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Raising kids is difficult. Very difficult. (And, yes, I recognize that is an understatement!) It is especially hard to raise kids in a world that allows actions, inactions, and behaviors that are contrary to the eventual development of a responsible adult. It is even more difficult when a child struggles with ADHD, anxiety, and/or any other disability that makes it harder for them to conform to adult/societal expectations. We are raising one such child in our house.

A few years ago, my husband and I had spent every day for two full weeks, plus, trying to help our daughter make better choices. (This was just the latest “all in” effort. We had always been trying.) We role played interacting with peers, practiced how to respond to various comments and actions, created and used reward charts, stuck to a strict schedule, and intervened in every way we knew how to hoping that she’d stay out of trouble and maybe make a friend. I’m sure she was tired of all our “help” besides being personally overwhelmed by trying to control her own reactions. (I admit the apple didn’t fall far from the tree.)

My office at the school was off of the media center. My daughter’s class had been in the computer lab. That was far enough from me that I couldn’t hear everything word-for-word, but I heard enough to recognize that all our efforts were for naught as I heard her name being called out by the teacher again and again. I was so frustrated and upset that her behavior wasn’t changing. I felt like I was failing as a parent! Just then, her class paraded past my doorway as they were returning to their classroom. As my daughter passed by, she turned to the kid in line behind her and stuck out her tongue at him. In a momentary fit of anger, I leapt to where she was and slapped her mouth. It was not a full-on slap where I left handprints, but it was enough to draw her attention to my refusal to allow her to behave that way. In retrospect, I know this was an inappropriate reaction on my part, especially since I was technically on the clock as a school employee. Raising kids with issues, in today’s world, when you work in their school, as I was on my way to leaving that career, never getting a break from kids, and on and on, is EXTREMELY difficult. I had gone too far in my own reaction, but I was in Mama Bear mode.

Fast forward to the next day. My boss at work came and asked me about the incident. It was done and over in my mind, but apparently another staff member had witnessed and reported it. I was informed that there would be an investigation. The following day, I was summoned to Central Office to meet with the district superintendent. She asked for my side of the story. Just before I disclosed my physical reaction to my daughter’s behavior, I was informed there was no video documentation. The angle was obstructed so it was just the other staff’s word vs. mine. I was also informed that legal precedence indicated that the consequence could be as severe as me losing my job. I felt that it was being made very clear to me that lying about what had happened couldn’t be proven otherwise and that repercussions could be devastating. I recall in that moment recognizing my opportunity (and maybe even permission) to lie. Thankfully, my conscience wouldn’t allow me to do so. I reiterated my story truthfully. While I had the free will to lie, I knew it was wrong to do so. The administrator was amazed that I was honest. Ultimately, I did not end up losing my job over it. I think that was by the grace of God.

God gives us free will. This does not mean, as so many in today’s world seems to think, that we can do whatever we want. It means that “we find ultimate happiness growing in holiness to become closer to Him. We find true freedom growing in truth and goodness because that ultimately fulfills our human nature, making us freer to be who we are meant to be.” (A Family of Faith Parent’s Guide, pg. 266. See also CCC 1731.)

Join us in Faith Formation when we discuss the development of our conscience, mortal vs. venial sin, and how we can advance our spiritual lives to grow in love of God and of neighbor. We meet in Fellowship Hall right after the 11 am Mass. Bring your books if you have them. All are welcome! We have something for everyone!

 Blessings,

 Julie Gould

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