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Sometimes, It Just Ain't That Easy

by Joe Ferullo

NCR Today

My oldest daughter is fifteen, already looking forward to entering sophomore year next fall at the all-girl's Catholic school she attends here in Southern California.

Now, you know what this means: 15 years old, Catholic school, sophomore - it's time to start questioning the Catholic Church.

Most of us have been there ourselves. My wife and I certainly were at age 15, so the conversations we find ourselves pulled into lately come as no surprise. Actually, it's kind of cool ? we can talk about church history, theology, its tradition of selfless good works, etc., and our daughter is old enough to be fully engaged.

Not that she buys it yet, not from us. My message to her is pretty simple, and came to me from a Franciscan theologian I met five years ago. ?Ah, the Catholic Church,? he said. ?You gotta love it. But sometimes, it just ain't that easy.?

Last night's post-dinner discussion focused on life issues, and - -thanks to President Obama's speech ? gave me a chance to describe Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's ?seamless garment of life? approach. My message to my daughter was not heavy-handed. ?Look,? I said, ?You may disagree with parts of this, but you have to respect the approach. It is well-thought out by a sophisticated thinker who is not talking down to anyone.?

I made some headway with that, I really did. But she was still not agreeing with my overall take-the-pluses-with-the-minuses theory. I pushed on: the Church, I explained, has a long history -- among other things, that means it has had many, many centuries in which make mistakes. Those lively evangelical mega-churches with rock music and doughnuts opened their doors a few minutes ago by comparison.

Then I tell her: you have to look at where the Church is going, not just where it has been.

Now, this, she began to buy into ? she loves her school and the brilliant Irish nuns who run it. They are strong, independent role models. Score one for me, finally ?

But then ? the newspaper landed at our front door this morning. Front page of the Los Angeles Times: ?Children Abused at Catholic Schools in Ireland, Report Says.?

For a moment, I considered hiding this from my daughter. But no. I sighed, showed her the article, and ? over breakfast and as she was getting ready for school ? we talked some more.

As a wise man once told me - the Catholic Church: you gotta love it, but sometimes it just ain't easy.

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