Opinion
Spirituality



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by Christian Mocek

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The other day, I pulled into the driveway to the sight of a little boy grinning from ear to ear and banging his two fists on the screen door in anticipation. From the movement of his lips, I could tell he was shouting, "Da-da-da." Part of a cadre of words he is just learning to say.

I quickly shut off my car, grabbed my workbag and ran to the front door. As soon as I opened the door, his little arms soared toward the sky and we embraced in the kind of hug you give a dear friend after not seeing them for a long time. His fingers laced themselves into the folds of my shirt and I grabbed hold of the blonde curls that adorn the back of his head.

We stood in the doorway for a while, just holding each other. His head on my shoulder and his chest pushed firmly against mine. When I put him down, he grabbed hold of my right index finger with hands that look so much like my own. He led me into the house, first to my bedroom so I could change out of my work clothes, then back to the living room where trucks, tractors, books, balls and blocks sit haphazardly stacked in the corner.

He grabbed a ball, shouted another word just learned, "bah," and threw it at me. After some back and forth with the ball, he ran toward me and jumped on my chest. We wrestled for a while, threw the ball some more, colored in a coloring book on a child-size picnic table that sits in the middle of our living room, and read a book. Eventually, my wife called us both into the kitchen for dinner.

After dinner and more evening playtime, it was bedtime. Once I changed him into his pajamas, I asked him to grab a book for us to read. He walked over to the bookcase overflowing with children's books, stood for a while pondering his choice, grabbed a book and then walked back to me.

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After giving me the book, he lifted his arms up and I placed him on my lap. We read the book three times. Every time I said, "The end," he would grab the book and flip the pages to the front. I didn't have the heart to stop reading and, in truth, I was enjoying it too much.

After the third reading, I shut off the lamp on the nightstand next to the rocker we were sitting on. He nestled into my arms and his smoky blue eyes stared right into my own. He grabbed hold of my nose and my cheeks while drinking from his bottle. I sang a couple verses of "Amazing Grace," "Silent Night" and "Away in the Manger."

After drinking his fill, he moved his hands from my face and grabbed hold of my shirt collar. He closed his eyes and rested his hand on my chest.

I walked out to the living room after placing him in his crib. I could hear kids playing in the street and our cat meowing outside the back window. My wife was folding a large pile of laundry that covered one of our couches. There were crayons strewn all over the floor, tractors and balls filled in where the crayons were not, and the picnic table was covered in pages from the coloring book.

I dodged the crayons and tractors on my way to a seat next to my wife. I grabbed some clothes and started folding. Awestruck by what transpired the last few hours, I looked at her and said, "Wasn't he born last week?"

"Yes," she said, laughing. "I don't know what happened."

"It's crazy," I responded. "I didn't realize it would go so fast."

"I can really tell you are starting to hit your stride as a dad," she said.

I stopped folding and looked up. "I agree." I said. "I feel like I'm falling in love with being a dad."

Her smoky blue eyes grew smaller and a smile bloomed across her face.

"I feel like all of the normal things are so special now," I added.

"I love you, Christian," she said. "Now, can you hand me another pile of clothes?"

St. Benedict writes in his Rule that monks should "regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar, aware that nothing is to be neglected." I'm grateful he was not writing a rule for parents, because there are plenty of things around our house that have been neglected since the birth of our son.

But, as with most of St. Benedict's Rule, there is a deeper truth hidden in his simple commands.

In one respect, St. Benedict was talking about material goods. He didn't want his monks being careless with the physical goods of the monastery that they all, as a whole, worked hard to provide for each other. But he also didn't want his monks losing sight of the grace that can be found in the mundane.

St. Benedict understood that one's vocation plays out much more in the normal, daily tasks than in extraordinary moments. I understand that more than I ever have, now that I am a father. The banalities of parenthood are exhausting. So tending to them as if they were vessels of the altar seems passé.

But it is precisely in the trivial, mundane and ordinary that we find who we are and what we are becoming.

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