



Second Sunday of Advent December 4, 2016 A

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The following three pieces are from the magazine U.S. Catholic. All three articles were written by Annemarie Scobey. If any of the pieces do not connect to your life situation, please consider sharing with someone who may benefit from them.

THE MARRIAGE MINDSET

This first piece is from the October 2016 issue of U.S. Catholic. Annemarie writes:

For Bill and me, and many couples I know, one of the keys to a long-lasting and healthy marriage has less to do with date nights or weekends away, and more to do with the mindset each partner brings into each day of the marriage.

Holding on to gratitude - especially when life gets crazy

Couples in strong marriages make a conscious effort to be thankful for their spouses. Miguel, married almost 20 years to Juanita, comments, "We can't seem to find date-night time. We are working to meet the needs of our kids and to care for our aging parents; we are bad at putting our marriage ahead of all that. Nevertheless, when I feel like I am grinding it out day after day, I remind myself that I am so grateful to be sharing all of this with someone who cares as deeply about our kids and parents. Basically, there's no one I'd rather do this with. I appreciate the teamwork we forge together."

Patty, married to John for 26 years and mother to five young adult daughters, agrees on the importance of spouses being grateful. "We thank each other a lot. Sometimes one of us will respond 'you don't have to thank me for that,' but we're each genuinely grateful for the other and the thank yous come naturally," she says. "One of our girls noted this recently when I thanked John for switching the wash. 'I just really appreciate your dad doing even the little things for us,' I explained."

Consciously look for the good

The socks in the middle of the floor, dishes piled on the counter, and the forgotten appointment can move a

spouse in one of two directions. The daily annoyances of life with another person can either serve as proof points as to why a marriage isn't working or can propel a spouse to look more deeply into the other person and into the marriage to find all that is worthwhile. Married couples who are happy and enjoy each other don't necessarily have fewer issues to work through, but they may take a different approach to their challenges than those with less satisfying marriages.

Nancy, married to Scott, knows of many unhappy marriages among her peers, and counts herself fortunate to have Scott. "I remind myself that even though I get frustrated with him sometimes (and of course I am not perfect either), I'm really lucky to have married someone who values family, my work, and me," she says. "I know my grass is greener than a lot of people's. Two key points that almost always prove to be helpful for our perspective are having a sense of humor and realizing tomorrow is a new opportunity."

For Jenny and Brian, parents of three children under 10, perspective is key. Jenny notes that intentionally remembering what attracted her to her husband brings positive feelings to mind. "I flash back to our time dating," she says. Jenny also mentions how important it is for spouses to get out of their day-to-day environment and interact with others to bring freshness to the relationship. "If I'm frustrated with him, my attitude always changes as we are out with friends or family; I see him interacting with others and I easily remember how awesome he is and why I married him."

Amy, married 23 years to Kevin, jokingly says that if she's in a difficult moment she allows herself to go morbid. "I think about life without Kevin and it really makes me appreciate him," she says. Like Jenny, Amy takes herself out of the present moment and into the past. "I think of when we dated and how much I wanted to marry him. I remember all the reasons why. When I do both those reflections, I am all in again."

Lean on honesty, humor, and faith

Brigid, married 23 years to Bob, says she has found that looking for the underlying truth in a small-issue moment she might be tempted to quarrel over has worked tremendously well for the couple. "I personally committed from the beginning to be honest with myself rather than play games. If I felt vulnerable, I committed

to stating that truth rather than pick a fight over something else to get the reassurance I needed,” she says. Brigid’s practice could likely help many marriages. Too often, couples find themselves in endless rounds of arguments that have little to do with the underlying issue: Do you love me? Brigid balances her serious, intentional approach with quick wit. “I go out of my way to tease my husband. You don’t tease people you don’t like,” she says.

Andrea and Greg, married 23 years, see the early years of marriage as critical. They credit their Catholic upbringing and long, committed marriages on both sides of the family as helping them with the more challenging early years of marriage—when misunderstanding sometimes led to hurt and distance. “As we have grown together as a couple, the trust in all areas has grown,” Andrea says. “We strive to be caring of each other and to put the other first. We operate from a place of deep compassion and respect. This has been the glue that binds us together.”

FAMILY RITUALS FOR CHILDREN

The second piece is from the November 2016 issue of U.S. Catholic. The following are some excerpts.

Each year on each of their children’s birthdays, C’za and Rob have a tradition: Go to Mass. Because their children are school-aged and active in many sports, the tradition means that often the birthday girl or boy is in the car by 6:45 a.m., heading to downtown Milwaukee for 7 a.m. Mass at Old St. Mary’s. “On the drive to church, I get to talk about everything that happened on the day they were born,” C’za says. “We then light a candle after Mass in thanksgiving for another year. If we have time, we stop for doughnut holes before school.”

While the birthday tradition honors joy, C’za and Rob understand it’s just as important to have a tradition to honor loss. Their 2-year-old son died in a drowning accident 13 years ago; the couple established a Memorial Day run in his memory at their children’s Catholic school. That day begins with Mass to honor not only Peter, but all who have lost loved ones. The run has become a favorite tradition of the school community. C’za says, “Rob stresses in his remarks before the run that this is a way to remember Peter, but it is also very much a way to remember our parish and school community members, who were our guardian angels during a very difficult time.”

Tradition is a cousin of routine, and just as children thrive on routine, traditions are comforting because they are recognizable and something children can depend on. Traditions break from the ordinary, give a nod to the past, and point toward the future. Traditions say to children, “This is who we are together, and this is who we plan to be.”

Need some new traditions for your family? Consider borrowing from the following favorites.

Happy New Year

Carol and Jamie, parents of four, gather their kids on New Year’s Day to talk about the highlights and accomplishments of the past year. As the kids speak, Carol takes notes. “We’ll read the highlights we had noted from the previous year, too,” Carol says. She observes that she’s often surprised at what her children consider highlights of the year and what they may leave out as unimportant in their bigger picture.

Eric and Jenna, parents of two, make New Year’s resolutions, an activity Eric finds as important for himself and Jenna as it is for their children. He says, “One year, I made a resolution about being present in the moment—for example, when playing with my kids I will not think about the papers I should be grading for school.”

Birthday

On each family member’s birthday, everyone in Emma and Sam’s family goes around the table and says something they love or appreciate about the birthday person. “When Riley was itty-bitty, she thought you actually needed to walk around the table, so sometimes we do that, too!” Emma says. “It’s very moving as a parent to hear what qualities my kids appreciate in each other and in us. Having to reflect on something in ourselves we are proud of is such a good ‘gift check.’”

Anne Marie and Larry, who lost their daughter Kelly as an infant, recognize her birthday by taking their other children to the cemetery, decorating Kelly’s grave, and singing happy birthday. They end the evening by having birthday cake at home. “It shows each of us we all remember Kelly,” Anne Marie says.

Back to school

Stephanie loved back-to-school shopping as a child and continues the tradition by taking her four children individually to get their supplies. “They each get a pair of new shoes, their supplies, and then just the two of us go to dinner or dessert together,” she says. “It’s definitely a special occasion ‘date.’”

Small traditions, big meaning

Sometimes parents don’t even notice they’ve made something a tradition, yet their child recognizes it and looks forward to it. Jacob, 21, spoke enthusiastically about the sub sandwiches his family had in the car each time they started a road trip together. “We would begin driving and then my mom would always hand out the subs,” he says. “There is something so cozy about that. We’re all together in the minivan, with all our stuff for the trip, eating our subs.” Jacob’s mom smiles at the

comment and says, “I thought he’d talk about our camping trips together, or our ski trips, and instead he’s talking about the sandwiches.” Jacob’s brother, Liam, 18, had a similarly unique response when asked about a meaningful family tradition. “Family meals together,” he says. “It is nice to be able to count on a hot meal when I come home.” Again, their mom smiles and softly says, “Good to know.”

GROWING IN GRATITUDE

The third piece is also from the November 2016 issue of U.S. Catholic. The following are some excerpts.

Amy and Kevin, who have a daughter with a serious liver condition, went through a period where their daughter was gravely ill. “We got a glimpse of what real darkness could be,” Amy says. “Life without our daughter. After we got through that time and our daughter’s health improved, we are better able to be thankful for what we all have.”

Victoria, a single mother and an immigrant to the United States, remembers once when she was waiting at a bus stop with her daughter. She had a low-paying job and no car. A woman from her child’s school drove by stop, she called a friend of hers who was about to give their car to charity,” Victoria says. “And that friend gave it to me, instead. My daughter and I were so happy; I cried and my daughter hugged the car. Victoria says the experience is one of many moments she has had where struggle has led to thankfulness. “The problems I have encountered in my life are nothing compared to the gratitude I feel for the people who have helped me when I was in a difficult situation.”

When Joshea, now 14, was 10, her 17-year-old brother died suddenly from an undetected heart defect. Joshea has a wisdom and an outlook beyond her years because of this loss. “I appreciate the little things, and I’m thankful for them because I know that they might not be here forever,” she says. “And I don’t argue with people over small things. It’s not worth it, because the next thing you know, that person might not be there.”

Eucharist embodies thanksgiving

In a frenetic life that is scheduled almost every minute, going to Mass can feel like one more time on a to-do list. Taking a different perspective—thinking of Mass as an opportunity to take a breath and give thanks, as a gift offered to us by God, as time to be moved by the grace present in the Eucharist—can help recalibrate where church fits in our life. Emma, a mother of three, puts it this way: “After Communion, my prayer is often simply, ‘Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.’ I’m just so thankful for my people. God knew what he was doing when he brought us together.”

Mark, who drifted from going to Mass for many years, recently returned. “When I left, I felt there was so much time during Mass when I wasn’t engaged. The rote prayers didn’t have meaning; if the homily wasn’t great, I didn’t see any sense in being there,” he says. “But after such a long time, I realized I never filled that space in my week with anything meaningful. When I finally returned, I did so with an appreciation for the times when I do feel involved—when something strikes me. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve learned to appreciate going to Mass for an hour as part of an effort to pray meaningfully for 10 minutes.”

Coach gratitude in children

Cultivating a true spirit of gratitude in children goes deeper than reminding them of the right words to say after opening a gift. Parents whose children respond to life with a true sense of appreciation and thankfulness are likely modeling that behavior. A home with a loving atmosphere of connection and collaboration is a safe haven for both parents and kids; when a family’s emotional needs are met, they can better respond to life with a spirit of thanksgiving. Much of family life involves keeping the household in order; as much as children and teens may resist chores, they eventually admit that pitching in around the house is important—not just so the kitchen floor isn’t sticky—to cultivate a spirit of connection and gratitude.

“In addition to the regular things we are expected to do around the house, we get paid for certain chores,” Kailah, 14, says. “I’ve had to save my money to buy some of the things I want. This has helped me appreciate what I have because I can see what it takes to get it. And then when someone gives me something as a gift, I am even more grateful because I have a better understanding of what it is worth.” Kailah’s friend, Callie, agrees, “Kids who get everything they want have a harder time being grateful because they just expect things will be given to them. When they become adults, I’m not sure what will happen.”

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Have a blessed week,

