The Doctor Needs Cana

Anonymous

It seems presumptuous to me that I should be telling other doctors how to make their married lives happier by means of Cana Conferences. But Cana has brought such rich blessings to my family life that I cannot keep quiet about it. If I were to do this job scientifically, I should divide the doctor's life into the various phases much like we divide the body into various systems. Then we should discuss the physiology and pathology of each phase and the proper hygiene and treatment for each in the light of the Cana Conferences. However, I am not going to go about this scientifically. I just want to tell you what Cana has meant to me and to my wife as an ordinary married couple.

I had always prided myself on my knowledge of women. What man doesn't? Give them plenty of money, a house to show off, some children to love, keep them busy and they are happy. Oh yes, take them out once in awhile, meet their friends occasionally so that they can be duly impressed with your importance. It was on one of these occasions that I gave up a perfectly good Sunday to go to a Cana Conference with my wife to keep her happy. It was a lot different day than I had expected. I thought I would catch up on some sleep, but the priest kept me awake by talking about me, so it seemed. My Guardian Angel must have given him my marriage score sheet. He hit me hardest when he knocked over my theory on women and proved that I did not know the dear ladies as well as I thought I did.

Women are lonely, perpetually so. God made them that way. They crave the companionship of the man God gave them as their partner to fill their life. They will never be satisfied unless they feel that there is someone who really loves them, who thinks about them and is interested in them as the most important thing on earth. The money I had handed instead of giving her
myself, was a mighty poor substitute. She could fill her pocketbook with it, but not her heart. She used the money in a vain effort to find a substitute for me. No, she was not unfaithful. Her heart was too noble for that. It might have been broken often, but never divided. She bought beautiful silver service, polished furniture, lovely drapes, heavy linen, fine lace and lovely clothes. However, her interest in all of them waned, because they could not return her interest. She wanted me, but I did not know it. In my smug complacency I thought that she had me. Now I realized that I was wedded to many other people and in spirit divorced from her. My office, my patients, my meetings got my allegiance, my interest, my care and my thoughts. I thought I gave her everything when I gave her my name and my money.

With that first Cana Conference, I was ushered into marriage. I found out that it was a lot more than two bodies and one pocketbook. I found that it was supposed to be the union of two grown-up people, united for the purpose of making each other more contented in this life, and reasonably sure of being content in the next life. It was quite an eye-opener for my wife too. It brought about the minor, or maybe the major miracle of having us talk about ourselves, how we were getting along, and how much better life would be for the two of us if we both wanted it to be. We lay awake late that night, reviewing the days since I had slipped the ring on her finger. Our review renewed the humility we had felt that day as the Cana Director talked about the beauties of marriage such as God had planned it, and the mess of marriage as man had made it. When we went to sleep that night, I think we were closer together than we had ever been, even on the days of our honeymoon. For the first time in many nights, I was thinking of her, and I dreamed of her rather than of my work and worries of the next day. When we woke the next morning, we were still holding hands, and I felt more rested than I had in years.

We did not become a model couple overnight. We still don’t claim to be, but we are trying. She helps me a lot with those letters that I find on my desk when I get to my office. Thursday she wrote: “Dearest, I want to apologize for contradicting you
in front of the children last night. They may lose some of their respect for you when they hear me argue with you, and I would certainly not want that to happen.” Here she was apologizing, when she had a right to bawl me out for arguing in front of the children. She was apologizing to me—to me who debates every question that will allow me to show my superiority and my knowledge. Her humility is gradually robbing me of the sadistic joy I must have subconsciously felt at humiliating her. I hope some day to even quit wincing when she proceeds to give her diagnosis and outline treatment for one of her friends who is a patient of mine.

It was at a Cana Conference that I heard the quotation about “men lead lives of quiet desperation.” They feel that they are constantly falling short of what they might be, what they should be. The priest told the wives that God meant them to lighten the load for their husbands, to encourage them and to sympathize with them. My wife caught the idea, and began to praise me and my work. I realize now that she might have stretched the truth at times when she would sit on the arm of my chair at night and say: “I am so glad the Jones woman is getting better. Her sister told me that she had consulted at least a half dozen of the best men in town, but none of them had helped her.” It helped to make up for the depression I felt over breaking the baby’s humerus in the delivery room that day.

When we were planning our wedding, I had made it clear to my wife, that as a professional man, with the confidence of hundreds of people, I could not discuss the affairs of my patients. I had maintained a rigid silence about my professional contacts. It was a world in which my wife had no part, so I reasoned. I bore my worries at times like a cloak of gloom, never allowing my wife to peek inside. At first she had tried to get me to talk about my work, but I gave her the “strong silent man” treatment. But when she began to pass on to me real or imagined compliments she heard about my work, I found myself more and more talking about what happened from the time I slammed the door on her in the morning, until I opened it with tired hands and drooping spirits in the evening. In the coffee shop at the hospital, I had always wanted to brag about my successes: “the
woman in 506; the girl whom everyone thought would die.” But I had to be so careful not to appear to be bragging. Someone might remind me of my failures too. I was not quite old enough or famous enough to patronize over the younger man. At home, under my new talking regime, I could brag to my heart’s content: At first Peg used to sit on the arm of my sacred chair, where I had presided since I was married, with my paper and my journals. It felt so good to have her beside me, listening to me and appreciating me, that I moved to the corner of the sofa, and she came and sat beside me, with her legs tucked under her. If anyone had told me that discussing cases with a woman who thought that “angina” was a part of a woman’s anatomy, would help a successful doctor, I would have laughed him to scorn. However, I found that in pointing out symptoms, explaining their import, formulating a plan of treatment and giving its rationale, outlining the prognosis, I saw new angles, checked mistakes and found myself intelligently questioning many of my routine procedures.

The priest to whom I go to confession knows that I am a physician. For years he has been telling me to see Christ in my patients, but he never told me to see Christ in my wife. It was at a Cana Conference that I learned that. Oh, I know that at times I am still blind and it is the biggest test of faith to try to realize that she is a child of God and God loves her. When she asks me to go downtown, park the car in the rain or snow or stifling heat to pay the gas bill, I have to close my eyes and think of the Cana Conference in which Father said: “If Jesus Christ asked you to do it, you would. He said that whatever you did for the least of His brethren, you were doing for Him.” That sure helps. And it is a gladdening feeling when I remember it during my examination of conscience at night, and think that I have gained some merit in heaven for doing it, and maybe shortened my stay in purgatory by making up for some of the punishment that the Lord has on the books for my many sins.

Medical school studies brought adequate knowledge of the functions and purpose of sex. I entered marriage with a knowledge that marriage relations were good because of God’s plan. I had not had, however, any special instructions about the morality of
It was at a Cana Conference that I first realized that the sexual union in marriage could be an act of virtue. Then it was clear that it should not be a cause for shame and that it should not prevent one from going to communion.

The realization that the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony rests upon the sexual union of man and woman as its basic factor, was something that took quite a while to sink in. I could always have argued that God meant us to enjoy marriage relations, that it was the Creator who made them pleasurable, but it took the Cana Conferences to open my eyes to the beauty and holiness of the Sacrament of “two in one flesh.” I think I had felt a secret resentment towards my wife on account of her soft attractiveness which made me want her physically, and I felt a sort of disgust for my own weakness, that I could not keep away from her comfortably and easily without a struggle. Now I thank God for making her so lovable. She is now much more loving too. She had a lot of inhibitions that kept her from a warm generous response. Now we burn a vigil light in our bedroom before the statue of the Sacred Heart to remind us that our embrace is not merely an instinct of our loins, but an expression of the love in our hearts. It takes an added spark from the knowledge that each is a personality made to love and be loved as a Child of God, as one whom the Sacred Heart of Jesus loves. There are many ways for human beings to express their love for each other. Now, we feel free in this, the way God made for husband and wife to express their love. It helps too, to know that we are cooperating directly with Him in His great work of creating new human beings who will give Him love for all eternity. Several times we have acted out a play of the short book of the Bible, called the “Canticle of Canticles.” It is a book that explains under the imagery of human love and love-making, the love of Christ for the Church. We have a book which explains the test and breaks it down into dialogue and action as a play. When Peg first suggested it I thought it kind of silly, but we took it along and acted it out on our semi-annual Cana honeymoon. I am sure that before attending the Cana Conference we would have been shocked at such opening words in a book of Holy Writ: “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth: for thy breaths are better than wine.”
Cana has made a difference too, in the saying of the rosary. Before Cana, I had said the rosary only when I went to Mass. Now I use my Missal and pray the Mass with the priest. The rosary is our house prayer. I had always been cold toward the idea of the family rosary. Kneeling by the side of the bed and praying when your bones ached to be tucked comfortably under the covers, was not my idea of prayer. That was just sacrifice. I argued that it was poor psychology and poor religion, both God and us getting cheated. A Cana director gave us the tip-off that really fills the bill. Peg and I curl up together, sitting in the corner of the divan. I lead on the odd decades, and she leads on the even ones. We use only one rosary, with both of us holding it, and our right hands joined as they were at our wedding ceremony. As the priest told us, "In marriage you join your right hands. That leaves one hand free for each. You can use that hand to swing at each other, or you can reach out and hold hands with Christ, making your marriage a triangle, with God as its base, you resting on Him and getting your strength from him, being united to each other directly, and being united to each other through Him." Our rosary has become the symbol of Christ in our marriage. We have our own way of picking the mysteries for the day. If we are tired and discouraged, and if our conversation has been about our hardships, we say the Sorrowful Mysteries. We compare our crosses with the Cross of Christ, and our sorrows with the sorrows of Mary. If we have been successful and happy, we say the Glorious Mysteries, and talk about heaven. Christ said there would be no marrying in heaven, for marrying needs bodies, but love doesn't. Heaven will be full of love. We sometimes do not say all the Hail Mary's but discuss the mysteries and look at them from the viewpoint of our daily lives. I think that is what the Blessed Mother wants. When we are in a romantic and loving mood, we say the Joyful Mysteries. Our present plans call for the Joyful Mysteries every night until term, if God sees fit to bless our union again.

There has been a subtle but definite change in the monetary standard of our married life. Redecorating is no longer so frequent or so thorough a job. Peg does not seem to be so interested in material things anymore. When the people next door had their property landscaped, I fully expected that we would follow suit.
One night, however, Peg surprised me by saying: "Honey I have decided not to have our front yard done. For the past week I watched the people next door, and then began to plan on changing our own. Yesterday, while I was getting supper, it came to me suddenly: 'Here is the baldest example of keeping up with the neighbors.' In almost every Cana Conference a priest will mention that in some way or another. I guess we have been doing it for years and never realized it." Then she added the idea that is basic to the Cana Conference, and indeed to Christianity: "For years I have been looking for happiness in material things like a new car, a new dress, a party, or a new landscape job. Lately I have begun to see that those things don't bring solid, lasting happiness. It is an insult to the Creator to embrace and hold on to created things instead of using them to rise to Him. It is like one of the priests said: 'The old pagans adored the sun instead of adoring the loving Power that made the sun to serve mankind.' We have been pagans, idolators without realizing it."

Once I held that it was a sacred and inviolable right for a man to have at least one night a week in which he would be free to get away from his wife. I guess I felt that marriage was a necessary evil in a man's life, and he had a right to surcease from it regularly. Cana has given me a different attitude on that. Now I plead "too busy" when there come invitations which will take me away from my wife. My work and necessary outside interests, her work and interest in the house and children tend to absorb so much of our time and energy, that we have far too little time together. At one time in our married life, I thought it would be boring to be with Peg very much more than I was. At first my new attention was dutiful and a trifle bit strained, but she basked in it as a rosebush in the sun, and under the warmth of it, she began to bud forth and show beauties that I had never dreamed of. Following clues given us in Cana Conferences, I began to see colors and beauties of her personality that I had been blind to before. I began to enjoy her company more than I thought it possible for a husband. I definitely like to have her around. If I get a night off now, I want to be with her.

Maybe I should tell you how the Cana Conferences have affected our relations with our children. But that would take an
article much longer than this. Also, I should tell you how it has improved our relationship with the Church, but you might think I was trying to prove that Cana Conferences are the panacea for everything in life. In my practice, I find that this new relationship with my wife has changed my outlook. I have lost a lot of my feeling of arrogant superiority toward women and their troubles. I am more sympathetic and understanding, and they appreciate it. It helps me to give them a better attitude toward their marriage, toward God.

Frankly, my first thought when I heard about these Conferences, was that they were just religious talks. I felt I had enough of that on Sundays and on Missions. Then my wife told me that they have discussions among the couples about marriage problems. That almost stopped me from going. I knew the people who were attending, and I did not have much respect for their opinions. I knew they had no special qualifications to entitle them to be settling other people's problems. But I did not realize that their discussion was not about big, special problems, but the ordinary things that need but the minimum of thought and the maximum of good will to eliminate. I found that other families had much the same life that we do, with the same enjoyments, the same sorrows, the same worries. I found that they solved things in much the same way that we do, and I even picked up some pointers that I had not thought about. Some friends of ours told us about the amount of psychology they learned at the Conferences. I felt that I knew enough psychology to handle any situation that would arise. After all, wasn't I advising people every day of the week on their conduct in marriage? But I learned something special from the Conferences. It was how to correlate the psychology of marriage with the religion of marriage. A family does not live in compartments, with this time for psychology, this time for religion, this time for love-making, this time for thinking. I learned the trick of integrating, centering things about God and my duties toward Him and toward others for His sake. It has helped me to feel that I am really doing something worthwhile at all times.

The best effect of the Cana Conferences came, not from any information we carried away, but from the new spirit we gained
from the idea that Peg and I, with God's help, must work at our marriage if we are going to make it a success. No one knows our needs, our frailties, our joys as we do. We talk them over now, and plan how we will work them out. We pray for understanding and God's help. We can thank the Cana Conferences for starting us, for keeping us on the road of true unity, thinking together, loving together, worrying together, praying together. We feel that we are finally attaining some of that unity for which God made marriage. It has made my wife a lot happier, and made me happier too. That is why I am recommending Cana to all my friends.