

Teaching to Fish



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“Adulting” classes. I heard about these on the internet the other day and that they are becoming increasingly popular for the younger generation—classes on how to cook, budget, balance a checkbook, and the simple daily tasks that most of us old, ummm ... “folks”... take for granted.

What are these things but taking responsibility for oneself? Self-reliance.

Those of us raised in a farm/ranch setting learn “adulting” skills pretty early, being even as children responsible for the welfare of animals (and thus indirectly part of the welfare of the family) and learning how to make minor repairs to equipment. Later, such children—tutored by their elders—learn

budgeting, about inevitable fluctuation of market prices for crops/livestock, maximizing value, the importance of work, dependability, timeliness, cooperative effort, etc. Indeed, my father spoke of his day when kids got a month off of school in the fall—not to recreate, but to work the fields to help bring in the family harvest, round up cattle, etc. Such participation and the solving “real world” everyday problems gives invaluable experience as to develop that wonderful virtue of common sense.

I used to witness such things a lot in my former rural parish. The ranch youth were “jacks of all trades”—able to repair, ready and willing to do work, good problem solvers, etc. Many of the “city kids” ...well, not quite so much. They might be expert on video games, but even moving a few boxes would elicit groans as though they were called upon

to build the pyramids.

In the specialization and compartmentalization of work in our day, cooperative team efforts among family members—and the vast amounts of life skills learned through such—has become largely absent, and so parents have to be more actively aware of creating and providing opportunities for their children to learn even simple everyday adult tasks. For instance, changing a tire is now a lost skill with the advent of good roads, high quality tires, cellphones and AAA. But, especially here in New Mexico, where there are long lonely stretches (and even some without (gasp!) cellphone service), do you really want to leave your kids— young or not—at the mercy of whomever might just come along?

Yes, parents ... YOU are the primary educators of your children—a privilege

that cannot be delegated to anyone else, whether it be schools, Church or relatives. Nobody else has that privilege as you do. To love a child is to teach a child ... to seek his/her welfare now, and when you will no longer be around. And in teaching them life skills you are not only becoming more virtuous in yourselves, but teaching them virtue as well in your sharing of knowledge.

For what IS virtue? Is it not the seeking of the good or benefit not only of self, but of another, and of maximizing benefit to society at large? And when we take the time to teach others useful, practical skills, that is exactly our goal ... as well as teaching that person to pass on his own newly-gained knowledge to others. Notice how children often can't wait to show off what they've learned from Mom or Dad—solving math problems (an extremely practical skill!), re-chaining a bicycle, a new cooking talent, using a tool effectively, etc.

Very often it just takes doing to get over youthful fearfulness, for the unknown is mysterious. To a young person who has never changed the car's oil or tire ... "What do I do? Which is the oil plug? What kind of oil? How tight the filter? What order and how tight the lug nuts? Where do place the jack? How do you work the jack?!" But, when taught and accomplished even once, mystery vanishes along with uncertainty. Confidence in the self grows: "Hey ... I CAN do it!"

All of this falls under the "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day; teach a man to fish and he'll eat for a lifetime" rule. After all, which is the greater charity: giving a kid a cellphone and the number to AAA, or teaching him how to

change a tire? Convenience is one thing, but life skills are another—essential when access to the convenient is not an option. As we all know, things break at the most inconvenient times in accord with "Murphy's Law", or assistance may be absent, etc.

The above falls broadly, of course, under the virtue—that seeking the benefit of others—of charity and love ... of sacrificing of one's own time in order to provide for the welfare—both present and future—of others. In our distraction-laden world, it's easy to be absorbed by the internet, media, entertainments, etc., of which there are no end. And work, too, can absorb us. Soooo ... put down that mouse, the clicker or whatever, and find someone with whom you can share your experience. After all, the winner of the rat race is still a rat. But the one who teaches and helps others becomes the others' angel whom they will remember (and thank!) for a lifetime.

St. Paul voices this principle often, as when he writes: "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor," (1 Corinthians 10:24) and "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:4) And, of course, Jesus says of Himself—highlighting what should be the attitude of His disciples (us!): "...the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve..." (Mark 10:45) Paul and Jesus were speaking primarily of spiritual good, of course, but nonetheless...to teach others self-reliance and independence is one of the greatest services of all.

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Stewardship Corner

What does Stewardship Mean to You?

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"What does stewardship mean to you?", I've been asked. Well, one of the first things that comes to mind is St. Paul: "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly

or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, "He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." (2 Cor. 9:7-8)

There are so many things also that Christ said that are applicable, but primarily how He reminds us that we are simply stewards of all we possess; what is given us is not for ourselves alone—or even primarily for ourselves alone—but for the good of those who are in need, whether that need be material OR spiritual. Remember the parables Jesus told of the talents given to the servants to invest until the return of the Master? And then He tells us: "Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them." (Luke 12:37) Well, we are "awake" when we are doing our Lord's will...being those good servants and stewards investing time, talent and treasures to further the absolute good for which they have been entrusted to us.

As the old saying goes, we lose whatever we keep, we multiply whatever we give. We need never worry about "loss" when we give, for God is never outdone in generosity...and certainly not when we give of ourselves in order to help lead His children home.

Office of Stewardship

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