

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

March 3, 2019

Spiritual Ponderings

Parking Lot Parents

In addition to attending the Amazing Parish Conference last October and falling in love with Fr. Mallon's Book: *Divine Revelations: Bringing Your Parish from Maintenance to Mission*, I also attended a workshop on Catholic Education and got to hear St. Patricia McCormack IHM speak. As I listen to her speak last summer, I knew that I wanted to spend more time exploring her theories on why Catholic parents (and I think Catholics in general) have such a hard time passing on our faith to the next generation. St. Patricia McCormack IHM shared here insights in here book that she titled: *Engaging Parking Lot Parents: a Catechist's Guide to Fostering Parents Participation*. I know that in the future I will return to reflect more with you on Fr. Mallon's insights but for the month of March, I am going to share with you some of my ponderings on Sr. Patricia's book. Quotes from her book will be in bold and my thoughts will be in the normal font.

**The danger is forgetting that anything that isn't modeled in the home probably won't take root in our children's lives over the long haul.**

Jesus spent his public ministry calling people to repentance. The word "repent" is the word that we use to translate the Greek word "Metanoia" despite the fact that the word "repentance" carries with it a moral overtone that does not exist in the Greek word "Metanoia." The word "Metanoia" really means "changing the way we think." An example of Metanoia occurred when we realized that asbestos was a hazardous material. The way we approached asbestos is much different then when we believed it was not a hazardous material. If we continued to use asbestos in the same way that we did before we found out that it was hazardous, we would find it really difficult to convince our children that asbestos was dangerous. If we want children to believe that faith (and the virtues and values that come with it) is important to us and therefore should be important to them, we must act that way at home, at work, and at church.

Sister Patricia gives three reasons for why parents (and I think all Catholics) are afraid to share their faith with others especially younger generations.

#### **1. Inadequate knowledge of their faith and a need for evangelization.**

**The need for evangelization or re-evangelization stems, in a large part, from a lack of knowledge or understanding of Catholic teaching and practices.**

I honestly do not think I would be a good Catholic today if it was not for everything I learned in the seminary. If I had to rely on my Catholic education that I had received as a child, I would have fallen away from the Church a long time ago. While the days of the "Baltimore Catechism" may have been too academic and not enough experiential the years after Vatican II seemed to focus too much on feeling and not enough on the academic part. I can understand why adults would find it difficult talking about the Catholic faith with confidence.

**Challenge:** Make learning about the Catholic Church a priority. There are online courses, retreats, and parish programs like ALPHA.

#### **2. Cultural Shifts and Challenges**

**The late Bishop Ken Untener summarized the transition from Christian culture to a secular culturized, perhaps even pagan, culture: *Times have changed, Sunday mornings are filled with entertaining TV shows, swim meets, league games, and travel demands. Holy Days have given way to commercialized holidays. It is not that people have become irreligious. No. The rhythm of life has. The social rhythm of life is no longer automatically turned in to the practice of Christianity... If I am going to practice the Christian tradition of daily prayer (and other spiritual practices), I'm going to have to be "countercultural"—a bit out of step.***

Many of us do not want to stand out or draw attention to ourselves for fear of being of being attacked or harmed. Let us face it, no one likes to be mocked and ridiculed especially for things that they cannot fully explain because they did not receive the proper education to begin with.

**Challenge:** Build a steady and consistent prayer life.

#### **3. Busy Schedules and Commitments**

**Some parents are overwhelmed by the frantic pace of society and by the expectations of others as well as themselves. Additional challenges including arranging for multiple extra-curricular school activities and student social events,**

**caring for aging parents, working second jobs, providing for childcare, or seeking professional help for children with social, emotional, or specialized learning needs.**

Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote the following: "If you do not worship God, you worship something, and nine times out of ten it will be yourself. You have a duty to worship God, not because He will be imperfect and unhappy if you do not, but because you will be imperfect and unhappy." I truly believe that going to Mass on Sunday and following the rules of the Church will bring me joy in this life and eternal life and I want others to share it. I believe that the rules of the Church are kind of like the rules of military. They are meant to build unity, cooperation, and cohesiveness among many different people.

**Challenge:** Make Sunday a priority for God and for family.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**March 10, 2019**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Parking Lot Parents**

Sr. Patricia McCormack IHM in her book: *Engaging Parking Lot Parents: a Catechist's Guide to Fostering Parents Participation* provides many interesting insights into how we can re-engage fallen away Catholics and at the same time prevent our Church from losing the next generation. Insights from her book will be in bold and my thoughts will be in the normal font.

**The New Evangelization involves outreach to those who were baptized, confirmed, and received First Eucharist but have no personal experience of Jesus.**

At my first parish I met an older woman named Pearl. Pearl would often say to me "I am just a dumb convert Father," and there was a part of me that loved to hear her say that, because it gave me a chance to respond "but Pearl, you have been Catholic longer than I have." When I met Pearl, she had been a Catholic for over thirty years and I was only twenty-six years old at the time. I think an important part of being Catholic is realizing that there is always more to learn.

**Evangelization speaks first to the heart before trying to reach the head.**

When I was newly ordained my first pastor Fr. Rosy was a big football fan. It did not take me long to realize that on most Sunday afternoons, I could find him sitting on a couch in the rectory watching the football game. From time to time, I would sit down and watch a game with him despite not having any no previous interest in football. Fr. Rosy slowly taught me to appreciate the game by telling me what made the game exciting and about fantastic plays that he had seen on (television or in person). I am sure that he would have killed any enthusiasm I had for football, if had started teaching me about football by listing all the rules. As my enthusiasm for football developed my desire to know the rules of the game also increased. I think in a similar way we need to talk to people about what is great about being Catholic and why being Catholic will benefit them instead of trying to enforce rules on them. We do not do the rules, because they make the game possible but we also do not beat people over the head with them.

**Catechists need to evangelize without antagonizing, offending-embarrassing, speaking down, adding stress, or implying guilt. In short, the goal is to energize rather than add to parent burdens.**

The word Catechists simply means one who teaches the faith and so in one sense we are all catechists. We are all called to share our stories and what we know about the faith in order to encourage others to follow Jesus. As Sister points out that this should not be a burden to us or even a burden to those who want to become followers of Jesus.

**Create activities that are non-threatening. Plan for information to be self-correcting so that no parent is embarrassed by performance.**

Learning about the faith does not have to be hard work. In fact, there are many ways to learn about the faith that are fun and exciting. For example, the Pinata was created to teach children the faith. The Pinata represents evil so it is shaped like a monster or a donkey (evil is a stupid mistake and a donkey is considered by many a stupid animal). The Pinata is colorful because evil is often very attractive. The person is blindfolded because we cannot always see evil. We

are given a stick (sword) because we must fight evil off and when evil is defeated everyone receives the sweet reward (candy) of heaven. I have come to find in my own life that I am a visual learner and so using visual learning cues help me.

Here are Ten family practices to help integrate faith practices into family life.

1. Establish a Prayer Center. Use a window sill, a tiered corner shelving unit, a table, the top of a filing cabinet—someplace that the family members pass daily. Display the Bible, a rosary, prayer tools, etc.
2. Provide a Prayer Dish, that is, a lidded container to hold prayer intentions. At mealtime or bed time, pray “for the needs that are included in our prayer dish.”
3. Maintain a Liturgical Centerpiece on the dinner table. Use the liturgical color of the season with a thought -a-day calendar or a miniature easel to hold a focus picture or quotation, and/or place symbols related to feasts that occur during the year.
4. Hang a Family motto banner above the entrance to the common room i.e. “Love one Another”
5. Choose a Family Mantra: For instance: “God is good all the time” – and “All the time, God is good!”
6. Punctuate mealtime with prayer before and after meals.
7. Customize Ritual Blessings for – wake up, bed time, leaving the house, etc.
8. Employ a Conversation starter
9. Choose a feast day to be an Annual Marker Day for your family.
10. Designate one meal a week for God Table Talk.

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Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius  
March 17, 2019  
Spiritual Ponderings  
Parking Lot Parent Myths

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**Catechists are companions when they walk with parents, listening to them, affirming their strengths, supplementing their weaknesses, giving hope, offering support, speaking encouragement, and sharing Scripture. Parents will be receptive to companion catechists who present themselves as colleagues and partners on the journey. They get defensive and resistant when they perceive that the person holding the title of catechist is rigid, judgmental, and critical, or flaunts power, authority, or knowledge.**

As I reflect on this quote from Sr. Patricia two thoughts come to mind. I was blessed to become friends with the high school freshman scripture teacher Keith. Keith had just left the seminary after discerning that the priesthood was not for him and took the job of being the Freshman Scripture teacher at Prep (the high school seminary). My class was the first class that he had got to teach. The bond between Keith and many of the students deepened when the seminary high school closed at the end of our freshmen year and Keith helped our class stay connected for many years.

I remember talking to Keith after I graduated college and I said that it amazed me that I now was at the point of knowledge that he was when he started teaching my class. Keith confessed that the only way that he was able to teach us was that he had the Teacher's book and was always just one lesson ahead. His confession, made it easier for me to see how I could teach even though I did not have all the answers. In the end, I realize that I learned more from Keith than I did from other teachers who had more knowledge because Keith was willing to walk with me on my faith journey. In order to be a catechesis (a teacher of the faith) I don't have to be a master of Biblical trivia or have a doctrine in Church Dogma, I simply have to be willing to walk with people including children on their faith journey.

The second thought that comes to mind when thinking about the above quote is that my attitude towards those, I am trying to teach is important. I also know that the times that I am rigid, judgmental, critical, or when I flaunt power,

authority or knowledge are also the times that I am filled with fear. I think this is part of the reason why the most common words in Scripture are “Be Not Afraid.” I have to remind myself that God is not expecting me to be perfect but he does expect me to try.

**We bring Jesus to others by what we are. We evangelize more effectively by our being than by any task we perform.** As a priest, I can give you a religion text book or a video to watch. I cannot make you trustworthy, carrying, or give you the gift of empathy. These are all skills you have to develop.

The following are some tips from Sr. Patricia.

1. Never underestimate the power of a smile. Like the Holy Spirit it “melts the frozen” and “warms the chill.”
2. Initiate gestures of hospitality and welcome: greeting by name, place cards, including in conversation
3. Display a patient and helpful attitude/approach
4. Witness Christian values. Practice and helpful attitude/approach. Especially to parents.
5. Be respectful and safe guard human dignity.
6. Be an agent of hope. “Speak only the good that people want to hear... things that will help them...”
7. Testify to the difference God makes in your life.

**The catechist-teacher realizes that instruction will fall short if he or she is not primarily a witness to Jesus and the joy of his Gospel.**

Teachers and parents are supposed to be co-workers and therefore we should all be grateful to all those who volunteer to be catechists. It is important therefore to show them gratitude and to assist them by reinforcing the lessons they learn in class in the home.



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**March 24, 2019**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Parking Lot Parent Myths**

Sr. Patricia McCormack IHM in her book: *Engaging Parking Lot Parents: a Catechist's Guide to Fostering Parents Participation* provides many interesting insights into how we can re-engage fallen away Catholics and at the same time prevent our Church from losing the next generation. Insights from her book will be in bold and my thoughts will be in the normal font.

I love it when an author presents something in a way that helps me remember it. In her book Sr. Patricia shares here tips on how to have a good parent catechist/teacher meeting but I really think her formula works for all relationships and meetings.

- T** --Is it **TRUE?** Whose truth is it? Is it a matter of principle or personal preference/ego?
- H** —Is it **HELPFUL?** Are chances better than not that parent will be able to “hear” what you say and be able to apply your information?
- I** —is it **IMPORTANT?** Is the topic vital to the process of “stimulating one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24)?
- N** —Is it **NECESSARY?** Will silence on this issue cause more harm than good?
- K** -- Is it **Kind?** Is the information you intend to present good-hearted, thoughtful gracious, courteous, and charitable? And will it be spoken with tenderness and sensitivity?

Is it **TRUE?** I like dialoguing (seeking the truth) with people but I hate conflict (where someone has to win and the truth does not matter). I know that the more I know the more I grow and that does not correspond in the same way with “winning” arguments. I may want Pizza to be non-fattening but I know that no amount of arguing on my part will make it healthy.

Is It HELPFUL? There are a few priests who at meetings are notorious for not asking questions at the Q&A time of a presentation. Instead, they try to show off by telling everyone what they are doing in their parish under the disguise of asking the speaker a question. In the end all that they succeed in doing is wasting everyone's time.

Is it IMPORTANT? I think one of the most Christian things I can do is allow people to save face. When a person makes a mistake and it is the first time, I may not say anything with the hope that they may self-correct. If they do it a second time, I may challenge them to approach the problem in a different way. Finally, if I do have to correct someone, I try not to do so publicly. Sometimes, this may make it look like I have not addressed an issue, and that is fine for me because often by allowing someone to save face, I gain a new friend or improve a relationship.

Is it NECESSARY? My litmus test when it comes to whether or not I should say something to someone about something is two questions. "Do I have moral obligation to say something?" and "Will me saying something, lead that person closer to Christ?" I am constantly reminded of the famous quote from Edmund Burke: "I truly be The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Is it KIND? In the end, I know that Jesus did not call me to be right but to be loving. I also know that it doesn't matter if I am right if I cannot get people to listen to me. Also, being kind helps get people to take ownership of the outcome. Envy tries to turn everything into a competition and kindness reminds us that everything can be a "win/win" situation.

Here are a couple of more tips from Sr. Patricia.

1. Pray before the conversation.
2. Speak from observations and not from hearsay or personal feelings.
3. Speak with respect, reverence, and encouragement.
4. Avoid inflammatory vocabulary and accusatory or judgmental tone.
5. Speak Kindly but firmly
6. Speak briefly and clearly
7. Think before you speak
8. Encourage with effective praise/feedback
9. truly listen to the other person.
10. Avoid taking things personnel



**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**  
**March 31, 2019**  
**Spiritual Ponderings**  
**Parking Lot Parent Myths**

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Sister Patricia in her book quotes another book written by Todd Whitaker called **Dealing with Difficult Parents**. Todd Whitaker proposes A+ behaviors as a guide to help catechists deal with teachers. I think though that we can use these six behaviors to deal with any difficult person in our life.

#### **6 A+ Behaviors**

- 1. Appreciate the parent for bringing an issue directly to your attention. Verbalize how you welcome his/her input and that you respect him/her for speaking directly to you rather than speaking passively through the gossip meal.**
- 2. Affirm the parent for presenting the issue. Speak in a rational, understanding manner devoid of emotional tones or the "he said/she said" accusation-style of communication.**

**3. Acknowledge the parent's feelings. Don't downplay or argue with parents over the perception, but try to listen to what needs underlie their emotion.**

**4. Avoid becoming defensiveness. The moment you feel the urge to justify an action or justify your position to protect yourself, or to guard or to secure your program the ego emerges. One ego takes over, the issue is no longer about the student or parent: it becomes about you!**

**5. Assume positive intentions and motivation on the part of the parent. Give the benefit of the doubt to parent behavior or lack of involvement. Trust that parents intend the best for their children and that if an event does not turn out well it is due to insufficient knowledge or weak human nature and not lack of desire.**

**6. Admit wrongdoing or guilt. Be secure enough to apologize. Or even, if you are not at fault, be humble enough to say something like, "I regret that this issue has been so stressful." Or, "I can explain why I made the decision but it does not excuse the hurt that resulted"**

**Take the "high road." Never raise your voice, use sarcasm, argue, or treat a parent rudely. Avoid power struggles. Do not let angry or self-righteous emotions dictate your behavior. You may not be able to control your feelings, but it is essential that you control your actions. Think "imaginary audience!" When you speak with a parent imagine that others can observe you and hear you. Conduct yourself accordingly.**

In the seminary, one of the teachers encouraged us to always pretend that our mother was in the room with us and that we just did not see her and so therefore we should never do anything our imaginary mother would disapprove of. I always thought that was good idea.

I also remember Dr. Gottman's (a relationship expert) words warning that while I might have a right to be defensive, that defensiveness normally does not end the argument but elevates it to the next level. Dr. Gottmann also points out in his writings: *Statistics tell the story: 96 percent of the time you can predict the outcome of a conversation based on the first three minutes of the fifteen-minute interaction! A harsh startup simply dooms you to failure. So if you begin a discussion that way, you might as well pull the plug, take a breather, and start over.* He also went on to write: *research shows that this approach rarely has the desired effect. The attacking spouse does not back down or apologize. This is because defensiveness is really a way of blaming your partner. You're saying, in effect, "The problem isn't me, it's you.' Defensiveness just escalates the conflict, which is why it's so deadly*