

Perspective

by Larry Badaczewski, Parish Counselor

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"Who wants to raise an idiot?," I asked a group of parents at a local church during a family catechesis session recently. No one raised his/her hand! I suppose it's almost like asking, "Who wants to create a dysfunctional family?" Yet, in lots of ways, I think most parents today (including myself!) are in clear danger of raising "idiots" if we are not careful. Now, at this point you might be asking: "What is *he* talking about?!?!" Let me explain...

I once heard the dynamic and powerful speaker, Franciscan Father Richard Rohr, talk about how in Greek society, there was a clear emphasis on building a great city/state. It was a given that the bigger picture, the global family, was the priority and to what great and common persons alike gave their skills, gifts and primary concern. The

Greek word for someone who had no concern for anything but his private life was an idiot. Not to doubt Fr. Rohr, but I did go to the dictionary to check this out and sure enough, the root of the word idiot is derived from the Greek *idios* meaning "one's own." So it comes down to a person worrying primarily about "one's own" world versus the city/state. I'll try to make the connection between what Fr. Rohr is saying and what this has to do with raising children - although some may well already guess where I'm going with this.

The fourth commandment states: Honor thy father and mother. It is strategically placed (at least *I* think) after the first three commandments which more directly address our relationship with God. So, if children are going to learn about God, aside from direct contact with Him, they will learn it from us - the father and mother mentioned just above. So, for instance, an adolescent (defined by Webster as someone in the process of growing up) says "YOU don't know anything!!!," we can either be filled with panic at the prospect that he/she may be right, or remember Moses on Mt. Sinai who got it straight from God that you as a parent know a few things and have the right and responsibility to try and illuminate this child's mind, heart and soul.

So far, so good, except...we live in a child-centered society. Children are "self"-centered by nature - this is neither good or bad - it just is. This means if we're not careful, as the saying goes, the lunatics will be running the asylum! Adolescents, for example, do a masterful job of advocating for their agenda. - I often admire their skill. The job of the mother and father is not to defer to their agenda but rather to teach that in any given picture there is a wider agenda to consider - usually involving other people - usually their family. If, as parents, we do not find a way to widen their perspective beyond themselves, then we'll find ourselves living with an idiot - an unpleasant prospect at best!

The sooner in a child's life we can teach him or her to consider and be concerned for the needs of others, the better. Not because, like the Greeks, we want to build a great city/state, but because we're committed to building the Kingdom of God. Of course, it's said that when it comes to learning about God, faith is caught more than it is taught. The talk I alluded to earlier was to mothers who, if wanting to teach their children about God and building His Kingdom, cannot give their children the message that children are the center of their lives. Precious? Absolutely! The center? No. That's a place reserved first, for God; next, their marriage; third, themselves as persons; and then children.

So save the speeches and lectures. They're watching you. If we don't want to raise idiots then we have to be careful not to be one ourselves!