

Faith Today

All in the family: a puzzler for parents

By Monica Clark
NC News Service

Ken's favorite football team was playing that Monday night and he knew where he wanted to be: at home, watching the game on television.

He didn't want to attend the parish renewal meeting that night. As far as Ken was concerned, during the group's first two sessions nothing of much substance had been discussed.

"Another evening is about to be wasted," he mumbled as he and his wife approached the home of Ann and John Meyers, where the group would meet.

The Meyers were older than Ken and Marie, with teen-age children. The group also included a recently married couple, a widowed school teacher, a divorcee and two businessmen.

The group chatted a bit, finally deciding to begin the more formal part of the evening with a prayer. Afterward there was an awkward silence while everyone got settled.

Then, before the discussion could get started, Janice spoke up. She needed some advice from the group, she said.

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"What can I do about my teenager? He keeps telling me he isn't interested in the church at all, that he's bored by it."

There was only a moment of silence before Mrs. Meyers admitted that she and her husband were struggling with the same situation Janice was experiencing.

It was clear now what direction the group's conversation would take that evening. Someone asked: "Does Scripture provide any insights about ways of handing on faith to children?"

The group decided they would try to find out how Jesus taught. And they found that he was on hillsides, on the shores of the Galilee, in Nazareth, Jerusalem — everywhere reinforcing his fundamental message of love.

Jesus taught "with authority," the group read in Matthew's Gospel. His power came from conviction.

That conviction, the group concluded, resulted from intense, personal communication with his Father. Periodically throughout his ministry he withdrew from activity for personal renewal.

"The trite adage about not being able to give what one doesn't have makes sense in this context," Ken observed.

What this all implies, someone said, is that people need to pay attention to God's action in their own lives — and to share this with their own children.

"We have to do more than convey theological facts and church rules. Teen-agers need to know whether faith makes a real difference to the adults in their lives."

Another important aspect of Jesus' teaching, the group discovered, was his ability to reach people where they were physically and emotionally. After the resurrection, when he met two disciples along the Emmaus Road, he walked with them and listened to their questions. They were confused because of the death of Jesus. They did not recognize him at first.

He accepted the struggle they were going through because of his death, then gradually led them to recognize who he was.

Ken saw a connection between that biblical story and the group's concern. "I guess we'll have to meet our kids along their roads and walk with them in their questions and doubts," he commented.

One of the young businessmen said he felt that Jesus had disclosed himself in different ways to Mary Magdalene and to Thomas. "Jesus met people at wells, in fishing boats, at wedding feasts. I'm glad my parents helped me be sensitive to the many ways Jesus reaches people," he said.

Jesus can reach people in the context of their own lives, he added. In fact, the young man



Lenten Series

Faced with the question of how to instill a sense of faith in their children, a group of adults turned to Scripture for help. They found that Jesus the teacher could serve as quite a model.

said he was convinced that he had had a religious experience once during a rock concert!

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On the drive home, Marie and Ken worried that the group hadn't provided Janice with enough of an answer to a problem that concerned her very much. But perhaps their conversation had helped.

In any event, Ken's mind was so caught up by the conversation, and with wondering whether Janice's question would be his question when his own young son became a teen-ager, that he barely heard the babysitter say his favorite football team had won the game that night.

(Ms. Clark is on the staff of the Catholic Voice, Oakland, Calif.)

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