

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009

Hi my name is Franca and I'm Mario Bergamin,

On June 16<sup>th</sup>, we'll be celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and it's been really interesting looking back on those years of marriage and realizing how much we've grown as a couple and everything that has brought us to this place.

When we were younger, we never had to put a lot of thought into marriage; it was something you did when you found the person that you wanted to spend your life with.

Our parents were married, as were our friend's parents and our relatives, marriage was meant to last.

You raised a family, you argued, you made up and you stayed the course through the good times as well as the bad.

So what was there to think about, how hard could it be?

You can tell we were young when we got married.

We're older and wiser now and we realize that although it is everyone's hope and dream that their marriage last forever, we know that it doesn't always work out that way.

We can only relate our experience to you, to give you a glimpse into our lives as to how we try to live it as best as we can.

One thing we asked ourselves was, "What makes marriage such a difficult choice for some".

Let me tell you a little story about a friend of mine, for anonymity's sake we'll call him John.

John is in his 30's and he is a model of success.

A few weeks ago, he surprised me by saying that he considered Franca and I mentors or role models.

He explained to me that for every challenge or undertaking in his life, he looks to those that have succeeded to help guide him.

Well needless to say I was surprised and asked him why he considered us so.

He went on to say that he was considering asking someone to marry him and in thinking about this, he thought about us as a couple who in his words "had made it" and wanted my advice as to how one could be sure they were marrying the right person.

He wanted to know how I knew that Franca was the one for me. He questioned his ability to be faithful in the long run. He even asked me why one couldn't have the best of both worlds!

In the end I had to tell him that although his feelings were strong for the woman he cared for, he wasn't ready for marriage.

I explained to him that the person you are when you get married is making a commitment for the person you are going to be in the future. I told him that marriage, in addition to being an act of love, commitment and hard work, is an act of faith.

In the end, I told him that the honest intention to keep this commitment is what makes it spiritual and sacred.

When we got married, like any couple, we had our hopes and dreams, some fear and trepidation about what married life would bring but ultimately it was how we faced all those unknowns that made and continues to make a difference, and for us that difference is our faith in God.

He doesn't expect us to have it all figured out; just that we have an openness to trust that he'll guide us along the way.

I guess trusting came easy for us because of the example our parents gave us. They passed along their values, love of family and neighbour and their strong faith.

They didn't have it easy growing up, my mom for example grew up in Italy, when she was two, her father went to war and never returned.

Times were hard and money scarce but to hear her tell of her childhood, it was wonderful, everything from the country to the people in it.

She came to Canada at the age of 17 with nothing more than a desire to marry my dad and start their new life together.

What I took away from my parent's relationship was that they truly loved one another despite and difficulties they encountered along the way, they didn't even speak the language when they arrived.

My mom taught us early on that we are not bound to this life, that we are passing through and not to fear dying because we have an eternal life, to forgive and to have our focus on God.

So how did we meet?

We were young, I was 17 and Mario was 19 and we lived a block away from each other. I'll always remember the summer we started to go out, my poor dad, father of three daughters, all these guys would come over to see us and our girlfriends, they would drop their bikes on our lawn and my dad would just walk around, give a big sigh and walk inside without saying a word.

Well, when he got to know me, I believe I became the son he never had and I'll always cherish the bond between us.

Franca and I dated for six years and one day I asked her father for her hand in marriage, he said “yes” and her mom in her practical, no nonsense fashion said “Damiano, we have to fix up the stairs and the balcony if these two want to get married”.

That was her way of giving us her blessing.

Now I mentioned that I asked for her hand in marriage, what I forgot to mention however was that I never actually proposed to her. Things were going so well between us that I guess we knew we would eventually get married and that it was just a matter of time before we did.

We were talking about how wonderful it would be to go to Europe and she said, “I’d have to be married”, and I said “O.K.”

It wasn’t your typical proposal.

Father Gilles mentioned that maybe we could relate how the “human institution of marriage” takes on a different quality because of God’s love.

Well for us, it was never about a piece of paper or a legal document, it was Mario and I and a sacred bond.

We had this perimeter around us where we were free to be and grow throughout our marriage, it was a safe place and it never felt stifling. Marriage with all its ups and down, life with all the demands it placed on us individually or as a couple, we always navigated within that sacred space.

One moment that stand out for me was when we were trying to start a family and after many tests and disappointments, my doctor said “Its alright to be angry at God” and I thought, no, I don’t know what God has in store for me and so I prayed for God to send us a baby and shortly after Matthew was conceived. We later found out that his name means “Gift of God”.

Three years later we were blessed with Alexander and his name means “Helper of mankind”.

I also remember us wanting to conceive yet at the same time arguing about whether the time was right. I know today that at that point in our lives when Franca was questioning whether or not we should have children, I was not only being selfish but also cheating myself out of one of the true blessings of marriage and what a beautiful and enriching experience it is to live your life for your family.

When our son was to undergo a serious surgery, for three months, I lived in a bubble and I questioned everything. Did we have the best doctor? Had we thought everything out? I even asked the doctor if he

was the best doctor for the surgery. His answer was “If I’ve not learned about a mother’s heart by now, then I’ve learned nothing”.

Mario did everything he could to reassure and support me yet I needed my space, he gave me the gift of time and patience, he never got angry, never felt threatened or rejected, he loved me enough to let me be. During the surgery, we both sat prayed and our prayers were answered.

On numerous occasions, through the course of my career, I have been offered promotions in Louisville, Houston and twice in Los Angeles. On each of those occasions, we based our decisions on what felt right for our children and us. It was about our family and not just about my career and myself.

Everything we have gone through has made us stronger and brought us closer, even though while we were living those difficult moments, it was hard to see the good that could come out of it.

When friends around us were going through divorce, one common thing stood out, they didn’t feel as if they were cherished in their marriage and the marriage eventually dissolved.

If we really love one another, why not do everything we can to let the person know how much we care about them even in the little things we do for one another.

It is amazing how even one kind word or one gesture can make all the difference in the world.

We are honoured to be asked to say a few words especially at the 9:00 mass because our faith community is a big part of our life. It would take an hour to tell you all the wonderful ways our kids have been enriched by everyone at St. Luke, Michael and Julie, the youth group and the wonderful young adults that we were privileged to travel with to WYD in Sydney, we love them all. We were blessed to have Father Gilles accompanying us on that pilgrimage too.

They enrich our family greatly.

Franca and Mario