

The Designated Lover -- Changing the Game of Life **By Bishop Paul Marshall**

[This is Bishop Paul's May 2008 column for secular newspapers, usually 600 words or less and different from his column in Diocesan Life. The column is sent to newspapers throughout our 14 counties. It is published by The Morning Call, Allentown, on the first Saturday of every month. It usually appears also in six or seven additional papers at some point during the month. The combined circulation of papers that publish the column regularly is about 400,000. Some 130 columns have been published over the past 12 years.]

The past is never quite past.

I was quietly watching Game Seven of the 1952 World Series on my computer, hoping the Dodgers would fare better this time. Just as Red Barber's voice had me once again sitting on my grandfather's lap watching the tiny screen on his Philco television back in Astoria, the laptop gave out its little you-have-mail ding. I am the slave of duty.

The past had come calling in the email as well. A person totally unknown to me had come upon a column published in this space almost twelve years ago and was writing to reply.

I had suggested in that column that we are helped by understanding our intimate moments as "making-love" rather than as the cruder unemotional expression, "having sex." I observed also that American prudery had stripped from the wedding service of my church the wonderful expression, "With my body I thee worship."

My correspondent misread me. She thought that the idea of making love must mean something gentle, expressing tenderness and devotion. She observed that in her serial relationships having sex meant the wild moments.

I have never had a stranger write to me about sex, and was totally unprepared for a note from a married woman discussing her pre-marital sexual history. Then again, I am a senior citizen watching a 56-year-old baseball game. I don't get out much.

What struck me more than the novelty of the situation, however, were the assumptions my correspondent made. Love had to be tender. Worship could never be fun. What was wild or exciting was something other than love or communicating worth (what "worship" means) could be. I was put in mind yet again of our common struggle to escape either-or categories of thinking.

Inventing for itself the "designated hitter" rule, the American League changed the nature of baseball in several ways. Not the least of those is that now there are baseball players and there are pitchers.

My correspondent's inability to imagine the wild moments as part of how one

communicates love and worth changes the game of life. Her not seeing that the environment of love and worth creates the frame in which the truly wild and ecstatic can occur concerns me. For her there is love and then there is the other thing. We need to be more integrated than that.

I bother to bring this up because many people have trouble feeling that our desires, our ambitions, and our ideals are aspects of one person. We have trouble understanding that these aspects of our being can work together only when they respect and communicate with each other. As long as they are kept apart, conflict looms.

Love that does not integrate play, aggression, passion, tenderness, and concern (among other more colorful qualities) suggests a fragmented spirit, a kind of “designated lover” rule. Studies show that the personalities of people who do one kind of thing with their spouses and special things with other lovers are as unintegrated as their love lives. When caught, they often cause others great pain.

The savvy reader has already detected that this is a spiritual issue, and these reflections are a commercial for actual as well as technical or legal monogamy. The Song of Solomon describes the entire relationship of lover and beloved as taking place under the banner, or canopy, of love. The two who become one flesh experience the totality of their relationship under just one banner.

[The Rt. Rev. Paul V. Marshall is bishop of the Diocese of Bethlehem, 14 counties of eastern and northeastern Pennsylvania. His recently published book, *Messages in the Mall: Looking at Life in 600 Words or Less* (Seabury), is a collection of ten years of his monthly columns for newspapers. Additional columns and sermons by Bishop Marshall are available at www.diobeth.org.]