Why ask why?

During our long drive to John's parents' house on Maryland's Eastern Shore, there was plenty of time for Leo to ask question after question.

His father is the best at offering explanations. He has tremendous patience, which helps, but he is also extremely knowledgeable about many topics. At social gatherings when we have been pulled into separate conversations, I have been amazed to overhear him discussing firefighting techniques, horse dressage, and the benefits of raising Rottweilers. There is apparently no limit to what he can discuss.

Yesterday, however, as we were going across the Bay Bridge, John was in the driver's seat and focusing on getting across the bridge.

If you've crossed it, you know it can require some concentration.

So when Leo asked for an explanation of how the bridge builders build the bridge from the bottom of the bay, John—who had already answered several questions himself—said, "Ask Mama."

I did the best I could. I told Leo that big machines and people wearing underwater gear must have built the bridge many years ago, that they were trained to do it, and that the supports holding up the bridge were very, very strong.

It was an unsatisfactory answer, and thank goodness Leo and Daniel started talking about the boats they saw on the Chesapeake Bay and didn't ask any follow-up questions. But it was not the first time I felt that parenting requires every bit of knowledge and ability I have.

Then this morning at Mass our priest was talking about how we are called to be disciples first, to listen and learn, and then to be apostles, to go forward and teach.

"When children learn to talk, what do they say first? 'Mom' and 'dad,'" the priest said. "And then after that comes 'why?' Why, why, why? What they are really saying is, 'Teach me.'"

Teach me. What a humbling reminder that we are our children's primary teachers, not just passing along our wisdom—such as when we are answering questions about bridge-building—but also giving them a foundation in our faith.