

No such thing as a “marriage problem”

As a priest and pastor I often receive the phone call: “Fr. Tom, can we come in to see you? We are having marriage problems.” This phone call almost always comes from the wife and almost never from the husband. I tell the wife to try and convince her husband that both of them should come to see me together. Few men ever really want to come to “see the priest” and talk about relational problems. When the wife finally comes to see me, dragging her reluctant husband along, I listen to their story, to their wounds and pains. After they tell me their story I offer a statement to the couple that is both encouraging and confusing at the same time: “Take heart. There are no such things as *marriage problems*.” That’s right. You read this correctly: There are no such things as *marriage problems*. I tell the couple: “You see, what we normally deem to be *marriage problems* are actually problems in what is known as the *theology of the body*. It is a question of, *who man will be for woman and who woman will be for man?* If we get this right all of life goes right. If we get this wrong, everything in the whole world goes wrong. This is because the human person is a microcosm of the universe and the universe is a macrocosm of the human person. The answer to the question, *who man will be for woman and who woman will be for man* is actually revealed in the *language of our bodies* as men and as women, hence, a *theology of the body*. The theology of the body provides the *why* behind being human, male and female. The reason we can trust our bodies as a revelation of truth is because, let’s face it, no matter who we are, what religion, what ethnic background, profession, rich or poor, we all have a body and it is either male or female. Since as human beings we are designed in an integrated and not compartmentalized or fragmented way, our gendered bodies are designed to work consistently with our heart, mind, emotions, in fact in the fundamental way in which we interface with all of reality.

Unless we know *why* we are male and female, we do not know *how* to be male and female. The hurts that come in relationships such as marriage are really a matter of man and woman not knowing *why* they are man and woman. This results in their not really knowing *how* to be man and woman which in turn results in their not knowing how to be for each other. They fail to complete for one another what their genders are designed to do: help meet one another’s legitimate needs and these needs are stamped in their very bodies as male and female. When this happens a process of hurt begins which compounds over time resulting in what we commonly label as *marriage problems*.

Our bodies actually *speak a language*. They point to transcendent realities; the real meaning behind our being male and female. Happiness in a relationship, in fact in all of life, comes down to whether we are telling a truth with the language of our bodies or telling a lie. I call this *entering the H-zone*—the *Honesty zone*. Being honest to the order of things is the secret to happiness especially when it comes to relationships. When we *dis-honesty* we end up with another ‘H’ word---hurt.

So what *language* do our male and female bodies actually speak? What is the *theology* that they point toward? Our male and female bodies, precisely in the fact that they are gendered speak a language of *gift*. The human person is the only creature that exists

for its own sake. In other words, we have no natural predators, (except at times ourselves.) Human beings do not exist for animals and plants, rather animals and plants exist for the proper use and benefit and enjoyment of human beings. Because human beings are made for their own sakes, so to speak, human beings discover their true selves only by making of themselves a sincere and total gift of themselves to one another. This is stamped in our very bodies as male and female: A man's body, for instance, does not make sense except in relation to a woman's body and vice versa. The very parts of a man's body that mark his gender are designed so that he can give himself away (make a *gift* of himself) to a woman. A woman's body is designed so that she in turn can make a gift of herself to a man. This is the only thing that makes total sense of the very parts of her body that mark her gender. Male and female bodies are designed to *fit together*. But along with the body comes the mind, heart, emotions, in fact our total selves.

There is a whole world to unfold in the *language of our bodies*. And this *language* holds the secret to happy marriages and relationships. It answers the question: *Who will man be for woman and who will woman be for man?* We will unfold that world in this series; *The Theology of the Body*.