



My husband and I got married nearly five years ago and I was pregnant with our daughter four months after we got married. That means my husband and I went into parenthood right away and both of us have learned a lot in the four years we have been parents. Parenthood is a journey as these parents will tell you.

I want to share a few things that I have learned so far. I know that people can tire of hearing something that they won't understand until they have been there, but in the case of parenting, it is absolutely true. So here are some things I didn't know:

1. That I could love someone immediately and unconditionally the minute I met them.

My daughter was transverse, which means that I had to have an emergency c-section after hours of labor. I was awake during the surgery and I can still remember her first cries. I began to cry in a form of joy that I had not previously known. They put her next to me for a minute before wheeling me off to recovery. She was the most beautiful and precious thing that I had ever seen. I had an immediate and irrevocable bond with her. I never knew that I could love someone so quickly and so deeply.

2. Children teach their parents how to increase their capacity for joy.

Children have an insatiable appetite for wonder. The most mundane things bring them excitement and happiness. They want to share that experience with the people around them. As adults, we tend to lose sight of the wonder and beauty that God has placed around us. Children bring us back to that primordial connection with God. It is no wonder that Christ tells the little children to come to him and that we must be like little children.

3. How selfish I am.

If there is one thing parenting does, it is to rip the selfishness right out of us. It is a long

and painful process at times. We sacrifice sleep, food, time, and material comforts for our children. There is an aesthetic component to parenthood. We have to learn to put this tiny person before ourselves. They come first for a while. Date nights may have to wait, as well as alone time. This way of life comes immediately after the child is born. Mothers and fathers are no longer “I” or “we” focused, but child focused. Spouses must take care of one another and prioritize their marriage as front and center, but the first few years of parenting cause a major change in marriage.

Parenthood is not easy. Marriage is not easy, but family life is a tremendous gift to those who are called to this particular vocation. I never understood the depth of joy that I was capable of until I was married and had my daughter.

4. The power of sacrificial suffering.

I had not even met my daughter before I learned sacrificial suffering in parenthood. I spent all nine months of my pregnancy violently ill with hyperemesis. I had extreme morning (all day) sickness. I had to spend a lot of time at home and learn that my own suffering was for the good of my child.

5. That I could hurt so deeply.

When my daughter was 2 years old she developed a staph infection. We will never know how, but staph is everywhere in our environment. It was serious and she had to be admitted to the hospital. There is nothing that can prepare a parent for the deep pain of having a child seriously ill in the hospital. There is nothing that takes away the ache of wanting to be in their place. The pain of parenthood, which is the flip-side of joy, even comes in the small daily experiences of life. It hurts when our child is rejected by others. It hurts when they scrape a knee playing. It hurts when they are lonely. The reality of life is that if we are to love and embrace joy, we also must embrace pain and suffering.

6. How much I would learn from my daughter.

There are days I have to wonder who is the teacher and who is the student. In moments of my own weakness my soon-to-be 4 year old will offer me startling, but loving fraternal correction. She loves all people and tries to learn about each person she meets. I see human beings in a completely different light through her eyes. She has taught me more than all of my years of advanced education.

7. The mission.

It is easy to forget that our mission, the meaning of life, is to be a saint. We are called to holiness. In our busy schedules and fast-paced culture, we can forget that fact. My job as a parent and a wife is to lead my family to Heaven. I, a broken and sinful person (as are

you) am called to lead my family and those around me to their eschatological end. Christ has given my daughter to my husband and me that we may grow in holiness and teach her The Way. Parenthood, much like religious life or Holy Orders, points us to Heaven. Our vocation is how we are conformed to the Blessed Trinity. It is how Christ points us home.

Parenthood is not easy. Marriage is not easy, but family life is a tremendous gift to those who are called to this particular vocation. I never understood the depth of joy that I was capable of until I was married and had my daughter. I also never understood how much pain and grief I would experience. When we marry, we do not know what will happen or how many children God will give us. I have experienced the deeply painful grief of three miscarriages. God may only give us one child. It is important that we understand that joy and suffering are both a part of married life. The Cross is an integral part of every vocation. As people prepare for marriage this summer, remember that you are called to the Sacrament of Marriage in all of its splendor and pain. The more you understand that, the more you and your spouse will be open to the gifts of the Blessed Trinity in your marriage. The more you will be prepared to walk hand-in-hand through the ups and downs of this life, especially as they manifest in parenthood. May God bless you on your Sacramental journey.