

Recently I was at a restaurant for lunch with a couple of friends—one of those places where you go up to the counter to make your order, and then sit at a table, where someone brings your food. After we ordered and sat down, an older gentleman walked in by himself, put in his order at the counter, and then approached our table. He said, “I’m here by myself, but I like having company. Do you mind if I join your table?” We felt noble, so we obliged him, had a pleasant conversation, ate our food, paid our bill, and said goodbye. That was the end of that random meeting with a stranger at a table.

Adrian has a different story to tell. He was at a restaurant where he noticed a young woman sitting by herself, and, without waiting for her to say, “I like having company,” he invited her to join his table. She agreed. The random meeting at that table had a very different ending from the one I experienced. In fact, Adrian’s random meeting never ended. It led us here today.

One theme of these stories is articulated several times in the bible: It’s not good to be alone. It is best when you are together for a noble purpose.

The Book of Tobit tells a delightful story about the marriage of Tobias and Sarah. It’s ultimately delightful, though it has some serious stress along the way. Sarah had already been married seven times, and all seven husbands died on the wedding night, so when Tobias took her to bed, he disclosed his secret plan: He intended to pray. Spoiler alert—it worked. They lived happily ever after. That prayer is the passage that Adrian and Monica chose for us to hear on their wedding day. It is a lovely prayer even if your life is not in danger.

At the beginning of it, Tobias and Sarah praised the God of their ancestors. They had faith because their parents had passed it on to them. The couple also invited all creation to praise God. Then they remembered the Bible’s first couple, Adam and Eve, and, on this night when Tobias’s life was in danger because he married Sarah, they reminded God, “You said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone’”—or the woman, for that matter, as was more the concern on this particular wedding night. Then Tobias said a prayer that can only be uttered by the best of grooms: “Now, Lord, you know that I take this wife of mine not because of lust, but for a noble purpose. Call down your mercy on me and on her, and allow us to live together to a happy old age.” Tobias had a beautiful insight. Taking a partner with the right intent creates the happiness and stability that can last to a happy old age well beyond the short-lived lure of lust.

Tomorrow in this cathedral Bishop Johnston will preside for Mass with all the couples in our diocese celebrating their golden wedding anniversary this year. Over 75 couples are coming, and several more can’t make it. I’ll be here tomorrow, but I won’t be here for that Mass 50 years from now. I pray that Adrian and Monica will, with a story that never ends.

Sometimes the random person we meet at a restaurant remains just that. Other times, they become a lifelong friend. Adrian and Monica, God did not make you for a random friendship with each other, nor for a random friendship with him. He expects you to live a noble purpose. In the years ahead, may you find more reasons to thank God for inviting you together to his table.