

Developing Spirituality

What's your first thought when you realize that Lent is here again? Is it a shrug and, "So what?" Is it an inward groan as an outward sign of lack of discipline? Or is it, "Good. We need it."?

Surprising to many, there are lots of people whose reaction is precisely the latter. As parents today, we feel the need for a deeper shared spirituality in the family, but we need to be prodded into doing something about it. Lent is an excellent prod. Parishes, magazines, and even the recipe sections of the local paper combine at this time of year to make us aware of the need to pause and look at our relationship with God and one another through Him.

As I begin this, my daughter is filling out a college application form, and her hardest question is a one word essay: "What adjective do you choose to best describe yourself?" It's a tough question because it's forcing her to examine her whole person, not just her personality or work habits. Of course, she would like me or her dad to choose an adjective for her, but that's not authentic. The value of the question is here reflection on herself.

It's not a bad place to start in discussing family



Lord, I Am Not Worthy

During a recent one hour flight from Fargo, North Dakota to Minnesota's Twin Cities, the passenger on my side described her husband's decline and death through cancer.

Thanks to the mushrooming hospice movement, this former truck driver died at home, relatively comfortable, assisted by regularly visiting health care personnel, and in the constant presence of his wife. The local parish priest came occasionally with communion, a welcomed visit which always seemed to supply both of them with fresh supplies of courage and strength.

In response to my question about how she and he might have felt had their pastor appointed her minister of the Eucharist, thus enabling her husband to receive our Lord's body more frequently, the widow quickly replied:

"Oh, I am not worthy enough to do that."

Persons invited to serve as regular parish eucharistic ministers frequently respond in identical fashion.

That exaggerated sense of unworthiness has deep roots in Catholic culture and stems basically from a medieval shift in our understanding of baptism, or better, of Christian initiation.

Benedictine scholar Father Aidan Kavanaugh, presently teaching at Yale's Divinity School, made this a point at a diocesan liturgical congress in Brooklyn last fall.

Throughout the first millenium of the Church's history, one became a Catholic through the initiation sacraments of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, and in that order. But at the end of this period, a change began to take place which removed baptism from that role and reduced it to one of five ceremonies ordinary Christians receive in their lifetime: baptism, first confession and communion, confirmation, marriage and a funeral.

In the new approach, according to Kavanaugh, a person now totally entered the Church only through holy orders or religious vows. Priests, monks or nuns became the full, complete members of the Church, those at the top, the worthy ones. Others could imitate their holiness and dignity, but people merely baptized remained at the bottom of this pyramid-like structure.

"Oh, I am not worthy enough to do that" flows out of such a fundamentally middle ages approach to baptism and Christian initiation. The bishops at the Second Vatican Council sought to reverse that direction and return to the earlier concept. Both the revised rite

Dolores Curran



Talks With Parents

spirituality. I'm devoting all six of my Lenten columns to the subject and it's logical to begin by examining our present shared spirituality. Sit together a half hour this first week of Lent and examine the level of spirituality in your home of asking each member to choose an adjective that best describes your family spirituality.

To get things started, suggest a few (perfect, comfortable, missing, juvenile) but then eliminate those as potential contributions. Don't rush the process. Allot at least five minutes to it and suggest that members begin with a list of five or ten and eliminate them to find the word most accurately describing your family's faith.

Now share the adjectives. (If the children refuse to take this exercise seriously, don't permit it. Ask them

to leave so the rest of the family can discuss Lent seriously.) You may find unanimity of evaluation. Everyone might think it's great or awful. On the other hand, you might discover great disparity, that you think your family's spirituality is arid while your children think it's superfluous.

Talk about the difference and discuss why you each chose the adjective you did. You may find yourself comparing it to your own childhood family and that's good. As parents, we need to examine that and it's good for our children to hear us discuss our childhood spirituality.

Next, take five minutes and each choose an adjective that you wish you could have chosen to describe your family spirituality (alive, none, etc.). This might be harder, but remember, all action emanates from a philosophy, even inaction, which emanates from a lack of philosophy. In order to truly examine ourselves, we have to ponder issues like, "What does family spirituality mean to us? Is it of high or low value? Do we really feel the need for it?"

Finally, talk about how your family can grow from the actual to the ideal in shared spirituality. Can you begin the growth process in the next 40 days called Lent? How? Put suggestions on the calendar and we'll talk more about it next week.

Fr. Joseph M. Champlin



Our Church Family

for infant baptism and a new ritual for the Christian Initiation of Adults speak of becoming full church members through the three initiation sacraments.

"The sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the eucharist are the final stage in which the elect come forward, and with their sins forgiven, are admitted into the people of God, receive the adoption of the sons of God, and are led by the Holy Spirit into the promised

Housewife's Prayers

It occurred to me the other morning — and not for the first time — that I do not pray very well on my knees.

As children we were trained to do so, to show reverence and I suppose as sort of a stimulus, the reasoning being that in that traditional position of supplication the prayers would flow.

It is not as easy as all that. Sometimes I make contact. Sometimes not. Not a formal person, it only follows I suppose that I am out of my milieu utilizing formal words and formal actions.

Actually as a housewife of 16 years I have discovered that there are other ways just as conducive as kneeling to communicating with the Lord.

One, almost guaranteed, is to stand alone in the kitchen, up to one's elbows in soapy dish water. I am not sure if it is the warmth of the water or the purging quality of the soap, but there have been lots of conversations held this way over the years, some of them quite fruitful.

Another is walking the dog in the town cemetery which, except for caretakers and an occasional high school boy having a cigarette behind a large mausoleum, is usually deserted.

Driving alone in the car works fine, so, too, does sitting on the passenger side as your husband drives in companionable silence.

There are other stimuli: watching your children sleep, pulling weeds with the hot summer sun on your back,

fullness of time and, in the eucharistic sacrifice and meal, to the banquet of the Kingdom of God."

"The anointing with chrism after baptism is a sign of the royal priesthood of the baptized and their enrollment in the fellowship of the people of God. The white robe is a symbol of their new dignity, and the lighted candle shows their vocation of living as befits the children of light."

Royal priesthood of the baptized, God's adopted sons and daughters, sins forgiven, membership in the people of God—those terms indicate Christian initiation gives every Catholic "new dignity," making each one sufficiently worthy to handle the Lord's body and, if appointed, to distribute the Eucharist to others.

Sarah Child



All in the Family

listening to the burbling babies that sometimes share our church pews.

And, of course, there is the provocation that does not start out as a prayer, but most certainly ends up as one.

"Lord, love a duck." I say in disgust as I unexpectedly walk on spilled sugar, find 32 towels in the hamper or catch somebody on ice skates on the flagstone. And, then, in earnest need, add "And me, too, please."

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