

God's graces: the Crazy Glue for married life

I recently attended the annual Matrimony Anniversary Mass in Dodge City. My lovely wife, Charlene, sat next to me.

During breakfast that morning, before we left for the Mass, Charlene really did ask, "Is this the event where they have the removal of vows?" She quickly corrected herself. "I mean RENEWAL! RENEWAL of vows!"

But it was too late. There was no going back.

I suggested that her question had been Freudian*. She couldn't respond because she was laughing too hard.

Hmmmm I thought as I shoved another Shredded Wheat into my mouth. As I crunched on the little bale of hay, I wondered: *Why am I eating Shredded Wheat? Am I eating breakfast or grazing?*

Then I wondered about our vows. The only vows that concerned me was when she said "I do" to: laughing at my jokes, watching my movies (even if said movies contain in the title the words "monster," "alien," or "zombie"), agreeing that I could easily beat Vin Diesel in a wrestling match, and finally, vowing that Taco Bell and walking around the video section of the library classify as a "night out".

I thought they were fair, but what do I know? I'm a guy.

Prior to getting married, I thought marriage was a scary place where guys were domesticated, sort of like the "Call of the Wild" in reverse. And I had a commitment-phobia. I was committed to Charlene, but the idea of putting it to paper left me trembling like a puppy in a blizzard. Then Charlene said these poignant words that made me realize with stark clarity the importance and sanctity of the gift of marriage that God has bestowed upon humankind. She said: "Listen up, bub. Put a ring on this finger or it's over. Got it?" (I cleaned that up quite a bit.)

I thought about it for about a second, and today, all these years later, I'm so very thankful she threatened me that day.

Like me, she loves to laugh and make jokes. She brags about me, telling people that there's nothing I can't do, even though my home improvement projects have resulted in desperate calls to the plumber, electrician or 911, or on one memorable occasion, all of the above.

Unlike me, whose fantasy is to live on a nacho boat while floating on a salsa sea, she's very health conscious. She's also well-attuned to current events (and reacts with strong emotion when money is valued over people—our national pastime these days). And she is extremely well read. At night, when I'm reading an escapist novel, she's reading a thick text about the *History of the Jews*, the *Romanovs*, or the *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, marking every interesting passage as she goes.

If the novel I'm reading doesn't hold my attention in a vise grip, I'll turn over and put on an old movie, like "Revenge of the Creature" and watch it on a small, old, black and white TV on my nightstand.

Often times she'll interrupt me and tell me something interesting she's just read, like, "It says here that hemophilia ran in the Romanov family line."

And sometimes I'll interrupt her with something like, "Do you think it's feasible for a half-man, half-fish creature to fall in love with a human woman? I mean, that's what they're trying to sell in this movie, but I'm not sure I'm buying it."

Charlene will think about it for a minute: "You fell in love with *me*, and I'm still trying to figure out what kind of creature *you* are," to which she'll laugh herself silly.

Do we ever disagree? Sure, sometimes. Not often, thankfully. I think that one big mistake that young people—or newlyweds of any age—make is to think that one big argument is an end-all. I'm not suggesting that some issues aren't bigger than others, but the general serious-but-not-all-that-serious stuff doesn't need to lead to breakups. Arguments, or even out-and-out fights, can lead to the illusion of love lost.

The longer you're together, the more you'll learn how to cope with challenges. Even in our worst arguments, I know that eventually we will be in that wonderful, happy place again where she's teasing me about being the result of a scientific experiment gone awry. Sometimes you just need to go your corner. Give it a little time. Love heals quickly.

(Note to guys: Swallow your pride! Admit when you're wrong! Even if you're right, admit that you're wrong! *It just saves time.*)

One of the great joys of marriage is when two people appreciate each other, warts and all (or in my case, moles). If you want perfection, build yourself a Stepford spouse.

Sometimes couples may forget what it means to take a vow. Sickness and health? We've both sat in the emergency hospital room, one for the other, waiting anxiously during those horrible hours for the doctor to show up.

Love and honor? I've learned a simple rule: The only person it's okay to flirt with is your spouse. Flirting is the psychological equivalent of trying to get your foot in the door. If you wouldn't go *through* the door, why bother? Besides, I'm exactly four pounds short of weighing twice as much as my wife, yet if she were to catch me flirting, the result would be like Godzilla chasing after that little Japanese kid.

My best advice for couples (I bet you think I'm going to say to pray together) is to pray together. But that's not all. I find HUGE rewards in attending parish activities together. It's not just good for your relationship, it's great for you, personally. They instill God's graces that help you to better deal with outside factors that otherwise might weigh on your marriage, such as work, finance or health issues.

God's wonderful graces will help keep you together through all the craziness. As St. Paul told the Philippians: "God's graces are the Crazy Glue of life!"

* *Freud became so excited when he came up with this particular theory, that he drove his 1905 Oldsmobile onto the curb, struck an Italian street bread peddler, and sent a loaf of bread flying into the face of a constable, who then arrested Freud for assault. It was Freud's very theory that he had just discovered that led to his pleading guilty to the charges. Freud's theory? "There are no accidents."*