

FEBRUARY 25, 2025 FATHER JOHN BERTAIO

Are you one of those people who is so insecure as some of my colleagues I know--well, are very insecure. Such as one who is always trying to stay away from others, for one reason or another. Now, I personally hear from a number of parents that they don't know what to do to get their children away from their cell phones, their computers, and their personal tablet. On the other hand, some children, they claim to be communicating with their friends on the other side of the world or perhaps even a schoolmate who they get along with very well and just want to continue to stay in touch even after school.

Also, how about some parents--And I'm not judging. Please. I'm not. I'm just expressing some observations that I've heard and have seen. How about some parents who come home from a long day's work and go directly into the home office, as they call it, and remain there until someone calls for a meal that tends to be very silent, looking at the phone. Now, you may also have noticed that, as I have, noticed that sometimes you go to a restaurant and you see sometimes maybe two people, sometimes three, and they don't say a word to each other, one hand holding the phone and the other hand putting the food in their mouth, they pay the bill, and they leave without saying a word at all to one another.

Now, again, please, I'm not judging, I was just sharing what has been told to me and from what I myself have seen over the last few years. The question is, do we have a social problem? Interaction face-to-face with one another. Little story, a few years ago when I was in a parish with just one primary school, I made it a habit to visit at least one, if not two, classes per week. I got to know the teachers and many of the students

very well, and getting to know, communicate with them face-to-face, which was, to me, a real beautiful encounter and joy.

On one occasion, when I was in the school yard during lunch, the lunch hour, I noticed a child about maybe five or six years old. He was with the special education teacher because he needed some help in development. I asked permission to approach the student and was granted. I introduced myself to this child as Father John. The student stopped, looked at me very strangely, and said, "Are you my father as well?" I said, "No, I'm not."

Now, when lunch was over, he asked his teacher if I could possibly go with them into the classroom. I was granted permission and so I went, and we sat there for a couple of hours, and developing this level of trust and communication. At the end, he said, "Can I call you my father number two?" I didn't answer. To my surprise, the parents called the next day and wanted an explanation. See, they were surprised that their child expressed trust in a priest they had not seen before who he wanted to call his father number two.

We had a meeting. When I explained that there was no magic or personal or hidden agenda. They just wanted someone to listen to them, to give them a chance to talk, to express, and, whatever he was going through, to talk about it without being judged. I have learned since that this child has grown up to be a very successful counsellor to troubled teenagers. Perhaps one of the best going around.

Dear friends in Christ, in today's Gospel Jesus made a dramatic gesture by embracing a child so his disciples would really--to express to them that the greatest, the greatest in the kingdom of God, is a child. So pure, so simple, so humble. After all, what can a child possibly teach us about

greatness? See, in the ancient world children had no rights, position, or privileges of their own. Little attention was ever paid to them. So what was the significance of Jesus' gesture?

Jesus elevated the little child in the presence of his disciples by placing the child in a privileged position of honour. Can we do that to our children today? Many just want to be heard by someone who loves them, like their parents, maybe grandparents. You see, as I'm sure you know, I have no children of my own, yet I hear so many confide in me that if their parents would only show them some little more time and attention. Time and attention turns into love, respect, and making sure that they are special.

Then maybe they wouldn't have to turn into the social media, to find a way to be accepted in a different way. Like my little friend at the school, all he wanted was someone to listen to him without judging and tell him that he too is loved by Jesus, just like each one of us. The difference in my little friend was that he just needed more time, more assurance, more patience than a normal child would, that he too was very important, very, very important. It just needed a little more time for him to become to normal like everybody else.

Dear friends, are you in a position to change the life of someone in need? Please, please, don't say to yourself that someone is beyond help and give up on them. No matter what age. Be patient, and, most of all, be a loving image of Jesus and experience the difference only you, only you and I can make, one person at a time. May God bless you.