

## A Battle Worth Picking

***Consider for a moment, the human body. The body is capable of doing incredible things. Imagine the training and discipline required to win an Olympic gold medal or a World Major marathon. These things don't happen by chance or accident, but with the combination of desire and hard work. This is also true of the spiritual life and our need to put in the hard work to make our souls worthy to spend with God in eternity. As a nurse, I was trained to care for the whole person, not just the physical body. It is why we do a complete history on each patient who presents for a procedure. We ask questions that have nothing to do with their bodies. Do they live alone and do they feel safe? Do they struggle with anxiety or depression? Have they thought about suicide? We also ask about religious preferences. Their answers reflect overall health and wellness and will determine how we proceed with treatment. We understand the complexity of the human person when we take a holistic approach to the care of each individual. As a nurse working for the Catholic Church in a parish setting, the challenge is to encourage health and wellness from the perspective that we are bodies and souls. I hope I am able to accomplish that in the reflection that follows.***

Sweat dripped down the sides of my face as I wrestled with my toddler daughter's 5-point harness. It was the 3rd time in ten minutes that I had pulled over, put the car in park, opened the back door and strong-armed my kicking and screaming child back into her carseat.

"Back in my day, we just put the kid on our lap and called it a day. We didn't have to fight kids. Your generation sure makes parenting hard on yourselves."

My well intentioned mother-in-law was chiming in from the passenger seat in front. I may or may not have grumbled something about "survivor bias", meaning the children who were catapulted from cars back then were not around to tell their cautionary tales about not being restrained in a moving vehicle.

Statistically we should have had at least one baby who liked to ride in a carseat. With four kids, one would think that would be the case. Somehow my husband and I happened to breed the kind that HATED being restrained in the car, which made multiple trips from Columbus to Cincinnati and back, sheer penance for the four years we lived up north. Nevertheless, as difficult and unpleasant as many of those trips proved to be, we were not willing to take a chance and let our offspring roam around the car. We could never forgive ourselves should a preventable injury or death occur for the sake of temporary peace and quiet. This isn't heroic parenting by any means. It's just what parents do to protect their children. In my humble opinion, it's the basics.

Fast forward to the summer of 2020 and I'm standing in the kitchen of my friend's Norris Lake summer home. We had spent that entire Saturday boating on the lake, soaking up the sun, surfing and enjoying life. I mentioned to my then 13 year old daughter that since the following day was Sunday, we either had to find an early mass in town or leave with enough time to make 7 pm mass in Cincinnati. When the kids left the kitchen, my friend innocently asked why I made my daughter go to mass. Didn't I worry that if I pushed too hard for something she didn't want to do, she would end up rejecting her faith? Didn't I want her to explore different faiths and find the one that most resonated with her life and her values? This friend had witnessed me searching for local Catholic Churches on many weekends that we had spent

together with our daughters at horse shows. She had noticed the eye rolling and heavy sighs each time I brought it up. She had noticed my girl's slumped shoulders as we walked out the door when none of the other girls had to go to Mass. And she was intrigued. After all, I seemed pretty reasonable and kind of normal, so what was the deal with the forced Mass attendance? Why, of all the battles we face with our kids, would I choose to fight this one?

I wish in that moment I had remembered the carseat years. I wish I had the words, the wisdom and the insight to respond with the glaringly evident truth. As parents, it is not just our duty to protect our children physically, but also spiritually. We are not just bodies. We are bodies and souls—souls, which at the end of our physical lives, stand before God and are judged. This is what our Catholic faith teaches and this is what I believe. If I didn't, I would not be Catholic. As a parent, I must protect both the body and the soul of my child, so long as they are in my care. Like my babies who didn't like their carseats, I also had children who didn't like the inconvenience of going to Mass. Like babies with no understanding that car seats were best for their physical safety, so go the children that often do not understand what is best for their souls. But as parents, our job is to insist on these things anyway because we know they aid in the protection of our children's bodies and souls.

My duty to restrain my kids when they were small was not cancelled out because they might choose not to buckle up once they are driving on their own.

I understand the chaos and the work involved getting kids out the door for Mass. I know what it is like to discover your teenager still in bed 5 minutes before you are leaving after you have awakened him 3 or 4 times already. I know what it is like when your 5 year old comes down dressed in a bathing suit for Mass or when your baby spits out carrots and peas all over his church clothes. I know what it is like to hunt for shoes and to look in the rearview mirror and see that sleepy teen's bedhead hair. I know what it is like to stand in the back of church, take an unruly child outside, endure rude stares from others and feel like I have run a marathon after mass. It is exhausting and oh so easy to opt out. I also know God sees all those things. He longs to come to us in the gift of the Eucharist should we just give him the chance. And when we give him that chance, He is so pleased, particularly since he knows the cost of our effort. He waits for the opportunity to pour an abundance of grace upon us when we battle for the souls of our kids. Please know it is a battle worth fighting.

I also know what it's like to lie in bed and decide to skip mass. To decide soccer and baseball games take priority and to use the "traveler's dispensation" excuse while on vacation. I know what it is like to hide from God because I am not living my vocation according to His will. I know what it is like to avoid confession for many years and pretend it doesn't matter. I know what it is like to be lukewarm and indifferent to matters of faith. As the saying goes, been there, done that, bought the t-shirt. I know what it is like to be my children's ages... with one foot in and one foot out of the Church, at times even living with both feet out.

But you see, I had faithful parents who put forth the effort when I was a child. They "forced" me to go to Mass and "forced" family prayer. My dad frequently brought us to confession (and then bought us ice cream!). Most importantly, my parents lived the faith in their daily lives. They walked out the doors of Church every week and that is when the gospel came to life for us. Discussions about God and faith were common in our home. We prayed before meals. They led by example in word and deed. They prayed for us daily (and thanks be to God, still do!).

And for me, that has made all the difference and I believe it will also make the difference for my children if my husband and I do these things. It is no easy task in a secular culture. It often feels like we are lone fish swimming upstream. We haven't always been faithful to the promises we made at our children's Baptisms:

**“You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand the commitment you are undertaking?”**

We said “We do.” But we sometimes did not. I have been humbled by God's mercy and love for us. It has been many years since we made the decision to raise our children as we promised on the day of their baptisms and the beautiful thing about God is that He doesn't hold grudges or keep grievances. Instead, He is filled with joy. He picked us up, dusted us off and embraced us. He gave us an abundance of grace as we forged ahead, resolving to do what He asked by caring for His children... bodies AND souls.

So parents, bring your children to Mass and be aware of the example you set for them in everyday life. If you and your child's or children's other parent are not together and the other parent doesn't intend to follow the same path as you do in regard to religious formation, know that you are only responsible for what YOU do, not what the other parent does. Do your part and pray for your child's other parent and let God do the rest. If your children are grown and not practicing the faith, don't despair, just keep praying for them. If you have accidentally stumbled upon this rambling note, but have not been practicing the faith, might I encourage you to begin today. Here are a few points to consider:

God is merciful always. Don't be afraid and don't delay (I once heard a priest say that those who intend to wait until the 11th hour to change usually die at 10:30).

If Church is the hospital for the sick, think of the confessional as where the Narcan is kept. Confession does for the soul what Narcan does for the body. Go as often as necessary.

Do not believe for one second that you cannot start doing what you haven't been in your families. If you've never taken your kids to Mass or take them only occasionally, you have the ability, authority and might I add, the obligation as Catholic parents to change that.

If you need encouragement, help, guidance and or assistance, talk to one of our priests. You could also talk to Brad Macke, who is in charge of Adult Faith Formation here at St. Ignatius and would also love to help anyone on his or her faith journey. There is an abundance of resources from which you can learn about the Catholic faith and the teachings of the Church. If you invest the time and energy learning, I promise that you will find the beauty and joy that comes with being authentically Catholic. Please don't hesitate to reach out anytime.

***“Consider how precious a soul must be, when both God and the devil are after it.”***

-Charles Spurgeon

God Bless you.

Kate Rewwer