

Never too old for bedtime kiss

By Rita Buettner

As I'm tucking my son into bed, he dodges my kiss. He thinks he's getting too old for a kiss from Mama - even though I know better.

"That's alright," I tell him. "I'll sneak in later when you're asleep and give you a kiss then."

He laughs and rolls over as I turn out the light. Ten minutes later he's fast asleep, and I slip back into his room to give him a kiss - the kiss he thinks he's outgrown, the kiss he didn't want.

Our son is growing up faster than I would like to admit, and he doesn't need a lullaby or a stuffed animal to cuddle or a kiss from his mother to fall asleep. He's so mature and independent and sure of himself. He certainly doesn't want to be reminded that he's still my little boy, and that he'll always be.

But I know better. I know that even though he dodges my hug and kiss some mornings and tells me not to bother kissing him at night, he needs love and affection from his parents as much as he ever did - and sometimes even more. I see it when he's sick or hurt or sad, and he climbs onto my lap for safety, comfort and reassurance.

As I watch him and his brother grow, I think of my relationship with our Father in heaven. Many days I think I don't need to turn to him often. My family is healthy, employed, housed, clothed and fed. There are many problems in the world, and I mention them to him - along with a series of intentions I take in and share with him, but I'm not constantly knocking at his door.

Then crisis hits. Someone I know receives a frightening diagnosis or loses a loved one. I hear of a young mother with cancer. I meet someone carrying a heavy personal cross. I feel powerless to help - and I find myself turning to prayer. It might be all I can do, but it's all I need to do.

And, as I pour out my worries and fears and hopes, I realize I need prayer far more than I think I do. Like my son, I might believe I don't need that closeness on the ordinary days. I have my challenges under control. I've got this, God. But I don't - not at all. In fact, without him by my side, I have nothing.

It's not that I don't pray. I talk to God throughout the day - in praise when I see a beautiful sky, with concern when an ambulance speeds past, with joy as I gaze on our children running through the yard, with hope when I pray for a friend or a stranger.

Still, it's often tragedy that brings me running to our Father in search of comfort and clarity and peace, just as it's a skinned knee that brings my son running to me. I

know I pray more fervently, more passionately, and pour more of myself into the conversation when I am particularly anxious.

“Prayer is an aspiration of the heart,” said St. Thérèse of Lisieux. “It is a simple glance directed to heaven. It is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.”

More than a year ago, a friend asked me to join a small prayer group she was forming. We meet once a month to talk and pray, and in between we email prayer requests to the group. I love how the petitions we share become not mine, but ours. Being able to pray, to turn our concerns over to God, just to participate in conversation with him, is such a gift.

This Lenten season, as we fast and serve and pray, I hope we can try to find moments just to be with God, listening and accepting his love, recognizing that he truly has us in his hands. After all, even if we laugh and tell him we’re just fine on our own, I like to think that after we fall asleep, he gives us a kiss.

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