Can I Have A Cookie?

BY JEM SULLIVAN
Catholic News Service

In the classic cartoon, “Calvin and Hobbes,” the mischievous Calvin is known for pushing the envelope with his parents. In a typical exchange, Calvin makes a series of requests to his mother in the hope of wearing her down. He begins with a clearly inappropriate request, “Mom, can I set fire to the living room?” Persisting on, Calvin then asks if he can ride his tricycle on the roof! To these extravagant requests, his mother simply says, “No, Calvin.” Finally, he moves on to the request he was hoping for all along. “Then can I have a cookie?” Once again, his request is denied, at which point Calvin gives up and says with a sigh, “She’s on to me!”

If you are a parent or work with children, chances are you know the persistence of a child’s request for a favorite toy, food, clothing or whatever catches his or her fancy. Children can be determined, even obstinate, when making requests or bargaining with parents or teachers. The persistence and determination behind a child’s request can wear down even the most resolute of adults.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus points to the simple human gesture of parents who give good gifts to their children to illustrate the nature of prayer. Jesus compares God’s gracious gift of the Holy Spirit to the generosity of parents who desire to give their children only good gifts.

In the first reading, God and Moses engage in a remarkable conversation. In this divine-human dialogue, Moses bargains with God in the hope that mercy prevails and the innocent are not punished along with the guilty. God is generous beyond our imagining.

In the second reading, Colleen, a graduate of George Washington University in Washington, shared, “My friends have helped me so much to pursue Christ in postgrad life. We hold each other accountable and pick each other up when we are down.”

In virtually every area of life, we are encouraged to seek out mentorship to be successful. Companies like Google are investing millions of dollars in mentorship programs because it brings out the best in their employees. It is no different in our faith.

Colleen, a graduate of the University of Dallas, said, “Having people, especially women of faith, to look up to, ask questions, and receive support from has been a game changer for me. My mentor helps me look toward the future with hope and a sense of mission. She also models for me what it looks like to have all parts of her life completely fueled by a love of Christ.”

Join a parish and contribute.

Don’t walk away if you do not immediately see something in your local parish that fits your needs or lifestyle. Be “Church builders,” not “Church consumers.”

David, a graduate from Westmont College in California, said, “Taking on a leadership role in my parish has kept me committed to continuously grow in my faith because I know I’ll be asked to share it with others and be a witness.”

Keeping an Eye on Our Elders

Elder abuse is a crime, too often within a family. Elder abuse takes many forms. It has numerous victims, victims and offenders. It comes with embarrassment and denial for victims; greed and guilt for the perpetrators; shame and awkwardness for reluctant witnesses.

The Fourth Commandment urges respect and love for our parents. But the discomfort dealing with the inconveniences of the elderly who are in nursing homes or other facilities, can lead to neglect — benign at the least, physically abusive at the worst. Despite well-meaning albeit shallow efforts by legislators and regulators, it remains a subject uncomfortable to discuss and difficult to enforce.

Elder abuse attacks those who are among the most vulnerable in society. They seem hidden away. We become frustrated and embarrassed by sights, sounds, odors and unfathomable language. We accept from babies but not from those who raised us a generation or two earlier. Maybe it’s fear that one day we will be in the same state. These conditions and reactions can lead to crimes of theft and violence. The issue has become so volatile that 2019 was the 13th year of Elder Abuse Awareness Month.

But the crime has not disappeared. Indeed, Social Security estimates that 10% of American elders suffer some kind of abuse, simply because they’re seen as easy targets. So it’s sad but somewhat satisfying to watch as someone who was entrusted with the financial responsibility of an older relative goes to jail for draining accounts to cover personal debts or indulge in profligate spending.

And that leads to the questions of awareness: How did this happen? Who was not paying attention? Now what?

AWARENESS OF ANY CRIME IS MULTI-FACED. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SIMPLY ACKNOWLEDGE A CRIMINAL ACT OR EVEN TAKE THE INITIATIVE TO CALLING 9-1-1 OR AN ANONYMOUS HOT LINE. POLICE AND REGULATORY AGENCIES CAN ONLY ADDRESS ELDER ABUSE IF THE STAFF OR VOLUNTEERS IN A FACILITY BRING NEGLECT OR ABUSE OF ANY KIND TO THEIR ATTENTION. THEY CERTAINLY ARE NOT TO BLAME IF A FAMILY MEMBER ABUSES THE LEGAL DESIGNATION OF GUARDIAN OR TRUSTEE.

Rather than look for someone to blame, Catholic Charities Long-Term Care Ombudsmen look for problems to resolve and advocate for residents long before police are called on site.

For our ombudsmen, every month is elder abuse awareness month. We must watch for elder abuse, whether financial, emotional or physical every day and every month, not just the ones observed or declared by a government agency.

When former Chief Justice Earl Warren advised, “Don’t complain about getting old. Many people don’t have that privilege,” he was not inviting people to bargain about abuse or advising residents to “let the buyer beware,” and thus become fair game for scammers, thieves and abusers.

No one has the right to strip the prior generation of their dignity or take the gold from their golden years simply because of age or infirmity.

We can do better than that.