



St. Rita

catholic community

A Letter From Our Pastoral Administrator

Noisy Little Saints: A Marian Reflection on Loud Kids

Dear Parishioners,

Holding my squirming, screaming 3-year-old tight, I break for the narthex as quickly and inconspicuously as I can. Once outside the sanctuary, I breathe a little easier. "At least we made it through the first reading," I say to myself. Just then a friend, a mother of five children, sidles up to ask a theological question: "How much of the Mass do we actually have to pay attention to in order to fulfill our Sunday obligation? I spend the whole Mass back here. Am I really going to Mass if I'm chasing kids the whole time?" "I've asked myself the same thing," I groan. And then we both run off, each after our own kid, up to something.

I'm a priest, of course, but as a parent, I know this experience personally. Being a parent has certainly changed my Sunday experience, my wife's the most. Embarrassed, distracted, awkward: you name it, we've felt it. From judging eyes to ruining sacred silence,

we parents worry about it all. "Going to Mass is just different now," one new mother said to me recently, sighing. I think every parent with young children can say the same.

Churchy *faux pas* aside, there is a deeper question to consider for parents minding their blessedly noisy little ones in church. And that is, what is the spiritual value of going to Mass if all you do is chase after noisy kids? What's the spiritual point? This is a serious question and one not very easy to answer.

Although Christian tradition puts very high value on role of families and parents, it's not altogether clear that the tradition has much good to say about the actual quality of parents' spiritual lives. St. Paul, for example, said that while the unmarried woman is concerned about the "affairs of the Lord," the married woman is concerned about "worldly affairs" (1 Cor. 7:34). St. Jerome put it even

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more bluntly: "Then come the prattling of infants, the noisy household... Tell me, pray, where amid all this is there room for the thought of God?" (*Against Helvidius* 22). It's an ageless assumption, it seems, that parents necessarily occupied with the bustle of family life are thereby cutoff from the deeper resources of the spiritual life. On the surface, at least it seems parents of noisy children shouldn't fight trying to pray or pay attention to the Mass while wrestling their kiddos. It seems there's just not much in the tradition giving young parents hope of anything but an abbreviated or suspended spirituality until the kids get a little older. It seems parents with noisy kids just have to tough it out, sign-up for a second-rate prayer life, and get on with it.

But is this actually so? Should parents just give up on their prayers when they furtively retreat to the narthex, screaming kids in tow, or when they struggle to quiet their fidgety little one in the pew? I don't think so.

At the back of the church, in my frazzled meditation, my thoughts turned to Mary, our Blessed Mother, seeing her as the patroness of young exhausted par-



ents. Mary, I think, genuinely sympathizes with parents chasing kids during Sunday Mass, struggling to keep them quiet. She too chased her Son all over the place, and I'm sure He was at times noisy. Jesus, in fact, gave her the slip once in Jerusalem, causing all sorts of heartache (Lk. 2:41-51). She, too, was an exhausted parent.

And here's another analogy. Imagine Mary on Good Friday as her son is dragged to Calvary to be crucified. All along the Via Dolorosa, she's trying to pay attention to her Son, to see Him, speak to Him, comfort Him. She tries,

but she's jostled by the crowd. Her companions – John and the other women – are crying, needing her strength and support. She's pulled this way and that, all the while acutely aware that something really important is going on – over there, within earshot, out of the corner of her eye. The sacrifice is happening over there, but she's harried by the noisy bustle of the crowd. Yet, in her heart, she's following her Son, although she remains among the hurried crowd. This is how Mary attended the first Paschal sacrifice – distracted, exhausted. Like you.

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Building Women of Integrity: American Heritage Girls Troop 838

What does our American Heritage Girls Troop 838 have planned for their new year that's just getting started?

The answer – lots of activities guaranteed to be loads of fun and guaranteed to build character and faith!

And girls ages 5 through 18 are welcome to join!

An Open House is slated for Sept. 17 here at the church, where the troop meets from 3 to 4:30 p.m. on Sundays, twice a month, from August through early May.

Shannon Catalina has been the troop coordinator for two years, and is handing the post on to Sara Hamilton. There currently are 20 girls in the troop ranging in age from 5 to 15.

“Our mission statement is that we build women of integrity through service to God,” Shannon says. “What we are trying to do is teach the girls about their faith, and serving and being leaders in their community and family.”

Shannon's daughter became a member when Shannon discovered American Heritage Girls online and later talked to our troop leader at a Christmas parade.

“My boys are in Scouts, and my daughter had done everything they did,” Shannon says. “So, I was looking for something similar to the boys' organization, something that offered an opportunity to learn leadership and do outdoor activities. When I found American Heritage Girls, I looked to see what they had to offer.”

The troop is made up of different levels – Pathfinders are 5 years old and up; Tenderhearts are first grade through third; Explorers are fourth through sixth grade; Pioneers are seventh and eighth grade; Patriots are ninth grade and up.

And the activities have included Pinewood Derby, taking part in the Christmas parade, and two family campouts.

“We also do work in different areas of life,” Shannon says. “We work on personal well-being, community service and outdoors activities. The girls can learn how to camp, and how to fix cars and things that will help in personal growth. We do service projects, like visiting nursing



The Explorers in the troop made puppets and prepared and performed a skit for the Tenderhearts. Leadership skills, as well as growth in their faith, are practiced in the troop.

homes, and we put together birthday bags for those who may not have family. We make cards for veterans, and collected money for the Wreaths Across America project for veterans' graves during the holidays.”

The girls' Catholic faith also plays a strong role in the troop.

“We have devotionals, and participate in religious activities, often through the diocese,” Shannon says. “We participated in the Year of Mercy and prayed all the levels of the Divine Chaplet of Mercy. The girls can also plan religious services, and they can work on religious awards and badges at their own rate, often with their families. At the end of each meeting, we have a Servant Circle. We join hands and each person gets to share a prayer intention.”

Shannon encourages parents and their daughters to take a closer look at American Heritage Girls.

“You are definitely welcome to visit a troop meeting, see the activities and meet the girls, and see if it would be a right fit,” she says. “American Heritage Girls gives girls lots of opportunities to participate and learn with girls just like them.”

Any parents interested in having their daughters join the troop may contact Shannon Catalina at 972-907-2762, or email her at shannon.catalina@risd.org.

Giving Hope for the Fu

“I see these kids, it just doesn't seem like they ever had a chance,” says parishioner John Beatty. “I'm just trying to give them a little bit of a chance.”

The “kids” that John refers to are mostly orange jumpsuit-wearing teenagers, between the ages of 12 and 17, residents at a Henry Wade Juvenile Detention Center in Dallas.

“One of the young men I talked to told me, ‘My father is dead, my stepfather is in prison for 50 years, and my brother is in prison for 90 years,’” John says. “When you start hearing these stories, you realize they've never really had a chance.”

As John points out, for many of the youth, their lack of stable

community leads them to build unhealthy relationships within gangs, leading to dangerous and often, illegal activity.

But for John, who serves as the ministry lead for our Juvenile Detention Ministry, along with others from the Diocese of Dallas' Prison Ministry, it is an opportunity to bring hope to young people who may not have experienced much of it in their short lives.

“I hope we give them hope and paint a picture for them that is different than what they may believe is the inevitable,” John says. “Especially at the juvenile level, we have an opportunity to change someone's life and help them be members of our society that are helping rather than hurt-

ing. We want them to know that they have a choice and they can make decisions in order to be better. We want them to understand that they get to choose.”

Many of the youth are held in the facility for up to six or eight months before they are transitioned somewhere else, or released. Each year, approximately 7,000 young people go through the Wade Detention Center, which holds up to 140 residents at a time. Convictions range from violence and gang-related offenses, to drug charges, and more.

The Juvenile Detention Ministry serves to provide weekly programs, designed to help empower the young people and give them the life skills necessary to



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thrive once they are released. The courses cover topics such as independent thinking, peer pressure, self-awareness, and more. John also leads a number of sessions helping give the young people the tools necessary to learn how to gain jobs and succeed in them. The group also volunteers at various events hosted by the detention center, such as the Christmas morning celebration, Thanksgiving dinner, and a summer picnic.

Although, due to various regulations, those who serve in the Juvenile Detention Ministry are unable to freely share their faith, the youth know where the volunteers are from and the group is able to open each session with a prayer.

"We start with a prayer and I ask the young people if any of them would like prayer, we ask for God's help and guidance," John says. "Many of them ask for us to pray for them. We're trying to have an impact, while still following the rules."

It's John's hopes that the volunteers' actions and dedication will impact the lives of the young people they're serving, maybe even more than words could.

"I want them to know that there are people who care about them and are praying for them," he says. "If we can get that across to them, that is what we strive for. We're just trying to give them a little glimpse that someone cares for them and that Jesus cares for them."

John has also found his own faith being transformed as he has served in this ministry over the past eight years.

"I'm convinced I've gotten more out of it than I've put in," he says. "It's impacted me. When I ask if someone would like to begin the session with a prayer and one of the youth gets up and does a wonderful job, at their age, in the position they're in – it's very inspiring. You see the Holy Spirit in action as they're participating.

I believe the Holy Spirit is impacting them."

John encourages those who may be interested in becoming involved in this Corporal Work of Mercy, "visiting those in prison," to think and pray about if it is a ministry to which they are called. Training, background checks and fingerprinting is required and it's a ministry that requires a certain degree of commitment to being involved. John also notes that while it is sometimes a difficult ministry, the rewards are much greater than the sacrifice.

"This can be a scary thing, but we should do it because people aren't doing it," he says. "We want to be people who do the hard things. As Catholics, we're supposed to be the face of Christ to those that need it, and I think that's why we need to be doing this. There are kids that need hope, and if you can bring that, come on in."

If you would like more information on becoming involved in our Juvenile Detention Ministry, please contact John Beatty at 972-679-5572 or john.beatty.tx@gmail.com. The Juvenile Detention Ministry serves the youth at Wade Juvenile Detention Center each Wednesday night from 7-8:30 p.m., with special events on holidays.

Setting an Example of Stewardship for Our Children

As we strive to live as grateful stewards, we must remember that each of us has a responsibility to help our youngest parishioners learn what it means to live as a disciple of Christ. Jesus Himself told the disciples, “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Mt 19:14). Christ wants children to grow closer to Him and to become His disciples, and parents are responsible for helping to lead their children to this end. The Rite of Baptism reminds us that parents are “the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith.”

An important part of faith involves living a life of stewardship, as the proper response of a Christian disciple. So, it follows that parents bear a great responsibility that comes from Christ Himself to raise their children as grateful stewards. However, it may already be difficult for adults to grasp the concept of stewardship and put it into practice in their own lives. How can parents teach their children to do the same?

First and foremost, parents can teach stewardship by setting a good example. Indeed, the example of our lives is so powerful that it can and should be a witness to the Gospel. As parents live the life of stewardship, their children will see the beauty in the stewardship way of life, and they are bound to follow suit. If parents live in thanksgiving to God for all He has given them, their children will grow to see that all we have is a gift from God. And when parents offer gratitude to God, it will surely impact their children.

Eight-year-old Suzie has watched her dad serve Communion at Sunday Masses throughout her young life. When

asked why she thinks he does this, she responds, “We need to help the priest.”

Meanwhile, her older sister, Jane, responds to the same question by explaining, “We need to serve God. He does so much for us. We should appreciate it and give back to Him.”

It is clear that by witnessing their dad’s example, the girls are beginning to understand – each in her own way – that the life of a Christian disciple involves selfless service in gratitude to God. However, it is not just their father’s example that has helped them develop this understanding. Both their father and their mother emphasize stewardship as a family practice. They spend time in family prayer, serve at the soup kitchen together, bring up the offertory as a family, and participate in other acts of service. Such involved participation in the faithful life allows the girls to bear witness to the power of serving others in thanksgiving, even at their young ages.

“We need to help other people,” Suzie says. “Jesus wants us to put other people first, and if we want to listen to Him, we need to serve others.”

As Suzie’s statement demonstrates, the stewardship way of life is not only understood or lived out by adults – Jesus wants children to be His disciples, as well. So, it is essential that parents help their children develop a true understanding of stewardship, and encourage its practice through the example of an active faith life.

May all Christian parents be not only the first, but also the best teachers of faith to their children, in what they say *and* in what they do.



The Serra Club Moves Forward with an Important Mission

When it comes to providing both important support and opportunities for stewardship, the Serra Club is truly unique.

"I firmly believe that being involved in the Serran community is something that God wants me to do," says parishioner John Vallala. "I enjoy it, and it is a perfect way for me to be a good steward of my faith and to serve God and others. Fostering and increasing vocations should be the mission of all of us. It is so important to the life and future of the Church."

John is Immediate Past President of the Metropolitan Serra Club of Dallas, in which St. Rita participates, along with Christ the King and St. Monica parishes. He currently serves on the Board of Directors with two other St. Rita parishioners, Tom Fuller and Geri Noonan.

Serra International was founded in Seattle by four Catholic laymen in 1935. As the organization's patron, they selected St. Junipero Serra, who played a leading role in the early development of the Catholic faith in Mexico and California.

Membership consists of Catholic men and women, who are actively involved in their faith and are willing and able to participate in club meetings and activities.

The purpose of Serra is to foster, promote and affirm vocations to the priesthood and religious life, and encourage members in fellowship through education to fulfill their Christian vocations to service. Even our Holy Fathers have recognized the value of this organization.

Addressing the Serrans' international annual conference while he was pope, St. John Paul II stated, "Dear Serrans, you are committed in a special way to promoting vocations. Never forget that yours must be above all a commitment to prayer – prayer which is constant, unwavering and full of trust. Prayer moves the heart of God. It is the powerful key to resolving the vocations question."

The organization's U.S. headquarters is in Chicago. Currently, there are more than 1,000 Serra Clubs in 44 countries with a membership in excess of 25,000. The basic unit of

Serra International is the local club. The Serra Club of Metropolitan Dallas is one of five clubs in District 46-E.

The Serra Club of Metropolitan Dallas meets twice a month – on the First Friday, they gather at St. Monica Church for Mass at 6:45 a.m., followed by breakfast, fellowship and a meeting. On the third Friday of each month, they meet at the Park City Club at 11:45 a.m. for prayer, lunch and a meeting. Speakers for meetings include diocesan and religious priests, religious women, leading laypersons, and periodically leaders of other religious denominations.

Club members are assigned to Action Groups headed by group leaders. The groups enjoy fellowship, and along with spouses, Serrans attend activities such as the annual recognition Mass and dinner for outstanding altar servers; a monthly Mass with our seminarians at Holy Trinity Seminary followed by a coffee and donut reception; the Lenten devotion and dinner; and the Advent Mass, followed by the club's annual Christmas Party.

Membership in the Serra Club is open to Catholic laymen and laywomen, and to those who have been ordained to the permanent diaconate. If someone is interested in more information or in becoming a member, he or she may contact John Vallala at 972-849-5494.



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Weekday Masses

*Monday-Friday, 6:25 a.m. & 5:30 p.m.
Wednesday & Friday (Only when School
is in session), 8:00 a.m.*

Weekend Masses

*Saturday, 5:30 p.m.
Sunday, 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 10:45 a.m.,
12:30 p.m. (Bilingual), 5:30 p.m.*

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An imaginative analogy, it helps us see that even a noisy narthex or a noisy messy pew can be a holy place. Just as Mary struggled to pay attention to her Son's paschal steps, so too do parents sometimes struggle to pay attention to the sacrifice of the Mass. Just as Mary tended to others as she tried to follow her Son, so too do parents tend to their children while trying to participate in the liturgy. Mary knows parents' struggles and she knows their efforts, and indeed, I believe she blesses them. She too struggled to attend the sacrifice as do we, because the struggle is holy.

And that's the point – we shouldn't see time struggling with noisy kids as wasted spiritual time, but fruitful. And as a community, we all need to see and appreciate the sanctity of what young families are doing when they bring their sometimes noisy kids to Mass, when they struggle to participate in the liturgy. We need to realize that God wants screaming kids there as much as He wants us there, if not more. We need to

be a community that is patient, loving, supportive, and kind – without exception and without exhaustion.

Because, like Mary, parents carry their little ones with them, struggling to see Jesus even while their children scream on the floor. Even these tantrums are holy. All of us should see this. We must pray for Mary's grace, to be like her. Like her, we must always re-focus on the cross until finally we're there, beholding with our children the sacrifice where Jesus gives us our children anew every week, saying to us as He said to her, "Woman, behold, your son" (Jn. 19:26). With her, we must strive to see the sacrifice.

Her prayers and her grace are with every parent. So, next time your little saints get noisy, say a prayer to Mary and relax – because she is praying for you.

pax,
Fr. Joshua