Christ's love.

Deacon Gary Aitchison
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