



Ram's Horn

**Marriage Retorno Newsletter
Summer 2009 Vol. 119**

**Strengthening Marriages
Through Scriptural Prayer**



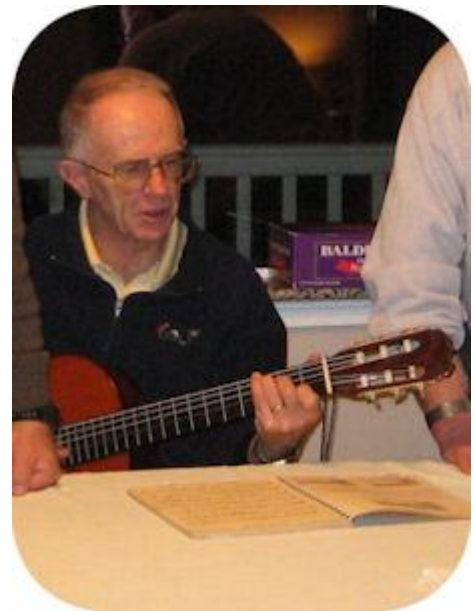
**Journey Together
To God**

THIS ISSUE IS IN REMEMBRANCE OF DEAR FRIENDS

Adrien Auger



Mike Oates





Adrien and Mary Clare have been involved in Marriage Retorno for many years; presenting weekends, acting as Treasurer couple, attending our yearly conferences, and living out the Retorno rhythm of prayer and sharing. Their example of having Christ as the third person in their marriage was clear to everyone they met. We had the privilege of attending Adrien's funeral and the eulogies given by their children showed how much Adrien was loved and how evident his and Mary Clare's relationship with God and Scripture was to their family and friends.

Adrien and Mary Clare



Mike and Maureen



Mike Oates and Maureen have been one of the strongest links in our Marriage Retorno chain. Until this issue they were the editors of the Ram's Horn, presented weekends, coordinating couple emeritus, attended yearly conferences and Mike always brought his guitar -thankfully! Mike was a deacon in the Dubuque, Iowa diocese and made sure that every married deacon made a Marriage Retorno as part of their formation. The Vigil the night before the funeral Mass was a tribute to a loving and caring man. Brothers, children, grandchildren, and friends all had wonderful examples to share from Mike's life. He will be greatly missed.

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Father Mel was Presider at Mike's funeral Mass and he generously allowed us to reprint his homily. It puts into words our thoughts about Mike and Maureen and the gifts they are and were to our community.





HOMILY FOR THE FUNERAL OF MICHAEL OATES

St Patrick Church

Cedar Falls Iowa

April 14, 2009

Rev. Mel Hemann

All of us have events that happen in life that leave a lasting impression on us. Forty four years ago I was assigned to St. Thomas Aquinas Parish and Catholic Student Center on the Iowa State Campus in Ames. The pastor, Fr. Jim Supple, was noted for his hospitality and any priest who was free on Friday was welcome to join others for golf, evening dinner and a card game. Just as the game was to begin a priest walked in and everyone was shocked. "We haven't seen you for months. Where have you been? He said, "I've not been feeling well and two days ago I was told I have terminal cancer and have about 6 weeks to live. I thought I'd come tonight so you can say all the wonderful things now instead of at my wake. I want to hear them. Talk about a conversation stopper. Finally Fr. Supple said, "We're thinking!"

If you have been watching the Oates-Caringbridge web page you might agree there is not much left to say. At 8:00 this morning there were 19,682 hits and 968 messages from all over the world. What is left to say?

Mike did want me to mention that I make known his pride in being the son of his parents, John and Mary Oates. Of course they are not here so we can't ask what their thoughts are on that matter. I presume by this time Mike has had the opportunity to personally talk that over with them.

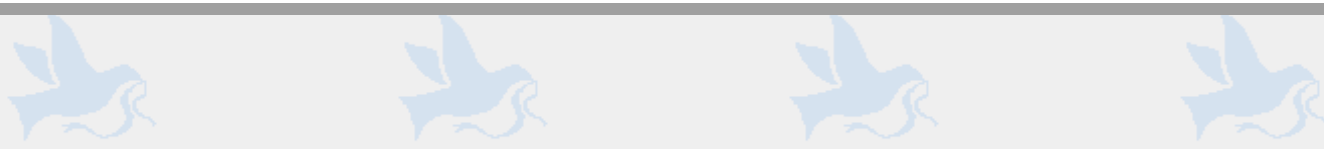
He wanted all to know of the pride he had in being the elder brother to Jack, Carroll and Pat. Obviously, as they shared so beautifully at the Vigil last night, they share some of the same sentiments and the fact they are lecturing at this liturgy bears that out as well.

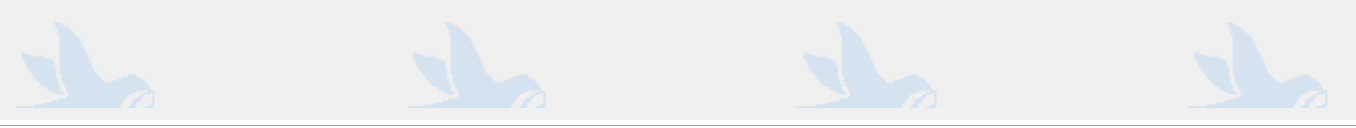
His other request was a real shock to me. He asked that I inform everyone how important his wife and family are to him and how much he loved them. Apparently they also have similar thoughts as they are all present and accounted for. For those who have known the Oates family, even remotely, I am sure it comes as no surprise. So what is there left to say?

I concluded many years ago that funerals are really for the living. As we offer our prayers for the deceased we often are negligent in exploiting the legacy that person has left us. Being the good teacher he was, Mike would never let a teachable moment pass. This occasion is no exception because Mike has certainly left us with many challenges as we strive to make our lives more fruitful.

Where do we start? I think Mike is the first person I've known who had a Personal Mission Statement: "I aspire to live with a grateful heart, to grow more open to God's love and, strengthened by my marriage, family, and friends, to remain true to the long-range, eternal values I claim to be mine". The readings for the Vigil last night and the Liturgy today were all chosen by Mike and help us understand more fully how his Mission Statement was achieved and the challenges he leaves us.

Our first reading from Isaiah reminds us how important we are in God's eyes. Even the hairs on our head are numbered. Regardless of age or sex I am protected. The Psalm is a reminder that we do follow a very wise and faithful shepherd as we tip-toe our way through life. Paul in his advice to the Romans reminds us of the many ways we are gifted by our God. It's advice we have heard many times so the question remains what is





so special about it today? The answer we find in the Gospel because it is here we find the special way in which Mike responded to his God and how he chose to share his special gifts.

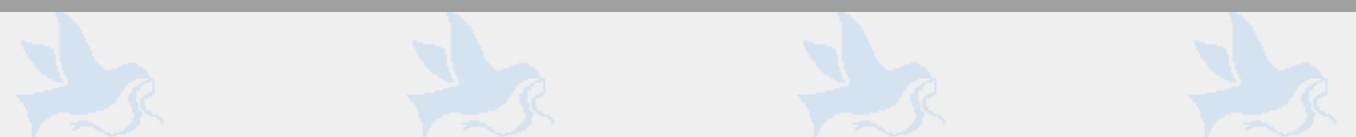
Thirty three years ago Mike, Maureen and I began presenting Marriage Retorno weekends. On the weekend we attempt to introduce couples to couple prayer by using Sacred Scripture as a basis. We usually pick a Scripture and briefly share what it means to us personally. We often suggest that Scripture be perceived as alive and to put ourselves into that story. Maureen selected the Gospel Mike chose to share at this Mass today. She began, "Two of them that same day were making their way to Emmaus, etc."! At the end she announced that the two were actually a married couple. Well, being the conservative, right wing Catholic that I am, I was shocked!

How dare she change those people into a married couple! As days turned into months, months into years, years into a life time, that friend Jesus became not only more real and intimate in their lives but very instrumental in the direction of their daily lived experiences. When we connect the Scripture from last night's service, the Prologue to St. John's gospel, "In the beginning was the Word and Word was with God and the Word was God". We find Mike and Maureen challenge us with something very profound in its simplicity, and as often happens with God's Word, it goes right over our head.

The journey to Emmaus started over 45 years ago for Mike and Maureen. As they walked and listened to the one who walked with them they came to realize and appreciate the tremendous gift God had given them in calling them to marriage. I wonder if you, as you read the caringbridge messages, noticed that time after time individuals and families commented on the effect Mike had on their lives and the obvious pride and reverence he consistently showed for his wife and family. Time brought new and deeper insights into their sacrament. No longer are you two, but one flesh.

At this point we need to reflect on one of our basic and fundamental mysteries. The Blessed Trinity. We know our God is a God of community. Three persons in one God. St. Thomas Aquinas says that our God knows himself perfectly. That self knowledge becomes an expression of the innermost thoughts of the Father. We call that expression the Word who is the second Person, the Son who became one of us, Jesus the Christ. The knowledge, love and understanding that flows between the two generates a spirit between them. That Spirit is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. One God, yet three separate and distinct Persons. We priests gathered here, as well as the deacons, spend a lot of time studying the mystery of the Trinity We learned all kinds of big words that personally meant very little to me. It was a big head trip. Our God wants all to know about him, even the youngest and simplest of people. He is a sneaky God as He puts the most profound of all mysteries before our eyes. **The mystery of the Trinity is lived out each day in the lives of married couples.**

Mike and Maureen realized that although Mike was still Mike; Maureen still Maureen, there was something unique happening. The One who walked with them was sharing His Spirit and as they dwelt upon their relationship they observed that their love was generating a spirit as well, a spirit unique to them. A spirit only they shared because there was no other like it. This spirit is neither his nor hers. It comes from the mutual love exchange between the two. What we have then is a presentation of the deepest of all mysteries, a living example of the Blessed Trinity. Is it not our belief that our God is a God of Community, Father, Son and Holy Spirit? The intimate knowledge and love that flows between Father and Son is so perfect that it becomes a separate and distinct person, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God himself. Scholars and





theologians over the centuries have reflected, studied and written profoundly about the mystery of the inner life of the Trinity.

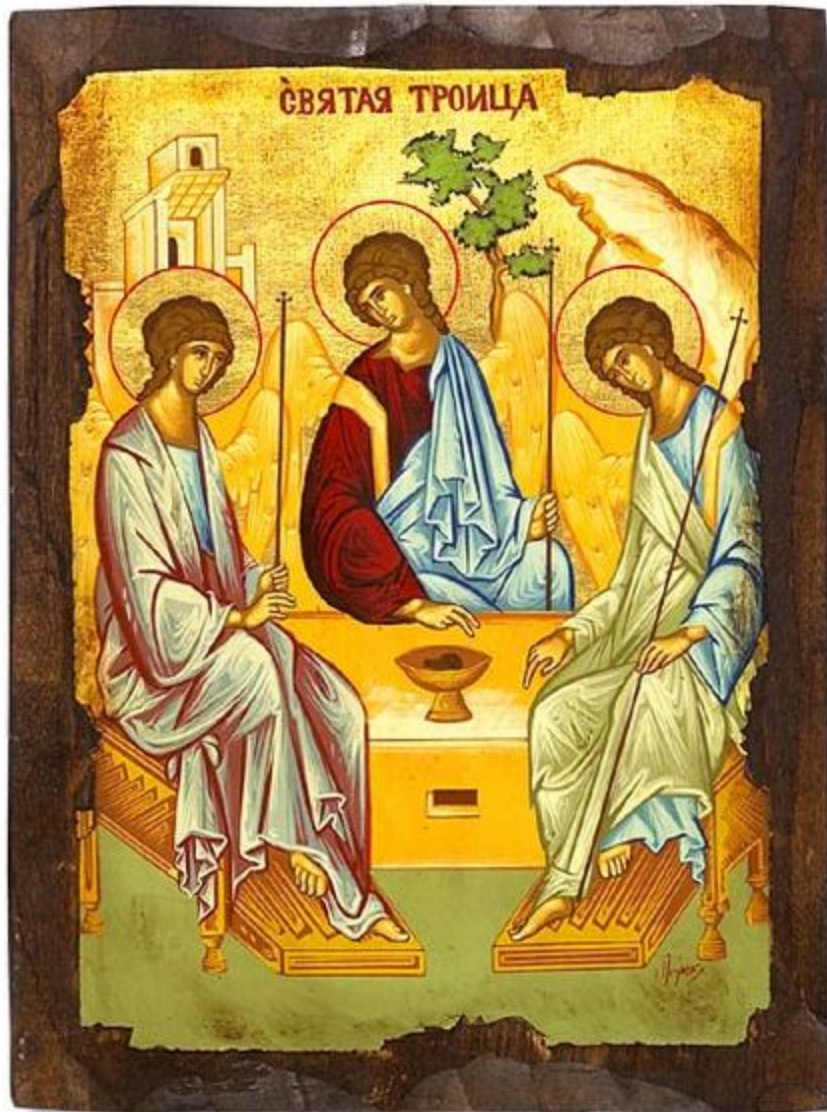
In His unconditional love our God wants all to experience that mystery. How would a God, who wants to be first and foremost in our lives, do that? Very simply, choose those in our lives who should be number one for us --- our mother and father. A man and woman, two separate and distinct persons, remain just that, two human beings. As their love deepens and they become increasingly sensitive to all the other is, that spirit between them takes on a separate identity. They remain separate and distinct but their spirit has something of him, something of her, within. When we come to this realization, it hopefully dawns on us that in the presence of married couples around us, we are actually in the presence of a triune God.

That is what Mike leaves as a witness to this august state of marriage. He understood that in life he was first and foremost a husband and father, the basis of his life. It didn't matter what else he did, teacher, golfer, musician, deacon, faithful servant to the poor of the world, all was based on the fact the most important sacrament after his baptism was his marriage. It was from that marriage he gained the strength to become what he did.

Other couples have come to some degree of this awareness in their marital bliss and have even chosen to name their spirit. M et M was the name Mike and Maureen gave their spirit. When you see an Odyssey driving around with an M et M license plate know that the spirit of Mike and Maureen is alive and well in our midst.

To you, Mike, and all married couples, we thank you. We honor you for who and what you are in our world - a real live presence of the Blessed Trinity in our midst even before we get to heaven.





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FALL 2009 NATIONAL MARRIAGE *RETORNO* CONFERENCE

Sept. 4-7, 2009 at
American Martyrs Retreat House
Cedar Falls, Iowa

1. Conference will begin Friday evening at 6:00 PM with dinner at the Retreat House and conclude Monday (Labor Day) after lunch.

2. TWO FOLD THEME CELEBRATE FATHER MEL'S 50th ANNIVERSARY OF



ORDINATION

MEDITATE AND SHARE ON PAUL'S WRITINGS ON MARRIAGE

3. Cost of the weekend: \$175.00 a couple, \$ 87.50 for singles

Please contact our local host couple Rick and Deb Giarusso to make a reservation: (319) 277-8170
E-mail Deb & Rick Giarusso

Further conference information:

The conference this year will be even more special. We will combine our conference with a celebration of Father Mel Hemann's 50th anniversary as a priest. Father Mel has been our spiritual guide for many years and it will be with great joy that we join in honoring him and since we will have just concluded the year of St. Paul we will reflect on some of Paul's writings on marriage in our meditation and sharing.

Father Mel's celebration will include a Saturday afternoon visit to the Sullivan Brothers Museum (all five brothers were stationed on the same ship during WWII when it sank. A movie was made about their lives and families) A Sullivan family granddaughter will speak to us afterwards. That evening we are invited to Father Mel's party for family and friends.

On Sunday we will all participate in Father Mel's anniversary Mass celebration at St. Patrick's church at 11:30 AM, followed by a reception in the parish hall. We will then gather at Giarussos.

Tentative itinerary:

Friday:

6:00 PM dinner followed by welcoming new and old friends and Catching Up.

Saturday:

7:45 AM Morning prayer service at the retreat house

8:00 AM Breakfast

9:00 AM Presentation: Marriage Emulates the Relationship of Christ and the Church followed by meditation and couple sharing.

Noon: Lunch

Museum visit and talk given by granddaughter

6:00 PM dinner at the retreat house

Celebration party.

Sunday:





8:00 AM Breakfast

8:30 AM Presentation: The Anology expanded: Marriage and the law. Followed by meditation and sharing.

11:30 AM Celebration Mass at St. Patrick's followed by reception.

3:00 PM (approximately) Rick and Deb will host a presentation on The Life That the Lord has Assigned for the Married and Others, followed by meditation and sharing.

6:30 PM dinner and party at Giarusso's.

Monday:

7:45 AM Morning prayer service at the retreat house.

8:00 AM Breakfast

9:00 AM Business Meeting and Mass

Noon: lunch and farewell

The cost of the weekend is greatly reduced because Rick and Deb have offered to ask friends of Retorno in Cedar Falls to host us for the weekend. Prompt reservations will be a big help! We invite all Marriage Retorno couples to join us for this conference. Refresh your commitment to praying together and share your awareness of the presence of the Lord in your marriage. We look forward to seeing you!

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E-mail

[Tony and Marianne](#)

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