

Just thinking... Last Sunday, I sneaked into one of the back pews of the upper church. I'm not sure if it was the location, the lack of having a particular 'job' at the Mass, the time of year, or who knows what – but watching our families from a back view offered me a trip down memory lane. And those thoughts and images keep swirling through my mind.

First, I can't help but commend and admire the parents (and grandparents) who were there with their children – some kids were self-sufficient age, many others were toddlers and babies. My own kids are grown and have children so I am becoming aware - ever so slowly - of the many pressures facing young families today. So it is quadruply inspiring that our parents take time out for Mass.

I was thinking back to the days when our kids were little and moderately interested in Mass – probably as much for the donuts and juice afterward (*donuts were not considered lethal to your health 25 years ago*) as for the entire experience. So on Sunday, as I watched the families come in, I remembered the chaotic scenes that were preliminary to getting there - *lost socks, hogging the bathroom, threats, bad mood (maybe Mom's), thoughts of "is this worth it?"* and was again inspired and grateful that you were there.

I commend you for making "Church Day" an important part of your children's week. Placing God at the core of our lives grounds us in ways we can't count and places a God-centered focus on the rest of the week. Attending Mass is a way for us to remember and be thankful for the many gifts God has heaped upon us. Attending Mass regularly exposes our children to our most central themes of our Church – seeing and receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. Participation in the Eucharist is life-giving – spiritually, physically, mentally and even psychologically. But maybe we learn that more deeply as we get older.

It was heartwarming for me to recognize so many people – but equally gratifying to see families nod, greet, smile or just wink at each other in acknowledgement. The kids were more effusive in their recognition of each other - how great that they see each other at Mass. And look forward to that opportunity.

At our parent meetings, we remind parents that you are your child's foremost teacher – in all things, especially faith. Your children learn by watching you. Children learn by repetition, through consistency and from example. Isn't that what Mass is? With so much to learn in a busy childhood, you are giving your child the opportunity to learn that Sunday Mass, as part of a regular routine, is a lasting and significant way of learning how to be Catholic. They are learning who their God is and that God is indeed present - no matter what – all the time. They are also learning through repetition how to maintain the habit of weekly attendance at Mass, even when it's difficult or there's something we'd rather do.

Thank you, good parents, for doing such a good job. The presence and voices of your children at Mass are a testimony and a reminder to all of us that our church has a future! When you think of the hassle of bringing kids to church and wonder whether it is worth it or not, look back to your grandparents who were your role models and look forward to the powerful witness you are giving as a faith-filled family – and know that your children forever will live what they learn.

Fran Hauck

I was thinking... I had the opportunity recently to visit a young family who had just welcomed Emma Michelle. They were in awe of their little girl - joyful, thankful, feeling blessed to have this beautiful addition to their family; Emma has a 2year old sister. We pray for Emma's family – and for all our young families each day.

That visit and other occurrences these past weeks, got me thinking about what makes a family strong and successful. While nowadays there may be many ways to define a family, all families have one common idea: caring. Have you ever seen a little child fiercely protecting a not much younger sibling? I recently heard from a woman who was burying her brother: “Early mother loss has made life exceedingly different for us and many others who experience the same loss. Life is precious. Embrace the opportunity for peace and joy in every moment.”

What are some ways to embrace “the opportunity for peace and joy in every moment?” in a family? In studies conducted in the United States and around the world, several characteristics of strong families were repeatedly found.

*Commitment. Members of strong families are devoted to the well-being and happiness of the other members. They value family unity and strong family relationships. This means that: family comes first; work responsibilities come second; each family member is precious; bad times do not destroy relationships; *forgiveness is available when there are bad times*; priorities are established and some sacrifices are made; traditions are established and cherished. A young person with whom I spoke commented that a family he knows “drops everything” to be with each other when the occasion calls for it.

*Appreciation. Members of strong families show and talk about their appreciation for one another. We all need to be loved and appreciated. Some of why we work so hard in life is not so much motivated by money, power, or position; it is the desire to feel appreciated.

*Communication. Members of strong families talk with each other – about the small and trivial things as well as the deep and important issues of life. We've all seen sitcoms where a parent hardly knows anything about their teen-aged child. It's not so funny. Teenagers will not come to a parent if communication channels were not created during their early years. Smartphones sometimes make us *not so smart* about communicating on a person-to-person level. Think of the times you've been annoyed because persons in the same room as you are working their phones rather than speaking eye-to-eye with you. Now imagine how a young child must feel who has no previous experience with one-to-one communication. Being open and honest, avoiding constantly criticizing (even if you think it's in your genes); and listening carefully are trademarks of effective communication.

*Spend time together. ‘Quality rather than quantity’ does not work in family life: both good quality and good quantity time are necessary for forming and maintaining good family relationships. Over the years the older folks I've worked with have shared that their fondest and most sustaining family memories are built around time spent together as family – both in their childhood and raising their own children. No-one's memory is ever that they spent *too much* time together. Eat together, go to church together, play games together; anything you can share together forges strong family ties.

*Coping ability and flexibility. Members of strong families are able to view stress or crisis as an opportunity to grow and learn. A history of good problem-solving in people of all ages increases our confidence that we can deal with most things that come our way. Today many articles are written for and about parents, ‘regular’ parents, ‘helicopter’ parents, ‘snowplow’ parents, who try to solve all their

children's problems or eliminate them totally. Caution parents: although those strategies might save a tear for the moment, they do not create the resiliency necessary to have a productive life. Fostering flexibility is an important strategy to help get through crisis situations. Strong families bend, change, and adapt, and when the storm is over, they are still intact. And proud.

*A belief in God. Strong families have a belief in God – the Power who is greater than themselves. That belief gives strength and purpose to life, provides guidelines for living, a sense of freedom and peace and helps families cope during times of trouble. Attending Church together offers support from people who share in a common belief system. In our Catholic faith, the Eucharist – the food of life – provides us with spiritual strength in an immeasurable way. Faith is gift that we can pass along to our children. Faith will be the contest in which they live their lives – a faith that is a source of consolation in bad times, strength in difficult times, and joy and thankfulness in good times.

Every family has the capacity to be strong. It is up to us, together as individual families, and as a greater Holy Name Community of families to “embrace the opportunity for peace and joy in every moment.”

Fran Hauck