



I was sitting in the examining room last week waiting for my doctor to come in for my annual physical. Actually, it had been at least three or four years since my last complete exam, as it is one of those things that I just hate to bother with. Everything about it I dislike: the questioning, the poking and prodding, the tests and most of all the waiting.

But as I was sitting there, it dawned on me that there are many similarities between doing the necessary things to maintain your physical health and well being, and those that are necessary to maintain the health and vitality of a marriage.

For example, each requires a commitment to regular exercise, proper nourishment, vigilant monitoring and a routine, if not annual checkup. I think that we all can acknowledge the need for exercise, diet and medical monitoring to be part of our routine in order to keep ourselves in good physical condition. Without these, it is very easy to fall into unhealthy habits which ultimately can take their toll on our physical well-being. But what about our marriage health?

To me, regular exercise in a marriage means working on those little, day-by-day things that help to transform an okay marriage into something truly beautiful, a gift to be treasured. Perhaps it is something as small as when Mary Jo sends me a text message at work to say she is thinking of me and wishing me a good day. Or when I might stop by the local coffee shop on my way home from work to pick up a pound of fresh roasted Columbian beans because I know how much she loves her fresh cup of morning coffee. While they may not seem like much, I believe these little expressions of love are a way of “exercising” our marriage vows and they help to keep our marriage alive and healthy.

But what does it mean to follow a healthy diet and seek the proper nourishment for the health of our marriage? Nourishment for our marriage means striving to pray, both individually and together, talking and sharing our day and just doing the little things together which help bring us a sense of closeness. Sometimes the days can be so busy, even though we no longer have all five children living under our roof. I wonder how we ever managed it when they were younger! At this point in my career I find that my job can get a bit all consuming, with leaving early in the

morning and getting home much later than I used to in the evening. So I am conscious to make it a point to say a brief prayer with Mary Jo, who is usually the only other one up when I leave for work. Just spending this couple of minutes together in prayer seems to give me nourishment for the day ahead. It also reminds me of the reason I go off to work each day, to continue to provide for my family, as I seek the grace needed for that day's tasks ahead.

Some days, when my schedule allows, I also manage to walk over to St. Joseph Cathedral in downtown Buffalo for noon Mass. The Mass is held in a small side chapel dedicated to Mary. There I find a sense of peace for thirty minutes and receive the Eucharist, which provides the nourishment and refreshment which I need for the rest of the day.

In the evening, at least during the nicer weather, Mary Jo likes to take a walk around the village in which we live. Admittedly, sometimes after a long day at work I may not feel like it, but most times I do join her on these strolls. The walk can follow a brisk or leisurely pace, but regardless, it provides us with some time alone to talk about the events of the day and catch up with each other.

Nourishment for our marriage.

Another form of nourishment for our marriage is the monthly reading and "sit-down" we do as part of our commitment to the marriage support group we belong to called Teams of Our Lady, or TOOL for short. Without going into the details on TOOL, as that would require a whole post by itself, let me just say that each month Mary Jo and I read a chapter of the current book our Team is studying and come together before our monthly meeting to discuss and share our thoughts and feelings about it. This uninterrupted time together helps to keep us in touch with each other and feed our marriage.

Lastly, I believe our marriage benefits from an annual "checkup" which in our case again involves a TOOL commitment of attending a yearly retreat. We make this together with the other couples in our Team; however, a couple could easily do it individually or within any type of structured setting. This time away from the ordinary routine and busyness of life allows us to focus completely on us and take a good look at the state of our marriage.

In summary, while I may not really like to do the things which are necessary to stay on top of my physical health and well being, I do them none-the-less. When it comes to the health of our marriage, Mary Jo and I are committed to doing the routine and yearly checkup items needed to maintain the good health of our marriage.