

Be reasonable

In Catholic circles, we often talk about “Christmas and Easter Catholics.” Sometimes, we called the Christmas door busters, the “Poinsettia” Catholics while we call the Easter Door buster Catholics, the “Lily” Catholics. Often we lump both groups together by calling them the “P & L Catholics” (Poinsettia and Lily) or the “C & E Catholics” (Christmas and Easter). Some priests, in a tongue and cheek manner, acknowledge the presence of the Christmas and Easter Catholics by saying, “For those of you who have been on ‘dial-a-prayer’ for the year, welcome to live action.”

At this time of year, I am reminded of another group of Catholics. I’m not sure what to call them. I might call them “Sacramental Catholics.” Then again, I might call them “I almost forgot Catholics.” Sometimes, I am inclined to call them “Age of reason Catholics” or “It must be time for...” Catholics.

It seems that many Catholics whose children reach that profound and ripe age of reason suddenly have a “Oh! Oh!” moment. Usually, their children are in the second grade. Parents discover it is time for First Communion. Of course, they are not aware that First Confession usually comes before First Communion.

In many cases, both parents and children have disappeared from the church’s radar screen. Often, their names do not appear on any church roster. Frequently, many of the children have not even been baptized.

In some cases, such children even attend Catholic schools. The children hear their friends in school as well as the teacher in second grade talking about First Communion and First Confession. The children go home and ask their parents about it and remind their parents that they, the children, would like to make their First Communion and First Confession. The children’s curiosity becomes a wake-up call for the parents who then realize that they have been guilty of Catholic amnesia.

In some of such cases, the children are not even baptized. So parents expect a fast-track approach so that their children can join their friends for such a wonderful sacramental experience.

Also, seeing that, in Catholic schools, there is a two tier tuition rate – Catholics and others; some Catholic parents, who have been “others,” now realize that they can get a better deal in tuition by having their child baptized.

Usually the R.C.I.C. (Rite of Christian Initiation of Children) begins to kick in for all those who have fallen through the cracks over the years and want to catch up on their sacramental journey in the Catholic Church.

Once the children who are supposed to be baptized are baptized and all the bases are covered for them to receive First Communion and First Confession, another saga develops.

I notice that on their big day, the children are dressed in their finest white dresses, veils, shirts and ties. Parents and grandparents beam with delight and accomplishment that their son or daughter is so angelic, so free from sin, so pure, so enlightened, so holy that the possibility of a bad word crossing their lips again is in proportion to how clean the First Communion dress or shirt will be at the end of all the celebrations.

The following Sunday, I wonder where some of these angelic children or their parents are. I will notice those who go to Catholic school at the weekly school Mass proudly receiving their Communion. Maybe, I will see them again at a non-school Mass, possibly at Christmas and Easter.

Some years ago, a gentleman and his fiancé came to see me about getting married in the Catholic Church. He was the Catholic party. I pointed out to him that I had never seen him in church and wondered if he went to church. He simply said, “When I was in elementary school and high school, we had school Masses every week. I think I have accumulated enough brownie points to keep me going for a while.”

I wonder if the age of reason may have less to do with age as with the responsibility of those who finally reach it.