

Teaching the Way of Love

Volume 12 | Issue 5 | January 2023
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Resolve to Waste Time with your Children

A few years ago, Pope Francis sent out a challenge to parents across the globe. His simple and direct tweet said: ***Parents, can you “waste time” with your children? It is one of the most important things you can do each day.***

This meme tweet from our Holy Father reminds me of a story that a parent told me years ago. This father shared with me that he had made plans to attend a Badger football game one Saturday with a group of his buddies. But his wife took ill early Friday morning which meant that he had to cancel his plans to take care of his 4-year-old son. Obviously disappointed with the change, the father said that he decided to spend that Saturday sulking. He was going to sit and waste time rather than do anything productive. And that is what he did. He sat in his P.J.s until 10. He read the newspaper. And he brooded.

When the game started, he watched it on T.V. During this entire time, his son zoomed around from one toy to another. Occasionally, the son would invite his dad to play. Still sullen, the dad agreed “to play” by half-entering into his son’s fantasy world of digging trenches with a dump truck and unearthing dinosaurs that were buried under pillows. As the little boy created endless stories, the dad paid just enough attention to convince his son that he was interested in him and not the game.

At some point, out of the blue, the tiny child crawled into the dad’s lap giving him a bear hug. His son exclaimed, “Dad this is the best day ever! I love you!” With that, he was back on the floor hoping to conquer another adventure.

The dad was startled by both the gesture of love and the comment. The Father’s heart was transformed at that moment. He had no idea that his presence – just being there – would have such a profound effect on his son. He was overwhelmed that his son found so much comfort and security in his sitting on the couch, wasting his time.

This example illustrates the challenge given to you and me by Pope Francis. He encourages us to share idle time with our kids; to sit down, relax and allow life to unfold around us. He asks us to put the outside world on hold and watch our children giggle and play, imagine and question, zoom and rest. He dares us to just ‘be’ with them and let them just be with us.

Why Waste Time? What’s the Point?

Wasting time is something that our culture frowns upon. In fact, any quick Google search on wasting time results in articles and resources offering you expert advice on how to become more productive and less idle. I remember meeting a mom who felt she wasn’t doing enough. So, she decided to begin

each day by asking herself three daily questions; why sit if you could stand; why stand if you can walk; why walk if you can run? She said that her goal was to maximize every moment of every day. When I asked her what her family thought about this philosophy she responded, “they just roll with it because like me, they don’t want to miss out on anything either.” As I walked away, I wondered how over busyness would impact this family’s happiness and fulfillment. Would they become more or less attached with each other?

If you take Pope Francis’ tweet to heart, you know that he urges you to slow up and enjoy the life God has given you. He wants you to know that God created downtime for a reason. Times of rest allow a family to rejoice in the fruits of its labors, create shared memories and experience the joy of one another.

In a recent message the Pope said, “Children are the joy of the family and of society... Children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable; and at the same time unmistakably linked to his/her roots. In fact, according to God’s plan, being son and daughter means to carry within oneself the memory and hope of a love which was fulfilled in the very kindling of the life of another...”

Harmony and Hope. That’s the reason that we waste time together. Harmony—the ability to be in sync and be at peace. Hope – the confidence that the world is going to be o.k. and that we are going to find joy in who we are. Both of these elements grow when we spend time with our kids doing nothing more than just being. Hope flourishes when we stop racing around and catch our collective family breath. Harmony expands when we allow ourselves unhurried time to unwrap the gift of our children and when they get to sneak a peek at the gifts that are hiding within us.

Consider looking at your calendar for the next two months. As you do so, ask yourself what percentage of your non-working hours is available to your family? Could you use this time to just be with your family? The end game is to find time each day to be together as a family. Even 10 minutes here or there can make the difference and meet the challenge given by Pope Francis. That’s doable, right?



Teaching the Way of Love



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