



Pastor's Pen

February 10, 2019

- Fr. Tom Wilson, Pastor

TIME, PERSPECTIVE, AND GRATITUDE

A parishioner from a past assignment recently called to joyfully announce the birth of another grandchild. The baby is a tremendous gift, considering the fertility challenges of her daughter in the past. It is hard to believe, from my chair, that this young woman is now a grandmother. It is even harder to believe that her daughter, seemingly perpetually etched in my mind as a fourth grader, is now a 32-year-old mother of two. As I wallow in wondering where the time has gone, neither one of them really cares about my perspective, nor should they, about how their growth and excitement in their family marks my chronological advancement. They clearly understand, as I do, that this is a time of joy in their family, no matter how old it may make me feel.

The mother is a woman of deep faith, who has served as an evangelist and an employee of the Church. The grandmother is a woman of great talents and gifts, who has used them all to serve her family and the Church. While I was at the same parish, she sacrificed much in her professional career to be with her children, and she used her gifts for the parish, the larger Church, and the universal mission without material compensation. In hindsight, that which seemed remarkable was the norm, when I saw them almost every day. Living family life as faithfully, though imperfectly, as possible, was what they did and was their purpose.

At times, interactions between mothers and daughters can feel like being in the front row of a female prize fight, with the swings thrown not with fists, but with emotional blows. I am not comfortable when I observe it. It's neither a gift nor a charism of mine to effectively navigate that piece of the melodrama of life experienced by so many families. This mother and grandmother were not unique in the occasional sparring during the daughter's teenage years. Most of the time, I just heard about it. Occasionally, I saw it. It was a useful experience, if not a pleasant one, to peer into that window of the human condition.

Time, perspective, growth, and maturation calm many earlier storms of our lives, as many of us know. This mother and daughter were no different. They are very close, with daughter seeking mom's advice, even as she branches out into her own motherhood in a very different world than which she was raised. Despite the growing intensity and challenges of family life, parenthood and motherhood still have cross-generational commonality. Children still need to be cared for physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Educational decisions must be made. Passing on the faith is essential. And mothers still have to say and do things that their children may not like. The vocation is joyful and challenging at the same time.

We all want to be appreciated, even if we don't accept the service opportunities God brings us with that in mind. We respond because it is our call, and we do it out of love. For moms, it might be a long time before that appreciation happens or is acknowledged. This young mom has been gracious in her adult life and has shown gratitude to her parents for their presence. But time, perspective, and experience can deepen that gratitude. The grandmother recently relayed to me that her daughter told her how much more she realizes all that her mom did for her and her siblings, while they were growing up. The grandmother appreciated not just her daughter growing up, but the fact that her daughter's own life experience as a mother opened her eyes to how much she received as a child.

Time and perspective change things. The young mom's own experience as a mother led her to a new gratitude of her own mother. Their experience is a lesson for all of us, whether we are the ones who have received, but are not fully aware, or the ones who have given, without the appreciation that we may believe is our due. Time and perspective change vision, and that altered vision leads to a greater sense of gratitude.

Of course, the same is true of our relationship with God. If we are growing in our faith, our sense of gratitude toward him should also be growing, as our perspective changes. Time and perspective should lead to more gratitude.