

Evil overload

Joe Ferullo | Nov. 24, 2009 NCR Today

My wife and I finally got away this weekend to celebrate our twentieth wedding anniversary, and -- oddly enough -- I found myself thinking about the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Sylvia wasn't particularly flattered that the bishops popped into my brain, but it is all actually tied very closely to our wedding day.

As you know, the bishops recently approved a pastoral letter on marriage that has the words "intrinsically evil" peppered all over it. Some of this language was removed before final passage, but much remained -- divorce and gay marriage were among the items awarded the "intrinsically evil" label.

Since 9/11, "evil" has been tossed around a lot in our national conversation -- and I wonder if it's losing its power. To call something evil (let alone intrinsically evil) is strong stuff; you'd hope religious people most of all would recognize that and hold back.

Apparently not the bishops, not when it comes to marriage. Which makes me think of my wedding day.

A couple weeks before, the priest who was helping us plan our ceremony came up with a novel idea: how about, right after Sylvia and I exchange vows, we all turned to the congregation and invited everyone married to exchange vows, too -- renewing their bonds?

At first, Sylvia and I were put off: after all, this was our special day. Our wedding. Now it was going to be some mass-wedding like the Reverend Moon used to do at Yankee Stadium? But the more we thought about it, the more it seemed like a great way to make the day special for everyone there.

And it happened: couples in church held hands and recited their wedding vows along with the priest. Suddenly, a few rows in, my wife and I spotted two couples crying as they spoke. Sylvia knew them and knew their stories. She told me later: both couples had been divorced many years ago and couldn't remarry in the church. Their new marriages had thrived and survived for decades, but something was always missing.

Taking their vows at our wedding made them feel as if their unions had been blessed at last. They cried over it, they were that happy.

I thought of them this weekend and thought of those two words: "intrinsically evil." Is that what those couples were? Is that what they remain today? Is that what entered our church at our wedding 20 years ago?

No. It was not.