

Our seventh child

I never cease to marvel at the way the gospel can be proclaimed via a simple story, insight or piece of news shared in daily life. Take, for example, the following email I received today from my cousin Grace (who is married to Kevin and mother of six children under 15). By the end of it I had been treated to a lesson in familial love, prolife values, eucharistic faith and social justice! Writes Grace:

We now have Iku, our Timorese foster child, living with us. He's a wild and energetic 10 year old, who drives us all mad at times! Yet the bravery of this boy who has left his family and homeland to come here, and is really making a go of it, is inspiring.

I am so amazed at people's generosity of spirit when I tell them about Iku. Regardless of religion, race or creed, they all offer support. When the fitness instructor at my gym heard of Iku, she bent over backwards to help out. She provided him with a bike, a jacket and loads of winter clothes.

But the story that really bears telling is his first communion. East Timor is predominantly Catholic, and Iku is very religious. He has been put into Grade 4, which is 'Eucharist' year. When Iku arrived in Australia, his English was very poor. So he would go to school and not understand a word in class. I had to explain at length that he was being instructed for

first communion. Well, when he realised that his first eucharist was imminent, he was beside himself. He was yelping 'woohoo' through the house. Excitement doesn't begin to describe it.

We threw a big party for Iku on his communion day (we are not averse to parties!). He made his first communion at the vigil Mass on Saturday evening. The next morning, Iku was up and dressed for 9am Mass. I tried to explain that he did not need to go, but he was so excited that he could receive the eucharist that I couldn't stop him. I then went off to the gym, and came home later to discover that not only had Iku been to 9am Mass, but 11am as well!!

Yesterday was the feast of the Assumption, and at 6:45 I remembered that I had to get to 7:30pm Mass. Kevin was away, the children were tired, and I did NOT feel like going to Mass. When I told the kids that we should go to Mass, Iku yelped with excitement. On the way to church, he was saying 'Thank you Tia Grace, Thank you!' (You can imagine my humility at this.)

So, we have a new child in our house. And I will not pretend that it has all been easy - far from it. But wow, Iku certainly shows us how to see things from a different perspective. Mass is so much more enjoyable with him, because his face is beaming (although I doubt he understands much of the English spoken in church!). And both Kevin and I and the kids have been to extra Masses during the week because

of him.

The other day the fitness instructor was selling sweatshirts at the gym. I bought three—one each for Chris, Joe and Iku. They were all different, and I thought Iku would like the bright red sweatshirt that read 'USA' on it. But I was wrong. He grabbed the black sweatshirt that said 'Independent'. He said, 'I want this one because that's my country: independent.' •

