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My family has had the pleasure and privilege of hosting foreign exchange students. Over the course of four years, we have hosted six different girls. We now have “daughters” from Thailand, Brazil, Ukraine, Japan, Georgia, and Moldova because we opened our home and hearts to these teens who were brave enough to venture abroad. These kids came to the US to live a year as an American teenager. We hosted them, we provided room and board, but even more, we took them on as members of our family. While many exchange students are very intelligent and mature, they are still kids. They are teenagers, 14-18 years old, and as such are still growing and learning to navigate in the world, all while dealing with developing emotions, wanting to be accepted, establishing their independence, etc.

One of our girls came to us as a fun, spunky, sarcastic (in a good way!) and energetic teenager. She was extroverted and pretty and made friends quite easily. She soon developed a bond with a group of kids who were a lot of fun. My husband and I were happy for her and allowed her to hang out with them. She had friends come to the house. We took kids camping with us. She would go with them and their families to various events, shopping excursions, and the movies. She participated in sports at school. We were getting along very well, or so we thought.

One day our coordinator called us to let us know this girl had asked to be removed from our home. This came as a total shock to us! Kory and I, the exchange daughter, and our coordinator sat down to discuss the situation. The girl kept insisting that while we had been kind and generous, she just “didn’t feel like a member of the family.” I remember being flabbergasted by this because she was every bit a part of our family as much as our own two biological kids were. They were all considered when making family decisions. They all had input on what we ate, where we went, and what we did. We paid for all meals out and other activities that we did as a family. They all had household chores. They all were expected to do well in school and complete homework. They all went to church with us on Sundays. They all had rules to follow. And after many long discussions, heated conversations, lots of tears and tantrums, what it finally boiled down to was that we had and enforced boundaries. She was not allowed to have boys in her room. She did have a curfew to mind. Her electronic usage was limited in both time and location. She did not like the fact that we were acting as her parents. She never could accept that our rules *were for her own good!* They were not regulations just so we could have something to enforce. They weren’t just so we could flex our muscles and prove our authority. They were because we were treating her as a member of the family. These were the same expectations we’d have had for our own daughters had they been older. They were in place because we loved her and wanted the best for her. Ultimately, she did end up moving. We were greatly disappointed. Our sadness came from the fact that she didn’t trust us enough to believe that we were looking out for her.

And that is what Original Sin is like. It wasn’t the fact that Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Rather, it was that they didn’t trust God enough to accept that He was looking out for their best interests. In choosing their own wants and insecurities over what God had dictated, they broke the perfect relationship they had with Him. It is only when we have some type of prohibition that we are given the opportunity to use our free will. God loved us into being and wants us to love Him back just as much. But He will never force it. He gave us free will so that it would be our decision to enter into relationship with Him. This free will is what we will be discussing at this week’s Faith Formation. Come find out how our choosing between right and wrong affects our ultimate enrollment in Heaven. God will never prevent us from an eternity with Him. We do it through our daily actions (and inactions!) Hope to see you in Fellowship Hall right after the 11 am Mass.

Blessings,

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