

## Suffer the Little Children

A wise parishioner helps a mother of five discover what a delight her noisy little children are to our Eucharistic Lord

*Victoria Gisondi*



here are two things that scare the wits out of Catholic moms of young children. The first is attempting Mass alone with small children and the second is attempting Eucharistic adoration with small children. The common denominator here is small children.

Children are precious and cute and often say things aloud that make us laugh. But they are unpredictable and often loud little creatures who make sudden demands of us and often in public.

I cannot count the times mothers have lamented wanting to attend daily Mass or Eucharistic adoration if it were not for the embarrassing distraction the children make.

As a mother of five, I have often been in this situation. And, to be completely honest, it isn't the Lord's opinion of my loud children or my mothering skills that scares me most. It's the opinion of those around me. This concern is not unmerited.

I'd like to say that I have always been received with open arms by other churchgoers but I have not. And I'm not alone. Many of us are still traumatized by the grumpy old man who made a snide remark about our bratty children or the lady who yelled at them in the bathroom. For every grouch I have encountered, twice as many have encouraged me, but I still get a little anxiety attack when my children crawl under pews or whisper loudly during the consecration.

It doesn't stop me from going, mind you. But it might stop a weaker sister. It goes to

show how even the venial sin of critical remarks or dirty looks can have such an impact on the Body of Christ.

I hadn't realized how much of this mentality had affected me until recently. As I was leaving daily Mass one morning, feeling fresh and fancy free because I was completely childless and had been able to enjoy the Mass without the usual distractions, I encountered an older gentleman I have seen around at Adoration. We got to talking and I was singing the wonders of how great it is to feel that "holy quiet" that can only be felt at Adoration- how its almost tangible and how it permeates the soul.



But then he said something that surprised me. He told me that it isn't necessarily the quiet that matters. He explained how the Lord wants us to come to Him like little children and how he has gotten to know many broken people who visit Our Lord on a regular basis and, as a result, have established a sort of community. I gathered from what he said that he and these people had possibly conversed quietly or shared their burdens and prayed together in fellowship before Our Lord. What a novel idea! The idea of little children struck a chord and I asked him if this idea included actual children.

Then he smiled and recounted a specific time that he remembered ME bringing my children to daily Mass and how frazzled I had looked trying to keep them all in order. He also recounted the face of an elderly lady who sat in the back and whose face lit up as she saw me enter with my clamorous brood.

"You don't know the beacon of light you are to those elderly or lonely people that haven't seen small children in a long while," he told me.

Yeah right, I thought, but what about all the rest of the people who I'm bothering? And, before I could get the thought out he said.

"There will always be people who express complaints. But those that are disturbed are truly disturbed by something else. Those that are there with a heart to love the Lord will not be disturbed."

Something about the statement really moved me. It was a new perspective that shifted and settled like tectonic plates inside me. I could barely fight the tears welling up in my eyes. So, it wasn't me! It was them. I hadn't been wrong.

I suddenly grieved for all those times I had scowled at and pinched my children during Mass or left church angry. I grieved for all those times I had unreasonable

expectations and had left Mass in a dark storm. I had been focusing on the wrong thing.

The gentleman reminded me that the Lord had very specifically said "Suffer the little children come unto to me." "The word "suffer" stood out and suddenly gave me peace. Jesus knew that in order to bring the children to him there would be some suffering required. As immature little people, they have not yet conquered their impulses, their manners, their noise level. They are, after all, little children.

I pictured Jesus smiling at their raucousness, making allowances for the disrupted silence and interrupted prayers. The Lord loves them dearly and accepts them with infinite patience- something I had failed to do. Where did this unwritten rule come from that says little children do not belong at Eucharistic Adoration?

I left a little sad, but resolved, and so I sat down to write this article. My prayer is to free all the women who have felt the same frustration I have. I wrote this article to give you, the mothers of young children, permission to go before the Lord, to ignore all those "apostles" who want to shoo them away. If you have held back from the graces of daily Mass out of fear, if you have stopped making holy hours before the Lord out of fear, out of shame, or even out of pride, GO BACK! Do not let the devil have the last laugh.

The Lord wants us and our children. He wants to build up his Body starting with the children. What better way is there to instill a love of the Lord if we don't start very young?

If we come back in armies of mothers and children, who will be able to stop us?

*Victoria writes for several Catholic publications and is the mother of five.*