

A Couple's Treasure

By John Bosio

Years ago, having trained as marriage and family therapist, I spent many hours each day meeting with couples in my office. The couples brought to me their daily struggles and problems and expected my help.

One day, after a full schedule of appointments I felt drained and tired. In my daydreaming a strange image came to mind. I saw couples entering my office carrying heavy sacks of garbage. They sat down and placed the sacks in front of me explaining that they had lost something precious in their garbage and they blamed each other for it: “She does not respect me.” “He does not listen to me.” “I cannot trust him.” “She cares more for the children than for me.” With the smelly trash scattered on the floor of my office they would plead: “Please dig with us through this mess and help us find our lost treasure.”

As I stepped back from my daydreaming I realized that what all the couples wanted was my help finding something very precious and important, which they had lost: their treasure.

In my work with couples I have learned that every couple's marital relationship is their treasure. From this treasure spouses draw the energy to meet their emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual needs. Happy spouses are those who recognize the importance of their relationship, they nurture it and protect it like they protect the most valuable possession they have.

When spouses are sidetracked and care more about other interests than their treasure their marriage stops meeting their needs. They experience discontentment; disagreements turn into painful battles, resentments builds, and the emotional garbage begins to mount to

the point that the couple loses sight of the treasure they possess together. Then, all they feel is the stench of the rubbish they have created. Their treasure is buried and lost under the garbage.

The fact is that even the happy couples have their rubbish, just like every household has its trash. But successful couples learn to intentionally manage their garbage.

The secret to marital happiness is keeping one's treasure shining; keeping the marital connection strong. When the relationship is strong it meets our needs, and we feel secure in the marriage. Then, our disagreements, disappointments, hurts, and conflicts become manageable. Our differences can be resolved because our intimate connection gives us the courage to risk being vulnerable with our spouse. We can admit our faults, share disappointments, and ask forgiveness because we know that our spouse will not turn away from us.

What should a couple do to keep their treasure shining? Where should you start? There is much advice on what to do in self-help books. Unfortunately too few of them get to the core of what truly helps us: our Christian faith. To keep your eyes on the treasure requires courage; the courage to be the best you can be for your spouse. It demands the courage to live the Christian life style and to become the sacrament of Christ's love to your spouse. Our faith provides the guidance and the motivation. Prayer opens you to let God's graces transform you. Grace gives you the strength to care for your marriage and not let your relationship's garbage pile up. God's grace helps you change your habits or start new ones. Start the habit of attending Mass regularly, praying together, and making time for each other. For example, go on a date with your spouse regularly. I know that you have many obligations to your children, to your friends, and to work, and you are often tempted to think

that making time for each other can always wait for another day. If you want to be happy your first priority must be to nurture your love for your spouse. Ask God for his help and pay attention to your spouse; to what he/she needs from you.

Reflection: Are you aware that your relationship is your treasure? What are you willing to do to strengthen your intimate connection with your spouse, and make your treasure shine?