

Teaching the Way of Love

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Valuing Being More Than Doing

A mother's wisdom and love are never wasted.

It can be so easy to fall into a utilitarian way of valuing ourselves and others. Utilitarianism is a philosophy that values people based solely on what they can contribute to society. Accomplishments become a sign of value. Our culture may not explicitly say that a person is only as good as his or her abilities, but we often think that way.



I doubt my mom knew much about the philosophy of utilitarianism, but she helped me combat it nonetheless. I didn't grow up with a lot of self-esteem. I was a smart kid and did great in school. But in my own eyes, I was a failure in all the areas that mattered. I was clumsy, slow, weak, and ugly.

For example, I participated in a speech contest in sixth grade. I memorized my speech word for word. The one area I had trouble getting through was the introduction. So, I recited the introduction repeatedly until I could say it without thinking.

The time came for me to give my speech. I got through the introduction without a hitch. Then my mind went completely blank. I couldn't remember the next line. I stood there in silence for what seemed an eternity. My mind skipped to somewhere in the middle of the speech. So, I started there. I jumbled up the rest of my talk but somehow struggled to the end and returned to my seat. I sat through the rest of the speeches without really listening. The reward ceremony was the longest ten minutes of my life. I didn't win anything, not even a consolation prize to stroke my broken ego. I had embarrassed myself and swore I would never give another public address again.

As we stood up to leave, my mom gave me a big hug and said, "I'm so proud of you."

"For what?" I asked sullenly.

"It took a lot of courage to get up there in front of all those people. It took even more courage to keep going once you forgot your line."

That was an important lesson for me. Even though I failed the accomplishment, I had exhibited the virtue of courage. My mom identified a personality trait in me that she could nurture through her praise.

In her wisdom and love, my mom helped me understand an essential truth: who I am is more important than what I do. She helped me recognize that my accomplishments didn't matter as much as the person I would become.

My childhood experience illustrates an important lesson for parents. And it's a truth taught by the Catholic Church in the Latin phrase "*operatio sequitur esse*," which means "action follows being." Who we are is more important than what we do, and what we do flows out of who we are.

How can you teach your children that who they are and who they become are more important than what they accomplish? Most importantly, remind your children that God loves them unconditionally and wants them to become the best people they can be. Tell them this again and again and again. Likewise, tell your children **you** love them because of who they are rather than what they accomplish. Remind them that even when you correct them, you still love them. Next, look for character traits (virtues) in your children to affirm and nurture when they do things, whether they succeed or fail at what they attempt. Are they patient or helpful? Do they compliment, encourage, and support others? Do they play fairly? Are they diligent and perseverant? These virtues are far more critical than individual successes. Celebrate them accordingly! Celebrate your children for who they are, not for what they do. Celebrating their Baptismal anniversary is another excellent way to do this.

Teaching your children to focus on who they are more than what they do lays a firm foundation for a strong sense of self-worth. It encourages children to grow in virtue. Perhaps most importantly, it teaches them to value and love others for who they are.



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