

The Joy of Restless Kids

Going to Mass when I was a kid was a rather strict affair. We were probably the first church in the world to have a “cry room”. Rambunctious kids could be kept behind the plate glass window where they could do no harm. This gave Father plenty of focused time for his long-winded preaching that touched upon the length of girls’ skirts, the amount of money lacking in the Sunday collection, the condemned movies, and the unkempt nature of the boys’ hair. Boy, have we come a long way!

I bring this up because I just finished an article in *America* entitled “The Joy of Having Loud and Messy Kids at Mass”. With a title like that, who could resist, right? It turned out to be a kind of parental apology or rationale for his own restless kids. But there was a quote from a priest that struck me:

I love having little kids at Mass. I love it when they are bored and pay no attention and squirm. I love it when they get distracted by a moth and spend five minutes following the moth’s precarious voyage among the lights. It’s all good. They are being soaked in the Mass. They hear the words and feel the reverence and maybe they even sense the food of the experience, you know? Sometimes people complain and make veiled remarks about behavior and discipline and decorum and the rapid dissolution of morals today and stuff like that but I have no patience for it. For one thing *they* were little kids at Mass once, and for another if there are no little kids at Mass, pretty soon there won’t be any Masses. You have to let kids be kids.

Being so closely tied to Holy Name of Jesus School, has given me a new perspective on kids at Mass. Sure, they can disturb some people; but they also are there to learn from us. When we have the “kids’ liturgy” once a month, I see the proud looks on the faces of the parents and the smiles on the faces of our parishioners and I get a great feeling. This is what church should be about. It is messy. But it is a lovely messiness in God’s eyes, I’m sure. I speak with kids at the school or at church (and, yes, they speak very well, are poised, and have things to say) and have hope for the future of the church.

True, the Mass is a holy time and kids are to be taught how to properly participate. But it should also be a joyful time; and restless kids are a part of that joy. I love the fact that altar servers are dedicated to their responsibilities and are willing to do a little extra as parishioners. I love the fact that kids are willing to walk up the altar and read before a church full of adults. That is, I think, just what Jesus would want.