



A Pastoral Letter: The Challenge of Making Faith First in Busy Families

Dear Parents,

Life is becoming more complicated, isn't it? More choices, more things to do, and certainly never enough time! We are busy, tired, stressed too much of the time. It reminds me of the time Jesus was visiting his friends Martha and Mary. Martha is running around doing chores, working on the meal, and has no time for Jesus. Finally, Jesus says to her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing." (Luke 10:41-42)

Jesus was, of course, asking her to spend time with him, like Mary, her sister. Aren't we all a little like Martha at times, losing sight of what really matters because there is so much demanded of us? The philosopher Henry David Thoreau offers this perspective:

*It is not enough to be busy; so are the ants.
The question is: What are we busy about?*

Let's focus for a moment on just one particular aspect of family life in America today that seems to continue to demand more and more of our time, energy and attention. It's *sports*. Whether we're talking about playing or watching, athletic activities dominate the lives of more than a few families. In fact, I increasingly hear sports referred to as our country's new religion.

Sports as America's religion! Could it be? Today, coaches demand more time for practice. Games and practices in some municipal leagues are scheduled now on every evening and even Sunday mornings. Children are regularly on multiple teams or sports in the same season. Many parents feel guilty if they are not able to make all the games. Perhaps without even noticing, athletics have come to control the rhythm of many families' lives. Do we stop to think what might be sacrificed as we strive to meet the demands related to athletics? While sports can be wonderful for so many reasons, I would suggest that things can easily become unbalanced, even unhealthy.

It is ironic that I am writing to you on this topic, as there are few who are bigger sports fans than me. I grew up loving athletic competition and I'm a huge fan of our professional teams. And yet, I was raised in such a way that it was clear that I was Catholic before all else, be it a baseball pitcher or a Bears fan. Our family never missed Mass because of sports. We simply placed our family faith before other things.

Children need to be given the time and encouragement to deepen the faith that God has instilled in each of them, so that it can blossom, transforming them as they grow. With the support of family, friends and community, Catholic faith can do great things in the lives of young people. Each July our diocese hosts a remarkable event called *Youth Leadership Conference*. Nearly a thousand of our young people come together for a weekend to learn, celebrate and worship. I wish you could be there! It is a powerful experience...more than any rock concert or sporting event you could ever

attend. These teenagers will tell you that the world can offer them no greater gift than that of living in the peace and joy of Jesus Christ, a truth that has come to them through their Catholic faith. These young women and men are a testimony to the grace of our Church!

As Catholic people we believe that there is nothing truer, more relevant or lasting than the “good news” of a God who loves us and offers us the hope of meaning-filled lives and salvation in Christ. You know that there is nothing more important that you can pass on to your children than our Catholic faith...not position, not possessions, not power. Jesus, who feeds us in Eucharist and Word, who lives today in our midst as “Body of Christ”, the Church...there can be no greater gift for you as parents to have and to give.

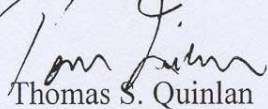
I invite you to evaluate the priorities as they are lived in your family. Often, time is an accurate measure of what we value. This is especially so when time is precious and we have to make judgments and compromises to meet all our commitments. Consider the place of Catholic faith in the lives of your children, in the life of your family. Make it the core around which all other aspects of life revolve. In doing so, you will be fulfilling your cooperative and creative role with God to give your children the firmest of foundations, rooted in the commitments made at Baptism.

Take full advantage of your parish’s resources, ministries and programs, both for you and your children, to grow in faith. Be present and active for the most powerful action in the life of your Catholic parish, the Sunday Liturgy of the Eucharist. Come to share your talents, deepening your family’s relationship with the parish community. And finally, embrace your central role in your children’s faith development. **Talk to your children about faith, pray with them (including the use of ritual actions and the Sunday scripture readings), and together give generous service to others...the three actions proven to most effectively foster faith development in children.**

May every child in our diocese come to celebrate their primary identity as a Catholic Christian, before all else. May we frequently remind them that any good news in life, whether its making the grade or making the team, is located within the Gospel good news of Jesus and the unconditional love of God! As parents, you have the power to instill a “faith first” approach in your family, especially as you model it in your life.

May the demands upon our time and energy not be a source of distraction away from our faith, but rather all the more reason for us to stay closely connected to and dependent upon our loving God. May God bless you each day with an abiding peace and joy that comes only from the Holy Spirit!

Yours in Christ,



Thomas S. Quinlan

Diocesan Director of Religious Education

I’ve posted on our diocesan website (www.dioceseofjoliet.org) a wonderful account of one local family’s successful efforts to keep faith first in a very busy family life. I encourage you to go to the site and look for “Family, Faith and Sports” to explore this topic from a parent’s viewpoint.