

THE STEWARDSHIP PAPERS

The Heart of the Matter

In the course of a day, the sounds that occur in a household are many and varied: doors opening and closing; dishes being shuffled around; music playing; sirens from the street outside; even dogs barking and cats meowing. It's a wonder that, out of all these noises, tiny babies learn to recognize a parent, let alone the sound of a parent's voice.

It makes me wonder how we learn to recognize God in the midst of all this worldly chaos. Maybe a clue is found in understanding our own children and how they learn to recognize us.

Even before a child is born, it is surrounded by and connected to the mother's beating heart. Perhaps, because of this, it learns to recognize the "sound" of this parent. After birth, whenever that child is held close to the mother, this may reassure the child that, although the image of the mother has changed, the old sound of the beating heart is the same as that which was heard from within.

So, with all this "mothering," how come the FIRST WORD out of ALL my children's mouths was "Da Da!?" And what about all those children in the world who are adopted?

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It has been many years since the occurrence of my children's first words, and I have had much time to reconsider the learning process. (And it is perhaps reassuring to know that an "old dog" can be taught new tricks.) I now believe that my children were born recognizing, quite simply, "a heart." And after this, began the process of learning about and recognizing a parent.

In many respects, the Church reminds me of a womb for the Children of God. We are "in the body," and the Church provides a place where we can grow spiritually, while learning about the special attributes of God...for example, what it means to "have a heart."

Isn't it wonderful that even before we knew what to ask for, the gift of recognizing God has been an automatic part of our spiritual learning? During this Christmas Season, may you find the joy and peace that comes with the recognition of the Christ Child, and may you feed on Him...in your hearts...with thanksgiving.

(December 6, 1995)