

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

March 2, 2011 at 11:41am

The challenge of being a parent, God's grace, and Charlie Sheen

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NCR Today

Every time there is another report about Charlie Sheen entering rehab, spewing weirdness on the Today show, or being the butt of late-night talk shows, all I can think is, "Poor Martin."

It can't be easy to watch your son implode on every media outlet willing to take advantage of someone who is obviously really ill. While his behavior is somewhere between "spoiled, rotten, brat" and "colossal jerk", I think it shows fairly clear signs of mania, be it natural or drug-induced, and responsible media should know better than to offer him a platform from which to take a high dive.

Regardless of the cause, Sheen's behavior is no doubt bringing enormous pain, worry and frustration to his parents. That's because no matter how old your offspring are, you still love them with a passion untamed.

It is a love that gives and believes and hopes and -- if your child goes astray -- aches worse than anything one can imagine.

It is easy to make fun of Charlie Sheen, easier still to think nothing that awful could ever happen to our families. But it can, and does, every day. Good families fall apart or are destroyed by mental illness, alcoholism, drug addiction or crime.

Parents try their hardest, bringing their kids to church, teaching them right from wrong, issuing all the safety warnings, walking the tight rope of protective versus permissive. In the end though, it seems that so much of parenting is a crapshoot.

Martin Sheen has probably spent hundreds of moments questioning his parenting in the past decade as he watched his son spiral out of control, apparently determined to ruin his life or too mentally ill to accept help. Charlie has gone from a talented -- if somewhat wild -- young actor to an odd, middle-aged man who is such a parody of lunacy that that *The Guardian* online offered a quiz Tuesday where readers voted on who said which outrageous thing ? Sheen or Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi.

(Surely it's a bad sign when your irrationality is compared with that of a leader who announces, while his citizens are protesting in the streets to overthrow him, "My people love me!?)

When people at work or on the street or in the neighborhood make fun of this celebrity disaster, they are not thinking that Sheen has parents and siblings who are no doubt worried sick about him (as well as mortally embarrassed by his actions.)

They are not thinking about the pain this family is going through or the desperate worry they are enduring.

They are not thinking, as they probably should, "There, but for the grace of God, go I.?"

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