

Feb. 26, 2017

Growing *out* of wisdom

Catholic Schools Week is one of my favorite work-weeks of the year. Little children have a wonderful Christ-like innocence that makes being around them a joy. There's no racism; no religious bigotry; no hard, ingrained opinions to argue.

There is rampant sexism, though! Girls have "cooties" and boys are *sooo stupid*. That's a given when you're a child. It's sad, really. Something needs to be done about the rampant sexism among school children.

Yet, I truly believe that children have far more wisdom than adults.

What happens to us as we get older? Why do so many of us willingly allow the wisdom of childhood to slip away? Why do our hearts become hardened?

Is it something in the water? Too much salt in our diets? Hair care products maybe? (They recently did a study on mice that proved that certain products cause excessive gossiping. On the positive side, the mice looked very nice with their little bouffant hairdos.)

Our fall from innocence reminds me of the story of Adam and Eve, when they suddenly realize they're naked. Their story is an allegory for the change we all undertake as we wave goodbye to our childhood innocence.

The question is, are the blinders coming off, or going on? Do we slowly close our eyes to the reality of Christ's teachings (which asks us to be innocent like children), or is the hardening of our hearts a survival method as we encounter the gritty reality of the world around us?

Or both? I don't know. Once again, I've managed to think myself into a corner. I always know when I'm thinking too hard. Little wisps of smoke come out of my ears and people complain of "that burnt pancake smell" coming from my office. And then my brain shuts down until I flip the breaker.

I would like to make a suggestion. I think the world's adults should allow themselves to take a few steps forward, by backing into that time of childlike innocence they left behind.

Here's what I suggest: First, close your eyes. Don't do this if you're driving. In fact, you probably should stop reading this if you're driving.

Second, open your eyes again so you can finish reading this. Then imagine yourself as a child again. I see myself looking down at my Converse All Star tenny-shoes. Now I can see myself at Sears trying them on. I can see those little Sears comic books they used to always give out with shoes. I would get home and run as fast as I can up and down the street, as if I'm suddenly a super hero by virtue of my new shoes.

Can you see your street? Your home as a child? Your bedroom? What do you see when you look out your window? I lived in the basement. Looking out my window well, surrounded by vines, all sorts of exotic weeds and such like, it would transport me, as if I was looking into a little rain forest. Perhaps one day I would travel to such a world, I thought, after they've invented flying cars and personal rockets to the moon. You know, somewhere around 1985.

I can see myself eating Saltines and watching reruns of "Gilligan's Island," "McHale's Navy," and "I Dream of Jeannie" after school. And riding bikes. I rode my bike everywhere, creating shortcuts where shortcuts were never meant to be. I remember going to the grocery store with my dad on Saturday morning after a soccer game, strangers asking, "Didja win?"

Now think about your mindset back then. Was there ever one single moment when you thought that causing emotional or physical harm, or allowing harm to come to someone else, was in any way the right answer to *any* question (except to dealing with cooties)?

As adults, we find ourselves in the bizarre task of having to remind ourselves what "compassion" really means. We knew as children. It meant kindness, helping one another! Being mean, being unkind, being racist--these were things we had yet to learn ... from adults.

As adults, we find ourselves asking what "pro-life" really means. When we were children, we knew what it meant. It meant loving *all* people as we love Jesus, from that little person growing in Mom's tummy, to the day the Lord decides to take them home.

Today? Does compassion mean that parents will *always* have health insurance, so that they can feel ever more secure and comfortable as they look to their child's future? Does "pro-life" mean working to limit the number of parents who abort their child because they felt that they could not afford him or her? Or does "pro-life" mean just a little bit less when it affects our wallet?

Does "compassion" mean praying that families who are unlucky enough to be born in an oppressive country can one day find refuge and safety in the United States? I'm not so sure any more.

Does "pro-life" mean working to limit the number of couples who abort their child because they feared for the child's future under an oppressive regime? Or is that not part of our "pro-life" definition?

To me, compassion means the desire that *all* people—regardless of race, religious affiliation, or gender feel the same sense of security that I feel as a white, Christian male.

To me, pro-life means to *celebrate all life. Not only the unborn. Not only other Christians. Not only U.S. citizens.*

Then again, maybe you have to be a child to really understand.