

Dear Parents

What a run of natural disasters we have witnessed over the past year or two! Just when we thought that the greatest disaster had unfolded before us, there came an even greater one. Those who were not directly affected could not but feel great compassion towards those who were. Probably, we had moments when we thought how fortunate we were to be spared the personal experience of such great catastrophe. When compared to those who suffered so much loss and emotional trauma, our own problems began to seem quite manageable.

Our minds are somewhat geared to make comparisons and whether we are content or dissatisfied, will depend on what we are comparing our life to. Unfortunately, advertisers take advantage of the way our minds work and constantly give us perfect images to compare ourselves with: perfect houses in which to live, perfect cars to drive, perfect partners and children, perfect body images. We are seduced into believing that whatever is advertised is what we need to be happy and content. However, William Shakespeare has a cautionary word or two to offer us: "Oh, how bitter a thing it is, to look into happiness through another man's eyes."

Curtin University School of Psychology has just completed a study that verifies grandma's advice that, "money can't buy happiness." "It has been studied and shown that a fairly small percentage of your happiness is about material things, such as your wealth or your situation in life. At the most it's responsible for about 10 percent and even questions are being asked about how long-lasting this bit is. The rest of the happiness formula is split between the two big players: 50 percent genetic – generally how you are wired from birth to worry and be neurotic – and the remaining 40 percent is intentional activity – the choices you make and what you do. Taking responsibility for your own happiness,

that's what is proving to be important in the long run. Certainly, not hoping your new outfit, new house or new city is going to make it all suddenly better."

Associate Professor Clare Rees. West Australian 23:02:11

It would seem from the findings of the Curtin Study that we would do well to heed the advice in the following words: "I pray daily; not for more riches, but for more wisdom with which to recognise, embrace and enjoy the great abundance of riches I already possess." Author Unknown. Wisdom and thankfulness seem to be the rich soil in which true happiness and contentment take root. But happiness and contentment will only take root when the "different parts" of ourselves make friends with each other. When there is discord between what we want and what we have, there is little chance that we will advance in happiness and contentment.

When our children were in their infant years, we could observe them playing contentedly with whatever we gave to them. It was only when we plonked them in front of the T.V. that they had comparisons to make and so wanted what they saw, instead of what they had.

As parents, it is an act of love on our part to limit the exposure of our children to what will harm rather than nourish their sense of personal contentment. It is an act of self-love if we do the same for ourselves. St Paul, on occasion, had a companion and assistant named Timothy, as he went about his missionary work. In the first of the two letters Paul wrote to Timothy he said: "Now there is great gain in godliness through contentment, for we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." 1Tim 6:6-8. Not a bad observation.

Peace and Best Wishes.