How to pick the right spouse

Next to our choice of God, the most important choice most of us will make in life will be the choice of a marriage partner. The choice of a spouse will affect our physical, emotional and spiritual health, and to a large degree the health of our children and grandchildren. We will pass on to our descendents our dysfunctional and addictive traits (addiction to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs), as well as our qualities of caring, commitment and character.

Yet, as Dr. Laura has said: "We spend more time picking out our silverware pattern, than we do picking the right spouse." Being attracted to someone who is "hot" or "cool" is not the same as choosing someone who is gentle and forgiving.

How do we choose the right marital partner? Well, recently Monsignor Tom Baumgartner, the retired pastor of St. Ursula, sent me a copy of some "letters to the editor" on that topic. The letters were written in response to a column on "An Ideal Husband," in which Father Pat Connor lists the following traits to avoid in a prospective husband: "abusiveness, drunkenness, financial irresponsibility and sociopathic tendencies." Here are a few of the responses to his column:

Ben Miller writes: "As a young man who aspires to the gentlemanly ideal, I would suggest that in formulating their model for the perfect husband, young women should refrain from studying dysfunctional 'celebrity divorces' and look to the ideals of the past."

Published in 1877, the Ladies and Gentleman's Etiquette states: "A true gentleman is always himself at his best. He is inherently unselfish, thinking always of the needs and desires of others before his own. He is dignified among equals, respectful but not groveling to his superiors, tender and compassionate to inferiors, and helpful and protecting to the weak.

"Women – all women of whatever age or condition – claim his respectful care and tender and reverential regard."

A positive look at qualities in a partner. However, a twice-divorced woman offers these suggestions:

“Never marry a man who yells at you in front of his friends.

“Never marry a man who is more affectionate in public than in private.

“Never marry a man who notices all of your faults but never notices his own.

“Never marry a man whose first wife had to sue him for child support.

“Never marry a man who corrects you in public.

“Never marry a man who sends birthday cards to his ex-girlfriends.

“Never marry a man who doesn’t treat his pets nicely.

“Never marry a man who is rude to waiters.

“Never marry a man who doesn’t love music.

“Never marry a man whose plants are all dead.

“Never marry a man your mother doesn’t like.

“Never marry a man your children don’t like.

“Never marry a man who hates his job.

“Never marry a man who doesn’t give you lovely and romantic gifts for your birthday and Valentine’s Day.”

Finally, my own advice: A good relationship is not just about finding the right person, but being the right person. Be the best you can be and you will attract someone trying to be the best he or she can be. And always pray a lot. Prayer does work miracles. Hold the ideal of the person you want to marry in mind, and refuse to settle for less. Put that image of the ideal person on God’s list, and trust! God will deliver in God’s time!