

A Crying shame

Recently, our 10:30 a.m. Sunday morning Mass was a cacophony of sounds. The sounds included cell phones going off; little kids skipping up the aisle after a bathroom break; babies testing the decibels of their lung volume with their piercing cries; little kids discovering that they have a voice that transcends the silence; and cough-prone persons spluttering through their latest allergies. It became an unfinished symphony that even would give Beethoven sleepless nights. I just prayed and hoped through all the Mass that the good Lord could decipher the pleas and prayers of the people at church.

Some people left early – maybe because of the length of Mass, maybe because they had to be some place else or maybe because they needed to give their eardrums some much needed rest.

Some parents, laden with Cheerios in plastic bags fed their kids while they hoped to be nourished more substantially by the Bread of Life. Other, childless, shot threatening glances in the direction of the noise. Their glance was as effective as a comb to a frolic ally- challenged individual.

Some, sensing the discomfort from squinting eyes, got up and took their raucous child to the back.

Some people say that if children cannot behave themselves, they should be left at home. Other say that, in order to teach them to behave in church, they need to bring them to church. Some people come to church where they hope there will be less children or babies to distract them. Others become immune to the sights and sounds of the symphony going on all around them.

Following the Mass exodus, a gentleman stopped me on the aisle on my way to de--robe. “What do you think of all that stuff going on at Mass today?” he began. I knew what he meant. “All the noise and crying during Mass,” I indicated. He nodded in agreement. “What can we do about it?” he continued. “We have a cry room,” I shot back. “How come people don’t use the cry room when their kid is acting up, crying and disturbing everyone?” he counteracted. “I’m not sure why,” I said back. “Maybe, the next time I am in church,” he concluded, “when kids start acting up and distracting everyone, I think I will go into the cry room myself, because there won’t be anyone else there. Maybe, then, I will have some quiet during Mass.”

So, are we caught between a rock and a hard place? Children belong in church with their parents. We should welcome them like Jesus welcome the little children and invited us to become like them, obviously more childlike rather than testing lung capacity. Many parents use the cry room as a time-out time to help their children transition from being upset to becoming more placid. Other parents use the cry room where they can let their children go nuts in a confined space without having to discipline them. I wonder if we should ban toys and picture books in cry rooms.

Some parents use God as a weapon to try and quiet down their disturbing child. You hear threatening comments like, “God is watching you,” as they point toward the altar, “if you are not good, he is going to get you.” The problem is not only bad theology but equating the priest with God and its possible consequences.

Some times, cry rooms are populated by children and teenagers who do not need to be there but provides an opportunity for idle chatter during Mass.

I wonder if parents explained what was happening during Mass to their children, would it perk the children’s curiosity and help. The debate is as old as the adage, “children should be seen not heard.” Maybe children should be both seen and heard because often from their mouths come judgments on things parents should not have said or should have said in the first place. Maybe, even in God’s eyes, life is a crying shame.