

Grounded 9

‘The dignity of every woman is the responsibility of every man.’

St. John Paul 11, Theology of the Body

The test of my love lies in marriage; it is revealed in the eyes and heart of a person, a woman, my bride.

I will not be judged on my ministry gifts; these I exercise freely and receive some reward from others who value a snapshot, a post card, an edited glimpse of me.

Annette witnesses the whole broken image, or rather a series of images—the unrated miniseries without end. God keep her.

Marriage casts a searchlight that reveals the delightful, dirty dance—how we bless and bedevil each other with our love, or lack thereof—the hopes and fears of all these years, 39 and counting for this marriage. Sure, there are gaps, every marriage has them, but also treasures hidden from others that confirm two persons’ best selves and establish home on earth.

I love what for me is the apex of Theology of the Body: John Paul exhorts marrieds to not reduce sexuality to orgasm but rather to recognize and savor the extraordinary sexual essence of her womanhood, his manhood—the person behind the passion. A whole-enough marriage summons that essence and gifts each party with the other.

The other day, after two virus-inspired travel-free months, enjoying very much the rhythm of Annette and my uninterrupted life together, I noticed something: Annette’s peace. She looked lovely, at ease, a little playful. She was grounded because her husband was. I fell in love again.

Truth is, we married, committed to a long stint in grad school and baby-making, then I took off on a runway and never looked back. (I’ve accrued nearly 3 million miles with one airline.) Racing around the world may be good for the Kingdom but hell on a marriage. Annette learned how to partner with me from a distance. Costly. Our syncopated rhythm has not served her well. Her reward is heavenly, mine purgatorial. Who said life was fair? Mercy trumps justice!

Normal anxieties aside, she is more beautiful when her man is around. You could say the pandemic invited Annette to breathe. I savor the gift.