

WCR This Week

Want those kids to be Catholic? Give it a sustained effort -

"Children have an almost forensic ability to detect insincerity.



Richard Rymarz

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Passing on the Catholic faith to your children takes time.

Richard Rymarz said that basic insight is not rocket science. However, in hectic lives where time is limited, its implementation can be difficult.

"Strengthening the natural family is the first order of business in bringing people back to God," said Rymarz, a professor of Catholic religious education at St. Joseph's College, University of Alberta.

As part of the Week for Life and the Family, he spoke at the Catholic Pastoral Centre on May 9 about Transmitting Faith to Children.

Faith in action is shown in how people live their lives. He said children are great imitators, so a young child seeing his parents pray at mealtime will instinctively want to do the same.

Similarly, if a parent reads Bible stories to a child for 30 minutes at bedtime, the child will come to appreciate Scripture and its value.

TRANSMITTING FAITH

How many parents are prepared to leave home on a Saturday afternoon and take their children to the sacrament of Penance? Since the children cannot get there by themselves, he said, parental assistance is required.

"One idea to consider is why is it hard to learn a new language or swim the English Channel? All take a sustained effort," said Rymarz. Transmitting faith to children is no different.

People will argue that they are not motivated enough to do these things. Rymarz countered that once one starts doing something, actually putting in the initial effort, that's when the motivation comes.

The three "coat hangers" to transmitting faith to children are time, authenticity and direction.

"How long do you spend doing religious things? What you do with your time shows what you value. Look at where you're spending most of your time to determine what's most important to you."

Most Catholic families spend little time praying, reading Scripture together and going to church as a family.

"The argument is that it's hard because we're so busy. You would never learn Spanish with this same attitude," Rymarz said.

As well, being authentic and having a Christian life that is genuine are important in transmitting one's faith to children.

The best incentive someone can have for doing something is intrinsic motivation, he said. That is, you do something because you want to. If the motivation for exercising is to get in shape or it's a doctor's recommendation, it's an external motivator and often unsustainable.

However, if someone exercises because he enjoys exercising, it's an intrinsic motivator that is easier to maintain, said Rymarz.

He spoke of parents who only prayed before meals when their children were present. They were being inauthentic, fakes. The better, more authentic approach, said Rymarz is "to pray with my children is because I like praying."

Do you really trust in the mercy and provenance of God? Do you try to make the Eucharist the source and summit of your life? A parent's answers to these questions will be revealed through their actions.

"Children have an almost forensic ability to detect insincerity. They respect authenticity, and they respect a person who is trying to live out his ideals. They want their parents to be authentic models."

MISTAKES INEVITABLE

Parents should not be hung up on achieving spiritual perfection; everyone is a sinner, said Rymarz. Making mistakes is inevitable, but staying disciplined enough can get parents back on track through the constructive habits and routines they establish in the household.

"God really likes 'plodders,' those who stick at it, realize their imperfections but try all the same, day in and day out."

Rymarz said a Catholic family must be like a greenhouse. Like the plants in a greenhouse, the children in a family are nurtured and sheltered from the hostile climate outside.

"If you don't have this kind of family as having a special capacity, a special character like a greenhouse, then unfortunately the plants aren't going to flourish," said Rymarz. "The family is a protective, nurturing centre where the transmission of faith has a chance to be successful."

The Week for Life and the Family presentations were live-streamed online. They are available for viewing at www.caedm.ca/webcast.