

What It Means to Love a Child

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On May 16 we remember Saint Vitus, the young son of a prominent Sicilian father. Vitus' tutor Modestus and his governess Crescentia taught him the Christian faith, and gave him an example of Christlike love.

When they saw that Vitus' father was forcibly attempting to turn the boy from Christianity, Modestus and Crescentia took him, in secret, to another part of Italy. There they lived quietly, hoping to protect Vitus from the persecution of Christians, ordered by the Emperor Diocletian, that was raging around them.

Vitus refused to hide his faith. He soon became well-known throughout the region where they lived, healing some people and converting others to the faith. But such notoriety was dangerous. Vitus was arrested and tortured. Though he was unharmed by many of his ordeals, he finally gave his life for the faith, as did the two who loved him so much, Crescentia and Modestus. All three martyrs died peacefully and even joyfully.

The recent movie "Rabbit Hole" is about a mother and father who also had a child they loved and wanted to protect. But they have had the terrible experience of being unable to keep their four-year-old son from harm. The movie begins some months after the boy has been killed by a car while running into the street to chase his dog.

We see that the mother, Becca, is shutting herself off from others when she refuses a neighbor's dinner invitation and leaves family gatherings abruptly. Her husband Howie, on the other hand, derives help from the bereavement group sessions that Becca finds useless, and is frustrated by his wife's rejection of his physical advances. He misses their son's dog, which Becca has given to her mother. The two argue, accuse each other, and express their raw feelings and bewilderment in hurtful ways. There are wrenching moments, as when they are riding in the car and have to come to a sudden stop. Becca instinctively reaches into the back seat to shield the child who once would have been sitting in the car seat that Howie insists on keeping there, over her objections.

But as the movie progresses, the mother and father come to new understandings. The dog becomes part of the family again, and Howie pampers it with food and affection, sometimes burying his head in its neck and sobbing. The car seat is given away so that Becca needn't see it anymore. When Becca reaches out to the teenager who was driving the car that killed their son, Howie's initial fury at her action eventually gives way to acceptance. He finds himself unable to betray Becca with an attractive woman from the bereavement group who, he knows, would welcome his attentions.

The movie's last scene shows the couple hosting the barbecue that Becca, to Howie's great surprise, has suggested. Surrounded by family and friends, they are finally able to see a future. They have not found joy, or peace, but they are on the way.