

Ram's Horn

Marriage Retorno Newsletter
April 2010 Vol. 122

*Strengthening Marriages
Through Scriptural Prayer*



**Journey Together
To God**

Greetings!

In this issue of the *Ram's Horn*, you will find:

1. [Letter from our National Team couple, Tony and Marianne Hartman](#)
2. [Lent, Spring, and Easter Reflections by Rev. Mel Hemann](#)
3. [MR Conference Fall 2009 Presentation from Ben and Gladys Whitehouse](#)

Special Notes: The 2010 Marriage Retorno Conference will be November 5th – 7th at the St. Francis House of Prayer in Stoneville, North Carolina. Mark your calendar now!

1. Letter from our National Team couple, Tony and Marianne Hartman

Dear Marriage Retorno Family,

After a very long and cold winter it was a joy to see the jonquils and tulips coming into new life. It is the same feeling of expectation we felt as we came to the end of Holy Week and knew that again we would celebrate Christ's resurrection and the new life He died to give us. Easter gives us so much hope for the future.

In our last issue Joe and Mary Ward shared the talk they had given at our National Conference last October – "Marriage Emulates the Relationship of Christ and the Church." In this issue Ben and Gladys Whitehouse have shared their talk: "The Analogy Expanded – Marriage and the Law". They too focused on Paul's writings and then made it their own. Hopefully you will find that these talks really make the scriptures come alive.

This is a great year for us! We celebrated our 50th anniversary on Feb.27, 2010 but will have a family celebration in Maine in June. The Lord has blessed us in so many ways over the years and we consider the gift of Marriage Return God's call to us to really know Him and make Him an integral part of our relationship. Each one of you has made His presence even more real in our lives.

In mid-May we are off to Poland and Germany with 40 pilgrims from the Knoxville diocese, as well as our Bishop Richard Stika. We will be following the footsteps of Pope John Paul II as well as visiting Blessed Mother Faustina's convent. We will end our trip seeing the Passion Play in Oberammergau. You will be remembered in our prayers in every holy place.

We have just completed the third of the four year "RENEW" program of "Why Catholic?" in our parish. It leads us through the entire Catechism of the Catholic Church in a series of six week gatherings of small groups in the fall and spring. We are especially looking forward to next fall when we will focus on "Prayer". Tony and I will definitely share our experiences of couple prayer with our groups. If it is offered in your area we highly recommend you take advantage of this wonderful opportunity.

We are looking forward to our National Marriage Return Conference the weekend of November 5-7, 2010 in Stoneville, North Carolina. Please mark your calendars and more detailed information will be in our summer issue and also on our web site.

In Christ's love,

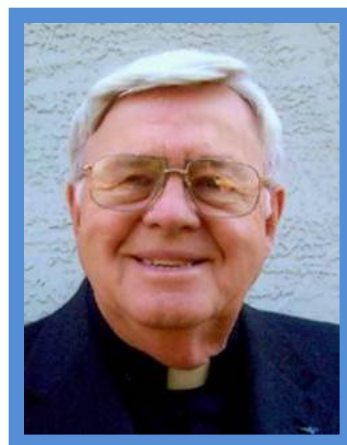
Marianne and Tony Hartman

2. *Lent and Spring Easter Reflections by Fr. Mel Hemann*

Lent, Spring, and Easter Reflections

It seems to me our society is rapidly reaching an all time low in civility, courtesy and good old fashioned common sense. I can't recall a time that lies, slander, gossip and mean spiritedness have reached the disgusting level that pervades our air waves and all manner of gossip we are exposed to. It does make one wonder what has become of the sense of well being and acknowledgement that we are all God's children.

As I think back over the past few decades it seems our campaigning politicians insist on promising all that will make us happy at no cost to ourselves. These enticements are basically the same promises Jesus heard in the desert when tempted by the devil: If you but listen and follow me you will have all power, wealth and undreamed of earthly pleasure. Today here in Iowa, one of our former governors has decided to



run again and is promising 200,000 jobs. When have we heard that one before? Do they actually believe they have that kind of power? Last summer one of our senators at a rally about health insurance was asked if he would back a policy that would give all Americans the same coverage he enjoys as one of our elected officials. He honestly said he had no idea what his coverage was. Fortunately a woman in the crowd knew and enlightened him and every one in attendance what their perks are for the rest of their lives. He was astounded and when asked what he thought the solution might be he said, "Get a government job or one with John Deere." The next day John Deere announced that 530 people were taking an early retirement buy out and an additional 700 were being laid off. A couple days later, John Deere announced they were building a new plant in Russia. These are a couple local examples of promises which are undoubtedly made in good faith, but deep down inside we all know words alone cannot do the impossible.

Our Scripture readings these past few weeks have given us many examples of Jesus' counter cultural but honest and loving concern for the underdog, the down trodden. For example, the woman caught in adultery and the woman at the well experienced unconditional love. The people involved in the whole Holy Week scenarios from the Palm Sunday kingly acclamations to the denials, inattention and cowardly reactions to our Lord's final hours. Jesus' response to all of this is summed up in his final words. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

In Penance services this Lent, I have suggested as a penance that he/she say a prayer each day till Easter, and hopefully after that, asking God to touch the hearts of people. In accepting that grace we might once again see the good in everyone just as God does. My thinking was that maybe if we assumed some personal responsibility in bettering our human community we might once again appreciate how valuable and important each of us is in God's sight. If I can appreciate my own goodness then I can look at others and come to the conclusion they are also OK. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could experience that in Washington and other places of leadership? It won't create new jobs or costs trillions of dollars but once we respect and love one another a sense of justice, love, and peace will follow. It seems that idea, that dream, has been expressed in the past. Maybe it's time to try again. This is certainly an idea that should be at the center of couples committed to couple prayer.

I was thrilled to receive an email from the Hartmans asking that we pray the rosary daily for that same intention.

At the conclusion of the Good Friday liturgy we prayed:

*"Lord,
send down your abundant blessing upon your people
who have devoutly recalled the death of your Son
in the sure hope of the resurrection.
Grant them pardon;
bring them comfort.
May their faith grow stronger
and their eternal salvation be assured.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen"*

The Analogy Expanded – Marriage and the Law

Ben

The year of Paul was an exciting one for me. It was very helpful to work at getting in touch with one of the Lions of our Church and the teachings that he brought forward as he attempted to follow Jesus' example of explaining all that has happened to those that followed the travelers on the road to Emmaus. I picture Paul, like President Obama today with health care, traveling and writing to answer the many questions and misunderstandings of this very complex mystery: What am I to make of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

I am certainly not even close to understanding the context and meaning of scripture so I really can only speak to my emotional response to the Word of God. So here is my best shot.

An important aspect of the Jewish faith was the Law that God laid out for Moses in His covenant with His people. This aspect of God's Law with the multitude of human interpretations and traditions was the basis for how the people of Yahweh lived out their faith on a daily basis. However, in Jesus, the Son of God, we see a new way of looking at the Law. Jesus seems to look at the Law of Moses and the traditions of the faithful with a new set of eyes (healing on the Sabbath, picking corn to eat, etc) and when pressed about the Law or Commandments he says there are really only two: to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. And when Jesus wanted to make this point, He and later Paul refer to marriage as a clear and relatable example. So when Paul speaks of the Law in Romans Chapter 7 and 1 Corinthians Chapter 7, I believe he is calling us to live the Law of God as lived in Jesus Christ, which we try to live out in our marriage:

- To love each other as we love our self
- To live out the death and resurrection of Jesus each and every day

Gladys

In the reading from Romans 7:1-6, Paul uses the analogy of marriage to demonstrate that, just as through death, we are set free from the covenant to our spouse and free to marry another, so also do we have a new freedom from the old laws through the death and resurrection of Christ. This is a freedom from the bondage to the Jewish law so that we may belong to Jesus and be productive in the service of God. In the reading from 1 Corinthians 7: 1-16, he instructs the new Christians to be faithful to their spouses and not allow their zealotry to be an occasion of sin. It is from this passage that the Pauline Privilege of an annulment is found.

Although Paul does not have a favorable reputation when it comes to marriage, these two passages shed a new light for us on Paul's view of marriage. He tells the new converts to Christianity that they are not living celibate lives if they are already married, but to be faithful to one another, and use the gifts that God has given to them. Rather than changing their state in life, he encourages them to answer God's call where it finds them – either married or single. Paul taught that through baptism, we become a new creation, free from the power of sin and death. In Paul's writings, we are encouraged to love one another by offering our life just as Jesus did on the cross. Paul tells us that we women do not have authority over our bodies, and neither do our husbands have authority over theirs. We are all to live and offer ourselves for the good of the other. What a powerful statement that is!

So how does Paul's interpretation of Christ's teachings help us to live our sacrament of marriage?

Ben

When we were first married, it was really easy for me to follow the laws and traditions of marriage as I understood them. To be the primary provider for Gladys and our family, to do all the manly chores, and of course be faithful to Gladys and our marriage. But I had little understanding of what it meant to give my self completely to another or to experience our own death and resurrection in our marriage. Like each of you, it was an awakening born from Marriage Encounter, Cursillo, and of course Marriage Retorno.

The Law that we have been called to follow in marriage is reflective of Jesus' commandment to move beyond rules and traditions to the deeper love that Jesus feels for His church which we experience each day in our sacrament.

Gladys

Although we find in Paul's letters the basis for the church's teaching on homosexuality, for Ben and me, his words also have helped us gain a better understanding of God's divine mercy and compassion. Many of you know that we are the parents of a daughter who also happens to be a lesbian. It took us years to fully come to accept this part of her. Now we can thank God for the gift she has been and will continue to be in our lives. She lives in a committed relationship, which has been blessed by The Disciples of Christ Church. She and Sara have adopted a little boy; almost 3 now who was in foster care and has several developmental delays. Although we don't understand it all, we know we have been called by God to accept and continue loving her and her family, putting aside judgments and condemnations. Trust us when we say it has not been an easy journey for us. Nonetheless, it has been one blessed by God and has strengthened our marriage.

Ben

Now in our sixties, our lives are not too dramatic these days so this plays out for us in the little everyday ways that we love each other and experience our dying and resurrection. Recently, when I had my eye removed, Gladys willingly sacrificed each day to be with me and make sure I was well taken care of. Even doing some things she would rather not have such as putting the temporary cover back into my eye when it came out. So while I was going thru a low point and rediscovering how I would deal with this, Gladys was there for me. As Gladys has taken on more responsibility in her job at our church and committed to training to be a spiritual director, I have been able to support her in this by encouraging her, giving her the time she needs for her studies, and increasing my share of chores around the house.

Gladys

No offense to the men here today, but when we women talk about our husbands being ill, we all seem to agree that men can be like little kids, complaining about their ailment and needing constant care. However, Ben has been through a lot with his eyes and had been under a lot of pain in the months preceding his surgery. It was a relief of sorts to finally have his eye removed. However, when the doctor told me I would have to clean and put the temporary plastic cover back in his eye when it would come out, I prayed to God I would be spared. That did not happen. The first week after his surgery, it kept slipping out. That wasn't a pleasant experience for either one of us. Fortunately, we became adept at making it stay in his eye. The other thing we had not counted on was his reaction to the anesthesia and other medications he had been given. That first week was difficult but somehow we managed to get through it all and realized that our love for another had been blessed. We were living that community in service to one another.

In my work at the parish, I frequently must facilitate a baptism or marriage prep class when a volunteer is unable to be there. Ben is always willing to put aside that weekend time and minister with me. I also offer a marriage enrichment program -- 10 Great Date Nights -- and this spring we did a parenting class together. It is at these times that I most feel the joy of ministry, knowing that God has blessed our relationship. Nonetheless, there is a dying to ourselves when we are called to do this. We are getting to the age that working all week long with frequent night meetings exhaust us. Having to give up our weekends as well can be a real sacrifice. God is good -- all the time -- and we know the resurrection too in our love for each other and our family.

It is in serving God in the many ways we are called to do, serving our family and one another, that we have experienced the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in our own lives. We are most grateful that God called us in our sacrament of marriage to live out this call together.

