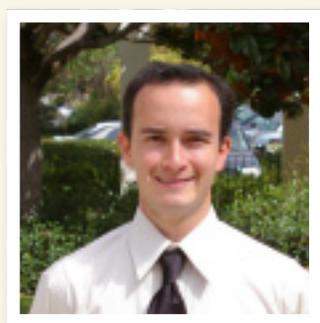


ECHOES OF CHURCH LIFE

BY GERARDO ROJAS



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One of my favorite aspects of parish ministry has to be the journey that the RCIA brings each year. Maybe this is the case because contrary to what we normally encounter in our society the RCIA presents a unique opportunity to talk to people that are genuinely interested in the Catholic Faith. It is a journey of discovery and communion. Discovery because it gives us an opportunity to share our faith and life journey with one another, and communion because through this process we become a community of people traveling together on the same lifelong road of faith formation.

However, as anyone familiar with this process can tell you, every journey is different. For me one moment particularly stands out among many beautiful ‘RCIA moments’. I was serving at a Catholic Church in Eagle, Colorado (St. Mary’s) as the director of religious education (DRE), and one of my responsibilities was to coordinate the RCIA process. That particular year we had an exceptional group of adults, but there was also one little girl named Maud. Maud was a very sweet girl and it was during her preparation for her first communion that we discovered she had never been baptized. So she became part of our Rite of Christian Initiation for Children (RCIC) process for the year. Now this was a small parish, so she ended up being the only child at our Easter Vigil Celebration. I had talked to her family about the length of the celebration to prepare them for the

‘liturgical marathon’, and they were confident that Maud would do very well. She did, and her baptism is one of the most memorable and beautiful ones I have seen. She knelt in the baptismal font, arms stretched out into the air; her head was slightly bowed as she welcomed joyfully the water that Fr. Bob Kinkel poured on her. We really wanted to make a ‘splash’ that year, so by the end of her Baptism she was literally soaked from head to toe, and despite being very wet and probably cold, the only thing on Maud’s face was a big and radiant smile.

But what was truly remarkable happened the following morning when I saw that same beautiful smile at one of our Easter Sunday Masses. I saw Maud and her family during Communion and after Mass I went up to them to say ‘hello’. Knowing how late our Easter Vigil Mass had ended the night before I asked what had compelled them to wake up early for Mass since last night’s celebration had ‘counted’. Maud told me she couldn’t wait to come back, that she loved the Mass and she wanted to come back to receive the Eucharist. The excitement that I saw on her face is normally what I would associate with Christmas morning, and her beautiful faith-filled witness is why this particular moment stands out.

The New Evangelization compels us to renew our sense of witnessing to God our Father, to our relationship with Jesus Christ his Son, and to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Maud’s witness reminded me of what Jesus told his disciples concerning children “it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it” (Mark 10:14-15). At times it seems like this part of the Gospel serves simply as a reminder that we need to be nice to children or Jesus will reprimand us the way he reprimanded his disciples. But there is clearly much more that Jesus is saying to his followers in this

‘catechetical moment’. He is calling his closest friends to receive the kingdom of heaven as little children, with the same joy, wonder, and faith that Maud displayed in her baptism.

It is no secret that children have an incredible capacity to believe what they cannot see. In a way that makes them more capable of seeing what is truly real. In his writing, C.S. Lewis refers to our present world as a ‘*shadowland*’ a preparation for the reality that will be present in heaven. Through our faith in God, we experience glimpses of the Kingdom here on Earth, but that sense of complete belief and certainty in its true existence is perhaps best seen among children and saints. So Jesus wants us to believe in Him the way they do, to trust in God’s love and protection the way a child has complete faith in her parents. And to allow the Holy Spirit to fill us with grace to carry out the mission entrusted to us. To evangelize we need to believe like children do. Their natural trust in the miraculous is an essential element we need for our mission. Without it, we lose the beauty and attractiveness of our faith, the sense of wonder and awe that is so needed in a world that is increasingly becoming more materialistic and self-centered. That way we can joyfully be true witnesses to what Pope Paul VI compels us: “it is important to proclaim the gospel through wordless witness so as to stir up irresistible questions to those who see how Christians live” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* §21). God’s beauty is truly irresistible.

