

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

February 7, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

21 Undeniable Secrets of Marriage

“Your decision to marry will almost certainly be the most significant and influential decision of your life.” – Dr. Allen Hunt. Last fall I received a collection of five books from Dynamic Catholic as a sort of free sampler pack. Among these books was one by Dr. Allen Hunt on forgiveness. I found it to be truly inspiring and yet practical so I quickly searched out other books by Dr. Allen Hunt. I came across The 21 Undeniable Secrets of Marriage and quickly began reading it. Dr. Allen Hunt a former pastor of a Protestant mega-church, who is now Catholic, has been happily married to his wife Anita through the many changes in his life. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my commentary will be in regular font.

01. The Secret of Purpose: If you’re going to be married, you have to know where you’re going.

“Blessed is the couple who understands their marriage as a pathway to heaven.”

The Catholic Church teaches us that every human beings ultimate goal is unity with the Blessed Trinity. When I try to visualize this I find myself of being caught up in a sort of whirlwind of love. At every moment of my existence in heaven I am receiving so much love that my mortal body could not hold it and at the same time I am giving others so much love that if I was not constantly being filled up that I would go empty. In marriage husband and wives are suppose to give all that they have to their spouse (and family) to they have nothing left and in return they are to be filled up with love from their spouse (and family). By practicing this everyday couples prepare themselves to spend eternity doing the same.

02. The Secret of Sacrament: God shows up in the vows. Every day.

That’s the only word to describe it: mystery. What other word could possibly describe what it’s like to merge two people into one, to combine two lives into a single whole? Each marriage takes on a life and a character al its own, totally unique to that relationship. That is a mystery. And that is a sacrament.

It all comes down to attitude. When I was in high school I remember telling my aunt that I had to work on the fourth of July and she quickly informed me that “I got to work”. She reminded me that there were many people who desired to have a job and could not get one. From that day on, I looked at my job in a new and totally different light. Work went from being something I had to do to being something I got to do. We can look at married life as an obligation. I am stuck as a part of this family or I cannot wait until I can get away from all these people or I can see family and if I am married my spouse as a gift from God. Catholics do not believe that you can choose just anyone and marry them and live happily ever after. We believe that you need to find the one person God created to be your spouse. If you are married enjoy being married. If your marriage is in trouble then rejoice that you have an opportunity to fix it.

God will give you the grace, strength, and might necessary to live out your marriage vows during good times and in bad and in sickness and in health. When God gives us a task (like being God’s image in the world) He gives everyone the grace necessary to do so. He gave Moses the grace to lead His people out of slavery, Joshua the grace to lead the Israelites into the Promise Land, Blessed Virgin Mary to be the Mother of God, and St. Paul to proclaim His Gospel to the Gentiles.

03. The Secret of Synergy: in marital math, one is greater than two.

Coaches inspire their players with words about how the whole of the team is greater than just adding up of the talents of the individual team members. That’s why championship teams rarely consist of the most all-stars. Championship teams merge the talents of the teammates in a mysterious way so that the team is greater than the parts that make it up. Business executives attest to the same thing. The synergy of parts working together is much more effective than a bunch of great people each working on their own.

There is nothing I love more than to be on a well successful team but there is nothing I hate more than being on a dysfunctional team. One of the key aspects for me in all my relationships is the need to remind myself and others that we are on the same team. I would think that this is ten times more important in marriage than in any other relationship. God really wants what is best for each of us. It is pride, envy, lust, etc. that turns us into each other’s top rivals instead of allowing us to live in the freedom of being sons and daughters of God. The married couples that inspire me the most are the couples who don’t point out each other’s faults but the husband simply fills in the gap that the wife leaves behind and the wife fills in the gaps that husband leaves behind.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

February 14, 2015

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I always start off reading books about marriage in order to improve my marriage preparation programs and marital counseling skills but I always learn so much about relationships in general. This was once again true as I read Dr. Allen Hunt's book: The 21 Undeniable Secrets of Marriage. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my commentary will be in regular font.

04. The Secret of Bedrock: for a marriage to work it is important to share everything, including the deepest values in your heart.

“What is the secret of bedrock? Prayer. Prayer that leads to a spiritual life together as a couple. A spiritual life together than will give you the same values and convictions in your heart so that the two of you are driving your relationship in the same direction at the same time in all settings. A deep melding will bind you together as a couple, and that bond will sustain you in ways you can never anticipate at the beginning. You shared spiritual life will serve as the mortar between the bricks of your home, pulling all the various parts together and holding them together as a unified whole.

The following is the Prayer Process that Dynamic Catholics suggests:

- 1). Gratitude: Begin by thanking God in a personal dialogue for whatever you are most grateful for today.**
- 2). Awareness: Revisit the times in the past twenty-four hours when you were and were not the best-version-of-yourself. Talk to God about these situations and ask him to give you the gift of greater awareness when similar situation arise in the future.**
- 3). Significant Moments: Identify something that you experienced today and explore what God might be trying to say to you through that event.**
- 4). Peace: As God to forgive you for any wrong you have committed (against yourself, another person, or Him) and to fill you with a deep and abiding peace.**
- 5). Freedom: Talk to God about how He is inviting you to change your life so that you can experience the freedom that comes from knowing that who you are, where you are, and what you are doing make sense. Is He inviting you to rethink the ways you do things? Is God asking you to let go of something or someone? Is He asking you to hold on to something or someone?**
- 6). Pray For Others: Pray for those who you feel called to pray for today, and those who have asked you to pray for them recently. Take a moment and pray for these people by name, asking God to bless and guide them.**
- 7). Finish by praying the Our Father.**

I can only imagine how strong a relationship would become if people felt free to pray the previous method out loud knowing that the person with them was going to respect and treasure the experience of watching the other pray.

Couple Prayer Method

The best method I have found for praying with your spouse is as follows. Step 1: Husband prays “Dear God I thank you for my wife (insert name) because (name two or three qualities that you appreciate). Help me become a better husband by (name two or three things/areas of your life that you need to improve). Step 2: Wife prays “Dear God I thank you for my husband (insert name) because (name two or three qualities that you appreciate). Help be become a better wife by (name two or three things/areas of your life that you need to improve). Step 3 (Optional) Thank God for each child making sure to give a reason why you are grateful. Step 4: end by praying the Our Father together. Praying this way helps spouses know that they are loved and appreciated and that their spouse is still striving to be a better person.

05. Marriage is a garden, not a fruit stand. You have to tend it.

They (marital researchers) look for a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions. A 5:1 ratio as the couple relates to one another. Positive interactions include simple things such as a smile, a touch on the arm, looking directly into your

partner's eyes, paying attention to what he or she says, saying thank you, sharing a quick hug or a giggle. Negative interactions include rolling the eyes, turning a cold shoulder, a dismissive harrumph, a mocking chuckle, or failing to listen to or acknowledge what your spouse is saying.

It is easy to create negative situations. Positive situations are much harder to create. It requires thought to be thoughtful.

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February 21, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

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Let us continue looking at Dr. Allen Hunt's book: The 21 Undeniable Secrets of Marriage to discover insights not only into marriage but into relationships in general. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my commentary will be in regular font.

06. The Secret of the Love Bank: If you want more love, you have to give it away.

Every person has a love bank inside the heart, one that can either be filled with love or be left bankrupt and empty. And we all yearn for our love banks to be filled to capacity. This is the secret of the love bank.

One of the great mysteries in my life is that I cannot understand people who treat others as junk and then cannot understand why no one wants to be around them. I have seen people yell and scream at another person and then wonder why the other person does not want to spend any time with them. Some people I guess fear change more than being lonely.

For marriages, and even for your life, the application of this rule is simple: If you want more of something give it away. If you want more love in your life, give more love away. If you want more joy, give away more joy. And it is especially true in marriage.

Do you want to be surrounded by other happy people? Then be happy yourself. Mother Teresa said that "Peace begins with a smile" and "Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless."

07. The Secret of Romance: Songs of Songs is there for a reason.

God desires to be the lover of your soul. And Song of Songs makes that abundantly clear. In this little book of the Bible you will discover the secret of romance.

I believe that this secret can be broken down in two. The first is don't expect from your spouse what only God can give. You spouse can help direct you toward your ultimate end but in of itself your spouse cannot be your ultimate end because that is God. The second is if you want to know what true love is look to Jesus as your role model. Romance is not so much about giving someone fine jewelry as it about forgiving. Romance is not so much about have a lot of possessions but rather about loving each person that comes into our lives as a gift from God.

As God loves you and me as His spouses, in the same way, a man loves a woman with delight. God's love gives the model for romance, selfless, sacrificial, and generous. Extravagant love!

08. The Secret of the Best Friend: Don't marry someone you can live with; marry someone you can't live without. What does it mean? It means your marriage has its best shot if you marry your best friend.

Over time, this settling in is when authentic love either takes root or dies. At that moment, when the sizzle has subsided every couple will make a decision to invest or to divest. To step in or step out. Each spouse will choose: Will I learn to love this person in way deeper than emotional, heart pumping star dreaming, or will I go in search of another two-year sizzle with someone else? If the answer is yes to a deeper love, the marriage and relationship will grow to a new level and increase its chances at thriving. If the answer is no, it will die a quick or sometimes slow and agonizing death. One or both partners quickening experience with someone else. They will have made the mistake of confusing lust for love. -

Struggles and difficulties do not mean anything is going bad in a relationship. In prayer there are times of consolation (when we feel God's presence) and there are times of desolation (when it feels like God is absent). St. Ignatius's beautiful insight in his rules of discernment is that God is speaking/teaching/nurturing in times of desolation as much as God is speaking in times of consolation. Marriages and relationships can grow just as much in bad times as they do in good times. Flowers grow possibly more in the rain than they do in the sunlight.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

February 28, 2015

Spiritual Ponderings

21 Undeniable Secrets of Marriage

Let us continue looking at Dr. Allen Hunt's book: *The 21 Undeniable Secrets of Marriage* to discover insights not only into marriage but into relationships in general. Quotes from his book will be in bold and my commentary will be in regular font.

09. The Secret of Ages and Stages: The only constant in your marriage will be the two of you and the fact you are changing as people and as a couple.

The fact remains that you and your spouse will change over time, and that process requires attention. The goal is to share experiences and change together. But reality teaches that this is not easy.

There are two factors that bring about change in marriage. The first is time. Time changes us as we get older and have more experiences and have the chance to develop greater illnesses etc. The second should be our desire to become a better person. I hope that I am a better priest now than on the day of my ordination. Sometimes the second thing that changes us is complacency. We stop trying to get better and we start developing bad habits.

Change is hard. When the grace of God is involved in that change, the process becomes even more difficult. Flannery O'Connor's wise words ring true: "All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and change is painful."

Being treated for depression in high school, college, and even as an adult was hard for me because I had to admit that I had not figured everything out and that I needed help. There was a giant part of me that wanted to avoid dealing with those issues. I chose to deal with those issues because I wanted to be the best person that I could be for my family (and the people of God that I wanted to serve). Learning to live a new way of life was hard but it was worth it.

Patience enables you to endure change. In fact, it allows you to thrive through change because you know that your spouse is always changing and your relationship is always evolving. The ages and stages of marriage become something you anticipate rather than dread. Patience helps you look eagerly ahead to what God will do next than resenting that your spouse has added a few pounds here and there or no longer likes to go camping like she used to.

10. The Secret of the Bed: If being together bothers you, your marriage has entered the danger zone.

Nearly one in four American married couples no longer share a bed. Home builders report a growing increase in requests for separate master bedroom suites and expect such requests eventually to become the norm for new homes. Sometimes that is for health reasons such as sleep apnea, snoring, or restless legs.

I think the wisdom behind this secret is that married couples have to seize every moment of togetherness they can even if it is while one is asleep. If one cannot share one's bed with their spouse or you are trying to strengthen another relationship other than that with your spouse look for other ways to spend ordinary time with that person. Go shopping together, ride along in the car with them as they run errands, or watch them play a sport. Spend time together.

11. The Secret of Priorities: Every marriage will face a turning point.

Life is about priorities. Love is about priorities. And a marriage thrives when it embraces the secret of priorities. Show me your calendar or phone and I'll show you your priorities. When you make time for something, it becomes

your priority. Where you invest your time is where you are investing yourself. Show me your bank statement and I'll show you your priorities. When you spend money or give money, your heart becomes attached and that project or item become a priority.

Here is a moment of honesty and vulnerability to me. Do you know what hurts me the most? When someone who I consider a good friend does not take time to even call or when I throw a party and invite friends and people don't show. I can only imagine how damaging this is in a marriage or other important relationship. I talk to my mother every day for ten to fifteen minutes. This is a priority for me because I love her. I have lost contact with other friends because I did not make them a priority and we have lost touch over the years.

