

# Vacation Offers Little Sleep, Lots of Faith

There were certain things I expected as our family headed out of town recently for a week-long vacation in the Midwest.

First, there was the long drive to central Illinois - 13-plus hours of pounding the pavement on the highways and byways of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. After three days, we planned to hit the road again for another 4-hour drive to southeastern Wisconsin to visit more family and friends.

So, there was that.

My wife and I also were prepared to be sleep-deprived warriors — young children in new and unfamiliar places equals broken sleep patterns for all. Should have brought more vitamins and Red Bull.

So, there was that, too.

And of course, we expected to have great fun, which we did. We went to the beach, hit a county fair, ate at many of our favorite food haunts and spent quality time with friends and family. My son also continued a family tradition of learning to ride a bike without training wheels at my father's house in Wisconsin, just as his oldest two sisters did before him.

And there was that as well.



But given all of this (and that), what I think I'll remember most about this family vacation was completely unexpected - Mass and conversations about faith and God.

The first occurred in the living room at my father-in-law's house late at night after 13 hours of driving. Thinking my daughters would be worn to a frazzle and ready to crash, they instead started asking questions about death and heaven.

Here are a few examples:

“Can people in heaven look down and see us?”

“As Catholics, when people die don’t we believe they go to purgatory?”

“If someone is bad his whole life and then at the end says he believes in God, will he be saved?”

The second question prompted a really good discussion with my father-in-law, who is Protestant. But it was a blessing for my daughters to hear what other Christians believe about death, purgatory and the souls of those we believe to be in heaven. At one point, my daughter thought my father-in-law and I were arguing so she wanted to stop the conversation because she was afraid we were fighting! We laughed and told her that we were fine and that we were just strongly expressing our beliefs.

Finally, I told the girls, “Time for bed, it’s late.”

“No!” my oldest daughter said. “This is fun, we want to keep talking!”

Then came Mass this past weekend in Wisconsin, when in the Gospel reading from Luke Jesus tells his disciples, “I have come to set the earth on fire” and “Do you think I have come to establish peace on the earth?”

I could see the confusion on my daughter’s face as she heard these words being read! Then, her brow furrowed and she looked at me with the most incredulous look I think I’ve ever seen from her.

Before she could say anything, I said: “Listen to the homily, the priest will explain,” I told her.

Unfortunately, he really didn’t, but I did after Mass, which led to another great conversation about Jesus and faith.

So, the moral of the story for our family on vacation was: Not much sleep, but lots of family, food, fun and faith!

Peace to you!