

Anniversary Waltz

In recent months, I have participated in and celebrated milestone wedding anniversaries. One was a 50th wedding anniversary; another was a 40th and the third was a 25th. Two of them were in a church setting; the other was in a home setting.

The 50th was a grand affair with tux and tails and a wedding dress on display that survived both Hurricane Camille and Hurricane Katrina. I noticed that the mature bride could still fit into it if needed. The celebration included most of the attendants from the original wedding setting. They partied afterwards with family, friends and community.

The 25th was also in a church setting which included a Mass complete with altar server nephews. Both celebrations included renewal of vows. The years of maturity masked any nervousness on the part of the brides and grooms.

The 40th wedding anniversary celebration took place on a Sunday evening in Ireland in the couple's home. It also included a Mass which I celebrated in a crammed living room with over forty family and neighbors spilling into adjoining rooms. Not knowing the couple led to some trepidation. The only connection with the couple was that one of my uncles used to be their neighbor.

What made this 40th celebration more poignant was that the bride had just survived a cancer scare a year ago. The couple felt that, given such an experience, they would use the Mass as an opportunity to thank God for her recovery as well as celebrate their friendship and love during the past forty years.

Following the Mass, I asked the couple some questions and invited them to share their experiences of how they met, how long they dated and how the groom finally approached the bride's father for her hand in marriage. Amid all their sharing, they indicated that they became friends long before they married and then continued as best friends during their married life.

The groom mentioned that they recently attended a wedding of a young couple. During the speeches, he noted that the father of the groom gave some sound advice to his son, the groom. The father said, "When you are wrong, admit it and when you are right, keep quiet."

Sometimes, in flipping through the cable channels on television, I pause on the show "Bridezillas." I am amazed at the arrogance, ignorance, stupidity, utter selfishness of the brides who act in such a grossly ignorant way. Even if the reaction might be hyped up a little for the dramatics of television, I pity the husbands to be and wonder what kind of marriage will ensue from such a charade.

My hope is that, in preparing couples for marriage, I do not meet any Bridezilla because I may be helping the couple file for an annulment some time later.

When I think of couples who are married a long time, I notice how much they have grown together, rather than grown apart. I often hear such couples say to each other: "You know, I was thinking the same thing myself" or "You took the words out of my mouth." So often, their silence speak volumes in ways that words could not express it. As I watch them shopping or strolling down the street, the non-verbals: the loving glances, the shoulder leaning, the hand holding, the measure pace speak volumes of a couple who have promised to love each other for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health until death separate their love. I notice that even when a spouse dies, the remaining one still speaks of the relationship as if they were still living.

As priests, we prepare hundreds of couples for marriage. Often, we wonder if a particular marriage will last, given that around 50% of marriages today end in divorce. Sometimes, the ones, we think will not make it, will surprise us and make it. The ones, we think will make it, will surprise us and divorce. Maybe, it proves that relationships are a mystery rather than a guessing game and those who survive continue to be mysterious.