

Evidently there was an occasion when a young ten-year-old girl asked Pope Benedict XVI what heaven was like. The Pope said that when he thought of heaven, he always returned to his youth. He said that he thought heaven would echo his childhood where he always felt secure and loved, where he was accepted and experienced laughter and the beauty of being human.

I have three reactions regarding this experience of Pope Benedict and his image of heaven.

First, I think that it is true that many of us do have such positive experiences of our youth. For many people their childhood was often an experience of pain. In our world there are many people who experience abuse or insecurity in their family homes. If you are one of those people, who think of your childhood with some level of pain or regret, now is the time to enter back into your youth. No matter how old you are, you are a child of God! Make this moment a time when you can learn to experience the Love of God the Father. He wants you to experience beauty and laughter. He wants you to know that you are secure in his love at this moment because you are accepted as his child, and you are loved. The parish is your family, and this is your home where you are invited to know and experience the love of a family and the tenderness of a perfect Father – who is our compassionate God.

My second thought is an invitation to families. While we are all broken and insecure in some way or another, I invite you to create a home for your children so that they can look back on their childhood as a foretaste of heaven. How is this to be done? First, place the image of a joyful God in the center of your home. Show your children by your lives that God is a merciful Father who delights in us. Speak to your children about your belief in God and the certainty that God is real. This can be done in an exceptional way by making Sunday a Day of Rest in the Lord. Sunday should be “family day” where you celebrate each other in rest. Try to put aside the work and worry of your lives on this one day in order to discover the genius of the Lord’s Day. Secondly, celebrate your humanity. This world is beautiful. Family life should – in its ideal reality – manifest the love of the Trinity. Though life is difficult, it is also profoundly beautiful. Celebrate often with music and games, with laughter and food. Take time to just “BE” with your children outside of an agenda or the busyness of modern life. All of us deserve the family like that of Pope Benedict.

Finally, I invite everyone to set your hearts on heaven. How beautiful will it be when we experience perfect acceptance and undeniable love? In heaven there will be no insecurity or fear. We will live in perfect harmony with God, with others and with ourselves. Set your hope on heaven in the joyful expectation of the promise made to us through Christ Jesus, Our Lord.

Fr. David Kime