

Of Life, Love and Laughter

It was Sunday, and I was enjoying the great outdoors with my sister and her husband and children. At one point we had a great makeshift barbecue going, with toast and sausages and tomato sauce the flavour of the moment. In the midst of all the normal familial chaos somebody spied the youngest member, baby Flynn, happily sitting in the mud eating a black substance which turned out to be a dirt-coated piece of bread. Covered in soot and mud and grinning away, he was relishing that morsel as if it was a rare delicacy.

What happened next was that, one by one, the whole family broke out into peals of laughter. It was contagious! From the little ones to the adults, we were rolling around in hysterics while baby Flynn happily munched on, not missing a beat as the sooty sludge was quickly replaced with a fresh biscuit. And of course the story had to be told and retold, complete with embellishments, all the way home.

I was smiling about the scene later, and I found myself remembering more scenes like it - from my own childhood and from young families I mix with today - where a whole family shares a joke; a joke which somehow celebrates the individuality of its members and the bonds of belonging; a spontaneous moment where little children, teenagers, 'grown ups' and grandparents will all together

be caught up in the humor and antics of one of their own. Such magic moments! Ridiculous, chaotic and deeply holy. A reminder that the business of being faithful is not all solemnity and hard work but often includes - indeed, must include! - a good laugh.

In fact, laughter, after tears, can even soothe a wounded heart. If you have ever shared hysterically funny stories after a funeral, you will know what I mean.

So if you are looking for a spiritual commitment to round off the Easter season, perhaps this one might be the perfect choice: to revel in some lighter moments with loved ones and to take time to simply enjoy being Catholic, especially on a Sunday which is the 'Day of the Resurrection'. After all, joy is a mark of the Christian life, a sign of prolife values and one of the best evangelizing tools we have as a Church.

But enough of the theory. Let me leave you with three anecdotes which I love for their implicit gospel witness as much as their humour. They are contributed by Bill Serong, father of eleven, including daughter Caroline who was born with Down Syndrome. Says Bill:

'Recently I took Caroline to see the film of Ned Kelly. She really enjoys films and I often wonder as to how much of the story she actually absorbs. Late in the film Ned was making his final stand at Glenrowan. Burdened by his "suit of armour" and hopelessly

outnumbered, poor Ned was blazing away at the barrage from the troopers. I leaned across and whispered to Caroline, "How do you think Ned is going?" She put her mouth close to my left ear and whilst pointing at the screen said excitedly: "He go much better if he take that bucket off his head!"

'One day Caroline's bus arrived fifteen minutes earlier than the appointed time to meet her teacher at the usual rendezvous. So I waited with her until the teacher arrived, whereupon I hastily explained my presence to the teacher who rather warily accepted the same. Having met the teacher at an interview with Caroline only one week before, I rather immodestly and incorrectly presumed that it was not necessary for me to reintroduce myself. As the teacher took Caroline by the hand she said, "Come along Caroline, say thank you to the nice man for waiting with you." Caroline promptly pointed her free hand in my direction and said: "No. He not a nice man. He my Dad."

'One day I asked Caroline jokingly. "Just what made you want to be a Downie in the first place?" She replied, "You just don't know, do you Dad? Well, because Downies is good fun."

