

A Father's Faith

By John Bosio

Fathers play an important role in our life and spiritual growth. Mickey Rose, a deacon at St. Stephen Catholic Community, in Old Hickory, Tennessee, shares the following personal story with the young parents who bring their children to be baptized. It is a story of hope for all of us who want to pass on to our children our faith and the values we believe in.

“As a young parent, says Mickey, I learned during a men’s retreat to bless my children. Each evening, after night prayers I traced the sign of the cross in the air over each of them, like the priest does at Mass over the congregation. After the blessing I would give Jim and Mike a little pinch on their nose. That was the signal that the day was done.

One evening, when my oldest, Jim, was about twelve, he looked up at me with a challenging expression on his face and said: ‘Dad, I don’t need your blessing anymore!’ I was taken aback by this request. I hesitated for a moment, then as I started responding I was interrupted by Mike’s yell coming from the other bedroom: ‘Yea, dad, I don’t need it either!’ I realized that Jim was about to step into a new world that he needed to figure out, and Mike, the younger sibling wanted to be as cool as his big brother. I was disappointed but I obliged them. So, I stopped blessing them openly with the sign of the cross but I told them that each evening whenever I said “goodnight” to them it was my blessing for them, and they could not dodge it.

Jim went off to college and Mike went to Knoxville where he took a job as a photojournalist with Channel 10. Later, Jim decided to go to Officer Candidate School

with the Marines. The day for his departure arrived and the family accompanied Jim to the airport. As the time approached for Jim to board the plane he turned to me and said: 'Dad, could I have your blessing?' I was touched by this request because it had a lot of meaning for both of us, and also because I thought this childhood ritual had been forgotten. I gladly obliged him. A few years later, when Mike decided to walk the Appalachian Trail he came to me and said: 'Dad, could I please have your blessing?'"

Mickey had thought that the ritual of his bedtime blessing had been dismissed by his sons as irrelevant to their life, and perhaps forgotten. Instead, he learned that when it comes to religion and spirituality nothing is ever irrelevant or forgotten. Whatever ritual or prayer parents institute in their home with their young children is likely to remain meaningful to them for the rest of their lives, and it will possibly be passed on to the next generation as a dear expression of faith.

Mickey concludes the telling of his story by sharing that his two sons, Jim and Mike, are now in the habit of blessing their own children at bedtime. Mickey calls this his spiritual legacy.

Question for reflection: Are there rituals or prayers that you say with your children at home that you learned from your parents? Have you noticed your grown children carry on spiritual traditions you passed on to them?