

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A

November 13, 2011

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

The Giftedness of Children

There is a young adult named Brian who provides a good lesson for us.

Brian has always loved to tinker with mechanical devices. As a 6-year old, he took apart a remote control toy car.

At age 9, Brian helped his dad fix the lawn mower. In high school, he spent hours tearing apart and rebuilding computer equipment.

And now, as a young adult, Brian is a sound technician for a theatre company. His parents have steadily encouraged him from a very young age.

But, Brian was never labeled as “gifted.” The definition of the “gifted child” has traditionally been limited to the top 5 to 10% of children who achieve high test scores and excel in school.

No question, these children are gifted, but, there may be hundreds of other ways for children to be gifted. Today, educators and psychologists tell us that nearly all children have special gifts.

Children may display their giftedness through words, numbers, music, athletics, technical skill, social interaction, intuitive insight, creativity, a quick wit, and on it goes. Many professionals now say that all children have gifts and they just vary from one child to another.

Our Gifts and the Gospel

I first came across these insights in an article that is entitled *Fifty Ways to Bring Out Your Child's Best*.

The author's name is Thomas Armstrong. Well, I am seeing today's gospel parable about the servants and their talents from the viewpoint of how we can assist others in using their gifts.

The article that I cited gives 50 ways to bring out the best, to bring out the gifts in our children. This morning I want to share just 5 of these with you.

Five Ways to Bring Out the Gifts

First, pay attention to what really interests and captivates your child. Be attentive to what interests your children in a positive way.

These interests may say a lot about where their gifts are. By being attentive to this, you are in effect letting your children discover their own giftedness.

This is one point in the gospel parable where the number of talents – 5, 2 or 1 – does not so much mean having more or less talent than others. Instead, they simply represent different gifts and our task is to help our children – and even other adults – identify their own unique gifts.

Second, encourage your children, but do not push or pressure them too much. If we do that, they may become too stressed and protest or form a distaste even towards their talents.

The master in today's parable does not pressure. He simply gives his servants the gifts and the opportunities to use them.

Third, allow your children to make some mistakes. If they have to do everything perfectly, they may never take the risks necessary to discover and develop their gifts.

It's good to assist a child in realizing a mistake and learning from it. But first, we need to allow some appropriate freedom to make mistakes.

And the fourth rule is connected with this: don't criticize your children in a way that belittles them or puts them down. Instead, give them encouragement and constructive criticism.

These two rules – allowing your children to make some mistakes and not belittling them – are borne out in the third servant in the gospel parable. He feels afraid and intimidated and the result is that he does not use and develop his gifts.

And the fifth rule: accept your child as he or she is. Maybe your son is musically inclined and does not have a lot of athletic ability.

Or maybe your daughter is more into computers than dance. The important thing is to take our children as they are, because that will be the best environment for using the gifts they have been given and for them to become the persons God intended them to be.

Conclusion

So, these simple, but important rules will help us to assist others, especially children but maybe even other adults, in identifying and using their gifts.