

## Tears in church

I stood at the back of church greeting people as they entered for our Sunday morning Mass. Then I noticed a little girl with a pretty light blue dress enter. She was accompanied by a gentleman. He seemed much older than her father and I concluded that he must be her grandfather.

The little girl, probably around five years old, didn't seem very happy. Soon I would find out why. Her grandfather took her into one of our restroom and left the door slightly ajar. I presumed he was getting some tissue to wipe the young child's nose.

Then, I heard her voice amid the tears. "She called me stupid." Then the tears got louder and more persistent. "I'm not stupid, am I," she asked. The gentleman assured her. "No, you are not stupid. You are a good girl. In fact, you are very good and you're very smart." Then the little girl, who would love to believe the gentleman, said, "Why did she call me 'stupid.' If I'm not stupid." "I don't know," continued the gentleman, "little children are mean to each other sometimes." "But why would she call me stupid," the little girl continued as the sobbing became more pronounced. "I don't know," he said again and continued, "all I know is that you are a good girl. You are pretty and we all know you are not stupid."

The little girl still did not seem convinced as the sobbing became more pronounced. "Do you want to go home?" he asked. "No! I'm just hurt. She called me 'stupid'" "Let me wipe your face," he suggested. She seemed to agree and a few moments later, a little girl emerged from the restroom still sniffing and with red eyes. The gentleman took her to a seat in a corner of the church.

Listening to the little girl's sobbing and not having a chance to assure her, I wondered how many people come to church in "tears." Oh, Yes! Some tears are obvious, like the little girl's tears but others are not so obvious. Many adopt a "stiff upper lip" mentality and don't show them. Others may simply give you a glimpse of their pain by casually, saying something like, "Say a prayer for me." The large figure that adorns the crosses in our churches is met with still living, breathing, crushing crosses brought by the faithful to church every weekend.

In society, one is as good as one's last paycheck, one's last promotion, one's last achievement, one's last climb up the ladder of success. Society reminds us that in order to get high and achieve greatness in this life one often has to climb over people, treating them as obstacles on the way to the top.

Unconsciously, so many parents equate greatness and success in their children by comparisons. Messages, first heard in the formative stages of life, are replayed over and over again on life's journey. The message, often forming a stunted personality, includes phrases such as, "Why aren't you like..." "Why aren't you as smart as..." "Why don't you behave like..." "Why aren't you as good as..."

Often parents live out their own unfilled dreams through the lives of their children, especially in the area of sports. Passionate parents push children into sports and even into extra-curricular activities in which their children feel lost, uncomfortable and don't want to participate but they grin and bear the ordeal because they do not wish to disappoint their parents and, in their estimation, suffer the loss of a parent's love.

Probably, the child who called the little girl "stupid" was either jealous, insecure, or felt a need to pull down someone in order to raise herself a little higher.

As I think about the little girl and her tears in church, I realize that, when the Lord created us, he saw that we were "very good." This goodness is not something we can beg for, borrow or steal. Instead it is a gift given, not to be compared, trodden upon but enjoyed and affirmed.