

Gregg Sandridge & Elaine Cardello

Last Saturday I attended the wedding of my nephew Bryan. He moved to Bulgaria 14 years ago when he signed up for Peace Corps and has remained there because he loves the country, the work and the people. His kindness is known by all. I was not the minister for that wedding; I was the uncle. I usually see weddings from the perspective of the service in the church. It was enlightening to see a wedding from the perspective of the reception. We had a wonderful, lively gathering that overlapped 48 hours of celebration. We ministers like to think that the most important part of the weekend is what we do, but also important is the longer celebration of food and drink, music and dancing, leisure and conversation.

The Catholic wedding celebration includes readings and prayers that at times remind the couple that there is more to marriage than the wedding day, even though the scriptures sometimes use the complete wedding celebration as an image of what to expect in eternal life - an unending banquet of rich food and drink in the joyful company of God who welcomes us into everlasting happiness. To get there requires more. The blessing I'll use at the very end of this celebration includes this prayer over the newlyweds: "May you be witnesses in the world to God's charity, so that the afflicted and needy who have known your kindness may one day receive you thankfully into the eternal dwelling of God." The couple, who are naturally focused on the commitment they make to each other, are expected to raise their eyes beyond their own personal love to those in the world who are afflicted and needy. Couples are a mini-Peace Corps. Their charity is a product of their love for each other. The blessing hopes that at the end of their lives, the couple will approach the gates of heaven to find the impoverished whom they have helped now welcoming them into their company with grateful hearts.

It's rare to find a couple who get this on their wedding day, but Gregg and Elaine do. Yes, one works indoors and the other works under water, but together they have shared a concern for the afflicted and the needy of the world. From Fiji to Africa, they have not only learned about the sufferings of others, but they have taken steps to alleviate the sorrows that weigh down this troubled planet.

Among the readings they have chosen for this day we heard the miracle Jesus worked for the guests at a wedding and the Book of Tobit's beautiful prayer of a couple on their wedding night. But especially noteworthy is a line in the reading from the letter to the Philippians. There St. Paul links two ideas: "Your kindness should be known to all," and "Rejoice in the Lord always." Some people feel that they will rejoice the most when they are kind to themselves, when they indulge time for themselves, when they spend on themselves. Others discover that kindness to others, the sacrifice of the self, leads to greater rejoicing. Paul has the Philippians stake their reputation not on how much they've earned or what accomplishments they have achieved. Rather, he says, "Your kindness should be known to all."

Gregg and Elaine, as you step forward from this day into married life together, we pray that God will build on the foundation that the Spirit has already laid. May the love you share this day overflow to all who need a loving hand. Your kindness is already known by many. May your kindness be known to all.

Saturday, September 15, 2018