

SAID ED October 12, 2008

Of late we have been receiving comments "from the pews" about excessive noise in church. Usually I'm unphased by "active children" in the pews. I regard the Eucharistic Sacrifice as the "family meal" of God's people – big and small. Family gatherings that exclude children aren't really "family" in my opinion. But recently there have been a few times when I must confess that I wanted to pull my hair out! (And I don't have that much left either!) There were so many loud interruptions and distractions – all pretty innocent, but I suggest, unnecessary. Parents, I know it is hard to come to Mass with young, impatient children, squirming and squealing because it is impossible for them to sit still in this context. My heart goes out to you and I applaud your effort. I'm sure you are very used to a certain "noise threshold" at home. We want you to bring your children to church! But I am writing this week to ask that while parents may have become desensitized to the distractions, those who sit nearby at Mass may have a terrible time trying to hear the readings and homily when children are noisy and impatient.

I recall hearing one story about a youngster "acting up" at Mass in a Midwestern parish. The parents did their best to maintain some sense of order in the pew but were losing the battle. Finally, the dad picked up the child and sternly carried him down the aisle to the vestibule to avoid disturbing those seated nearby any longer. Just before reaching the door, the little one loudly screamed out to the congregation "Pray for me! Pray for me!"

I want to remind those parents, who may occasionally feel like they're "losing the battle" that our Living Room in the Parish Center is equipped with a large flat screen TV which is linked to the church. Many folks with "active children" attend mass there. In the Living Room you can still see and hear what's going on at the altar, without allowing your restless little ones to steal attention away from the celebration of the Eucharist.

Sometimes the best way to stop the clamor is just to get up and walk with your little one. We have placed flat screens in the corridor of the Parish Center so that you can still be connected with what is going on in church while channeling your child's high energy in a less distracting way. No one minds that you get up and move; and your moving is far preferable to remaining in the pew and disturbing those around you – not mention the presider, readers, cantors, and homilists. We do welcome your little ones at Mass – we love having them here and understand that there will be those difficult days – but we ask you to please be considerate of others in the Assembly. For those among us who are enjoying the grandparenting stage of life, we know that patience with parents of younger children will assure that they always feel welcome in the Lord's House. A little understanding on the part of all of us can go a long way toward helping our children learn how to behave in church. Thanks for your efforts in that regard.

Remember that this is Respect Life Month and that this year especially we need to educate ourselves as to our Catholic tradition to preserve life at all stages of development. See www.faithfulcitizenship.org – the official website of our Bishops – for guidance as you prepare to vote on November 4.

Have a good week.
