

Amazing Grace

Dr. Gregory & Lisa Popcak have so much to offer Catholic Families as they share the Amazing Grace God and His church give us for the journey ahead. This is a conference you won't want to miss and will want to bring family and friends to.

Enjoy this article from a presentation at a Family Life Conference in the US that will introduce you to the Popcaks. At the Conference this year they will give three talks and have a lively Q&A session in the evening where you will have the opportunity to address issues specific to your marriages and family life.

Do you have the kind of marriage that makes the angels smile and the neighbors sick with jealousy?

That question opened Gregory and Lisa Popcak's presentation during a Catholic Family Conference attended by people from 29 parishes in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Missouri, Texas and Kentucky.

The Popcaks presented "For Better, Forever: Four Secrets of Incredible Marriage" to an audience of couples young and old, reminding all that marriage is "a sacrament instituted by God to help you become the person God meant you to be in this life. It is also supposed to get you to heaven."

Dr. Gregory Popcak is a nationally recognized expert in pastoral counseling, especially in the areas of marriage and family problems. He has degrees in psychology and theology, as well as a master's degree in clinical social work and a Ph.D. in human services with a specialization in pastoral counseling. He has written seven books, plus articles and columns for such publications as Catholic Parent, Family Foundations, Faith and Family and Our Sunday Visitor, among others.



He has hosted two television series for EWTN, "For Better ... FOREVER!" and "God Help Me!" With his wife, he hosts the daily, nationally-syndicated Catholic radio broadcast, "Heart Mind & Strength," and serves as executive director of the Pastoral Solutions Institute.

"Pope John Paul II said there is one secret to making (a happy marriage) happen," Gregory Popcak said. "That secret is called self donation. Self donation is a kind of heroic generosity. In particular, it enables us to give ourselves totally to our spouse — to use your whole self to work for the good of the other person."

Through the course of the marital relationship, spouses help to perfect one another. “Marriage,” he said, “is the preparation chamber for the day that we will meet our God in that heavenly, eternal wedding feast, and every day, husbands and wives smooth out the blemishes that we have through our conflicts, and we make each other sweet-smelling through the love that we share and the romance that we enjoy in our relationship ... so that one day we can stand in the awesome presence of God without trembling, without shame.”

There are four qualities of self donation, which the Popcaks defined in the acronym “GIFT.” “‘GIFT’ is what you should be for your spouse,” Lisa Popcak said. “In this acronym, ‘G’ means that you are going to ‘grow’ together in your Christian identities. ‘I’ means that you are going to ‘invite’ each other to experience original unity. ‘F’ is ‘foster’ companionate and romantic love, and ‘T’ is to ‘treasure’ the sacred power of your romantic intimacy.”

To “grow” together in Christian identity, the Popcaks suggested that couples create a marital mission statement that articulates the values that they stand for and the beliefs that they want to uphold.

“You have strength in your Christian identity if you live out the virtues you’ve articulated in your life,” Gregory Popcak said. “If every day your life presents an active pursuit of those values, ideals and goals that you say you want to live out and stand up for. “When you are baptized, you receive as a gift your identity,” he continued. “God gives you the qualities, the virtues that he asks you then to live out in the course of your life. That is your identity, and that is what spouses are called to help each other live out every day in the course of their relationship.”

They suggested that couples sit down together, look at the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, and write about what gifts they have, what goals they would like to attain, and what qualities their families may need more of, such as love, respect or responsibility. “You create an idea together of how you want to live, and you talk about how you can draw each other on to these qualities,” Lisa Popcak said. “That’s what it’s all about; partnering together.”

That allows couples to be accountable to themselves and to each other. Inviting one another to experience “original unity” is rooted in the Book of Genesis — to Adam and Eve in their relationship with one another before the fall.

“The Church does not teach that men are from one planet and women are from another,” Lisa Popcak said. “That is a worldly idea.” “It is an idea that describes how things are,” Gregory Popcak said. “It doesn’t tell you what you are supposed to become and what God, through the grace of marriage, is challenging you to grow into. After the fall, men and women drew a line in the sand and dared each other to cross. Before the fall, man and woman were perfect helpmates to each other. Adam looked at Eve and said, ‘At last, this is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.’”

To invite one another to original unity, spouses must understand that “each of us is made in his image and likeness,” Lisa Popcak said, “and that each of us lives out God-given virtues, for example nurturance, differently.”

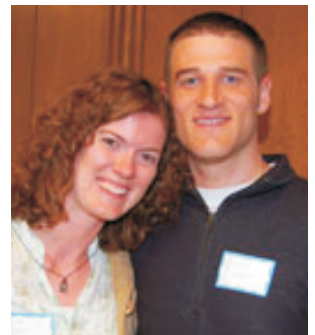
“These differences are all about service and real generosity,” Gregory Popcak said. Fostering companionate and romantic love is based in the idea that “companionate and romantic love work together,” the Popcaks continued.

“You need both in your marriage,” Lisa Popcak said, adding that developing friendship throughout the course of marriage involves “working together in generosity.” The essence of real friendship “is the willingness to work for the other person even at the expense of your own comfort,” Gregory Popcak said. “By doing those things, we cultivate that companionate love.”

There is a spiritual purpose to romantic love. “Romantic love is not just this Hollywood-y, kitschy thing,” Gregory Popcak said. “We’re going to spend eternity in God’s presence, loving and being loved by him. If your spouse isn’t worth a card, or a couple of words of affirmation, or love, affection or attention from you, how is your spouse ever going to get used to the idea that he or she is going to be eternally in the presence of the most perfect, most incredibly passionate love that he or she will ever experience?”

Finally, the Popcaks explained how couples can “treasure” the sacred power of marital intimacy, a “sacrament which works for the perfection of the couple by helping them to grow together in love, and leaving them open to the power of bringing new life into the world.” “Remember that we are not just loving each other in our own power,” Gregory Popcak said. “We are revealing God’s love.”

Shane and Erin Starr, newlyweds, enjoyed the presentations. “It was really great to hear the Popcaks together,” Shane Starr said. “We’ve read several of their books, and I enjoyed that they covered a lot of the ideas they present in their writing. It was a great refresher.” “We listen to their radio show, too,” Erin Starr said, “and it’s always nice to hear words of wisdom about how to be a strong Catholic family. We don’t have children yet, and I think this is a great way to help us prepare.”



Father Ted Dudzinski, moderator of the conference, said, “The Holy Spirit was very much present this weekend. On Saturday morning, I could sense a great energy and desire for families to participate. I think we had a wonderful balance of families with children, older couples and single people. We accomplished what we set out to do; to offer a conference for Catholic families,” he said. “The facilitators and speakers were all awesome. I thank God for the grace and the gift of the conference, for everybody who worked to make it happen, and for everyone who participated and desired to grow in their love and knowledge of God and how to be a good family. To that end, I think it was a very grace-filled weekend.”