Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



Sr. Jennifer Wilson and her students at the annual mother-daughter Mass at Mount Mercy Academy in Buffalo, New York (Michele Melligan)



by Jennifer Wilson

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The answer came every time I teased her about something she said or did. She said: "I am a child of God!" It became the standard answer when she might have felt as if I were questioning her. Every time she said it, I smiled and thought: ""You are a child of God and you are also at times an annoying teenager." Haddie, the teenager in this story, lives in Guyana, South America. I recently spent two weeks in Guyana connecting with sisters and friends there from my time as a Mercy Volunteer Corps member.

Two weeks after returning from Guyana**,** I sat listening to the priest's homily at my school's annual mother-daughter Mass. I had been thinking about something else when I heard the words, "You are a child of God." I instantly flashed back to my visit in Guyana, to those words that Haddie somewhat cheekily would proclaim.

The priest went on to say that no one can take the fact that you are a child of God away from you, regardless of what comes your way. He went on to say that you will always be loved by God. As I looked at the teens and moms sitting near me, I wondered if the teen girls around me really know that they are loved by God? Their mothers, who have most likely experienced many moments of disappointment — and hopefully as many moments of joy: Do they truly understand that they are loved unconditionally by God? I then wondered: How can God love us unconditionally without getting annoyed at us?



Haddie (right) and her cousin pose for a picture in Georgetown, Guyana. (Jennifer Wilson)

These questions involved a lot of thinking for so early on a Sunday morning, so I let the thoughts come and go, and then I got distracted by considering what I was going to do when I got home. I began organizing the tasks in my head and marveling about how there always seems to be so much to do.

As I was doing laundry later, the words from the priest's homily came back to me. I heard Haddie's voice again with its lilt of wonder, fun and innocence, saying: "I am a

child of God." What happened next caught me off guard. I began to see pictures in my mind, similar to one of those random iPhone "memories" my phone pulls from storage. Those memories do cause me to pause and think about whatever my phone is showing me.

The memories that were flashing through my mind also caused me to pause. What I saw were sunsets and retreats, conversations with mentors and friends. The day I began to think about becoming a Sister of Mercy, and the day of my final vows. The day my grandfather died, taking with him a very tangible link to my beloved grandmother. The time I stood in awe at the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

Those are some of the moments and memories where I felt absolutely sure I was a child of God. I don't think about this every moment of every day, and I imagine that most people don't. It is something I take for granted probably more often than I should. The iPhone-like memories slipped away and I went on to finish my laundry.

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Throughout the week I kept thinking about those questions I asked myself in church — wondering if the people around me know how much they are loved. The iPhone-like memories that had run through my head days earlier got me thinking about today, and the question: "How do I know I was loved by God today?"

I started writing down one experience in each day, that in that moment I knew I was loved by God. This practice is easy and hard at the same time. I encourage you to try it for a few days and see what comes. Don't think too hard; you might find — as I did — that it brings a few minutes of peace and reflection to an otherwise busy and sometimes chaotic day. Those few moments might help you remember the moment the sun shone down on you, or that time a child said something endearing to you.

My moment for today was as simple as walking through an outdoor garden center, taking in the sunshine and fragrant flowers. That moment, recalled later, allows me to stop for a minute and be with God, to remember I am loved, to feel God's presence and take that moment with me into whatever else is happening. Haddie is right: We are all children of God. Do we take time to think about this, remember it and rejoice in it often?