The Society of Mary, Discipline, and Consequences (Part II)

Many parents and students look at how Marist administers discipline through the lens of college admissions directors and how it will influence their student's application. I want to ask parents and students to take off those glasses and look at discipline the way God does.

To look at life from God's perspective is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is called wisdom.

A Marist education is concerned with the formation of our students' soul or character. This is consistent with Jesus, himself a teacher (rabbi), who said, "What profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul in the process?" (Mk. 8:36) The key to forming one's soul or character is the willingness to accept correction, especially from God that is normally communicated through human agents or events.

Here is what that can look like. You will recall King David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of his most trusted and loyal commander, Uriah. (2 Sam. 11 - 12) This occurred while Uriah was away in battle. Bathsheba became pregnant. David then arranged to have Uriah placed in the front lines of a battle to increase the odds that he would be killed. He was, and King David proceeded to marry Bathsheba, believing no one to be the wiser.

One day the prophet Nathan confronted the king with his sin. To his credit, David did not deny it or claim someone else did it, blame it on his upbringing, or having a bad day. He took responsibility for his actions, understood he was wrong, and that justice required a penalty to be paid.

The infant from their illicit union became deathly sick. David prayed unceasingly for six days, wearing sackcloth and ashes, fasting, and begging that his infant son be spared. On the seventh day, he received the news his child had died.

What spiritual lessons are we to learn from this? Well, here is the first one. You can't fool God. One may think that he or she has gotten away with something, especially if the consequences are not felt immediately. However, the chickens may not come home to roost until years later. The reality is that we cannot escape from reaping what we have sown. If not now, then later, but there will come a day of reckoning. "For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open." (Luke 8: 17)

Here is the second lesson—many people associate correction or punishment with appeasing an angry God. I tried to correct that understanding of God in my previous essay, which you may read **here**. God corrects us by letting us experience the consequences of our actions, thereby prompting a change of heart and drawing us closer to him.

Being on the receiving end of getting a ton of demerits, being denied certain leadership positions, and even being asked to leave school are examples of suffering the temporal consequences of wrong actions. When does mercy kick in? We human beings get caught up in the present moment, whereas God takes the long view. From the divine perspective, it is better to pay the consequences now rather than escape them by lying or blaming someone else. That runs the risk of doing something far worse later in life that could have even graver consequences. Wanting to help students avoid that scenario is an act of mercy.

Once he learned his infant had died, David stopped beseeching God, took off his sackcloth and ashes, put on his kingly robes, and, would you believe, immediately went to worship God. Then he ate and returned to

his duties. This episode ends with the biblical writer observing, "And the Lord loved him." (2 Samuel 12: 24)
The biblical writer could just as easily have said, "And the Lord took pity (mercy) on him." In the Catholic Church, the remedy or healing balm for grave sin is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Every penitent who approaches the Sacrament of Reconciliation is treated with dignity, respect, offered God's forgiveness and mercy, given a penance and encouragement, and told to go in peace. All of this echoes the writer of 2 Samuel 12: 24, "And the Lord the loved or took pity (mercy) on him."

The Lord loved David before he had sinned, while he was sinning, and when he was being disciplined by accepting the consequences of his actions. As I said in my previous essay, we can't make God hate us because God always was, is, and will be love.

That is true for any of us who have the honesty and the humility to admit we have done wrong and the faith to trust that the Lord loves us even when the divine love permits us to experience the consequences of our sinful actions. That includes trusting that God wants the best for us even though initially that may not be to our liking. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "My son [or daughter], do not disdain the discipline of the Lord, nor lose heart when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and reprimands every son [or daughter] whom he welcomes [as his own]." (Hebrews 12: 5-6)

What is of ultimate importance is not our relationship with a particular college but with God. A Marist education begins with that fundamental truth. Everything else that is learned in a Marist school bows in humble surrender to it. As I said at the beginning, "What profit a man to gain the whole world but lose his soul in the process?" (Mk. 8:36)

Now you can return to wearing the lens of a college admissions director. Just remember that from the Society of Mary's perspective, it is far more critical that your daughter or son be admitted through the gates of heaven than through the doors of a favored college.