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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

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SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Teaching That Parents Should Give Their Children

“Whose son is he?”—St. Matthew 22: 42.

If we see a child that we do not know we ask: Whose child is that? What is his name? Whose son is he? Whose daughter is she? Although I might not know either the children or their parents, yet I should guess at once from the behavior of the children how the parents bring up their children, and should say: This one is the son of parents who do not fulfill their duty; the second is the son of pious parents, who look after the souls of their children. Parents who wish to bring up their children as they ought, for their last end, must have good tongues, sharp eyes, paternal hands, and good habits: tongues to teach their children what is good; eyes, to be watchful over all their actions; hands, to punish them when necessary, in a paternal manner; good habits, so as to give them a good example of virtue and the fear of the Lord. If one of these be wanting the children will not be trained properly.

I. Those parents who have not good tongues do not rear their children properly, because they do not teach their children what is good.

II. Much less do those parents rear their children well, who have bad tongues; that is to say, who teach them evil.

I. Amongst the many miseries that we inherit from the sin of our forefather Adam is deplorable ignorance in nearly everything. No man is born learned. No matter who we are, we bring ignorance with us into the world. It lies with us in the cradle, and remains with us for many years afterwards. Children must be taught and instructed how to speak, read, and write, nay, even how to walk and stand, eat and drink, although the beasts themselves require no instruction in these latter things. There is an art of which if they remain in ignorance they will never be happy with God in heaven; that is the art of arts; it is the only art that we must know—the art of living and dying in a Christian and holy manner. Now, it is a most deplorable fact that this art is the one of which we are most ignorant naturally, and which we find the greatest difficulty in learning, on account of our inclination to evil. Hence, in order to acquire a knowledge of it, much more time, trouble, and labor must be expended, than what a mere natural art or science would require. Even after having learned and understood that art, it is one that we forget most easily, unless we are constantly reminded of and exercised in it.

Hence if children are to attain eternal happiness, which is the chief thing for them, they must necessarily be instructed most diligently in this art from their earliest years, and must be constantly exercised in it by those on whom the duty of teaching them devolves. And who are they? You, fathers and mothers, have received this charge from God: “Teach your children,” says the Lord to his people, after he had warned them to observe all his commandments faithfully: “that they meditate on them” (Deut. 11:

19). And you must teach them constantly: “When thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest on the way, and when thou liest down and risest up,” teach your children. What? “What I command you this day, that you love the Lord your God, and serve him with all your heart.” God’s words to parents are: “Hast thou children? Instruct them from their childhood” (Eccl. 7: 25). Mark, he does not say: “Enrich them; exalt them; but instruct them.” in what? In that of which Eternal Wisdom says: “Come, children, I will teach you the fear of the Lord” (Ps. 33: 12). What the Apostles were, as teachers of the whole world, what bishops and priests are to those under their charge, that you are, oh, parents, in your families.

But how, and in what manner, must this instruction be given? What must it treat of chiefly? That the children know how to make the sign of the Cross, to say the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Creed, as well as the Commandments of God and of the Church, and that they know all the principal parts of the Catechism by heart, seems to be enough for most parents, even for those who wish to live as pious Christians and to fulfill their parental obligations; and would to God that all parents taught their children even that much! But is this all the instruction that they owe their children? It is part of it, certainly, but not by any means all of it; for what good is it to know the faith by heart, and not to know how to live according to it? Of what use is it to be able to repeat the Ten Commandments, and not to know what is commanded or forbidden by them? Nay, what good is it even to understand all this, if the children are not constantly urged to observe the truths they have learned? To be satisfied with the bare knowledge would be like trying to feed a hungry child by holding out a piece of bread to him so that he could see, but not eat it. If that mode of action were persevered in the child would die of hunger. So it is, also, with the food of the soul: it is not enough merely to present it, or to impress the Christian law and the Ten Commandments on children’s memories, so that they can repeat them like a parrot. They must be taught every day, clearly and earnestly, how they are to lead a pious life, according to what they have learned. They must have that food put into their mouths by frequent exhortation, so that they may practice what they have learned when opportunity offers.

In that way they must be deeply impressed with the last end of their creation. Say to them: We are here solely for the purpose of fearing God, serving him, keeping his commandments, doing his will in all things, loving him above all things, and so, after this short life, enjoying him forever in heaven. If we do not get there it were better for us never to have been born. That must be the object of all our desires. All that we do, think, and say must be for God’s sake, and to gain heaven. They must be taught to hate mortal sin and fear it more than anything else, because God is offended by it. Therefore, whatever you do, see that you never commit a mortal sin for any one, for any pleasure, or for any gain. Parents, you must teach your children from their earliest years to have a great love for the Christian virtues, especially for humility, modesty, diligence, meekness, patience, and contentment with the will of God in all things. They must be directed to the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, how obedient he was to his parents, how he was clad modestly and humbly, how poor his food was, and how many years he thus spent on earth, until he died in torments on the cross, in order to show us the way we have to go if we wish to follow him to heaven. In that way you will save them from the deceitful spirit of the vain world, and will fill them with the true spirit of Jesus Christ and his Gospel from their tenderest years. They must be taught to have a tender love and devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, and to the holy Angels guardian. To teach your children to be respectful in church and devout at prayer, you must always make them pray with folded hands before and after meals, and every morning and evening they should kneel down to pray to God and the Saints. They will learn to be merciful and charitable to the poor, if they are told to bring the alms to any poor person who is begging at the door, and they must be told, at the same time, that what is given to the poor is given to Christ.

You will find many examples of parents who have thus trained their children in the Sacred Scriptures; amongst many others, the history of Tobias, and how he trained his son: “From his infancy he taught him to fear God, and to abstain from all sin” (Tob. 1: 10). And how did he instruct him? Read the 4th chapter of the Book of Tobias, and you will see words there which should be constantly on the lips of parents:

“Hear, my son, the words of my mouth, and lay them as a foundation in thy heart.” “All the days of thy life have God in thy mind; and take heed thou never consent to sin, nor transgress the commandments of the Lord our God.” “Thou shalt honor thy mother all the days of her life; for thou must be mindful what, and how great perils she suffered for thee.” “Give alms out of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from any poor person, for so it shall come to pass that the face of the Lord shall not be turned from thee.” “According to thy ability, be merciful. If thou have much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care, even so, to bestow willingly a little; for thus thou storest up for thyself a good reward for the day of necessity. For alms deliver from all sin, and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness. Alms shall be a great confidence before the Most High God, to all them that give it.” “Eat thy bread with the hungry and the needy, and with thy garments cover the naked.” “Take heed to keep thyself, my son, from all fornication, and beside thy wife never endure to know a crime. Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind or in thy words; for from it all perdition took its beginning. If any man hath done any work for thee, immediately pay him his hire, and let not the wages of thy hired servant stay with thee at all. See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another” (Tob. 4: 13). Keep away from bad company: never eat nor drink with the wicked. “Seek counsel always of a wise man. Bless God at all times, and desire of him to direct thy ways, and that all thy counsels may abide in him.” “Fear not, my son, we lead, indeed, a poor life, but we shall have many good things if we fear God, and depart from all sin, and do that which is good.” Such were the beautiful exhortations and teachings of the pious old man; whereupon, Tobias answered his father and said: “I will do all things, father, which thou hast commanded me.” The tears come to my eyes whenever I read or meditate on this chapter. Christian parents, compare with that the teaching you give your children, and see whether they both agree.

There is still another thing to be deplored, and that is, if some parents neglect their duty, and are on that account to be condemned because they do not use their tongues to instruct their children, how much more are not they to be condemned who, instead of giving good instruction, teach their children wickedness by their evil tongues and lead them into sin? Yet, alas! There is a large number of such people in the world.

II. Perhaps you think it almost an impossibility that amongst Catholic Christians parents are to be found who deliberately and willfully teach wickedness to their sons and daughters; for that would be to change one’s house into a school for the devil, to the eternal ruin of souls. And yet, I repeat, how many there are who set up such a school of perdition in their own houses, so that the devil finds no better teachers and agents in the world than many fathers and mothers, whom he makes use of to betray innocent children? It would, in truth, be much better for many sons and daughters that they had never been born, or that they had been abandoned in the streets, and had been reared in a foundling asylum. Better for them if, after Baptism, they had been put, like Moses, into a basket and been left to the mercy of the winds and waves. Better, I say, to lose their lives at once than to live and learn sin and wickedness from their parents! I will not speak here of those undoubted agents of the devil who teach their children to lie and cheat, to work on Sundays and holydays, to eat meat on forbidden days, to steal, to curse, to be immoral. I could not suspect decent parents of being guilty of such things. Yet there are such people in the world. My complaint shall now be directed principally against those who inspire their children with the false and lying maxims of a corrupt and perverse world, which are altogether opposed to the Christian religion, to the life and example of Jesus Christ, and to the principles of the Gospel. For instance, Christ, by his example, and in his Gospel, says that the poor in spirit are blessed (Matth. 5: 3), and condemns the greed of gold: “Woe to you that are rich” (Luke 6: 24); to you who set your hearts on riches. Now, some parents daily teach their children the contrary, and tell them that happiness consists in being very wealthy. See, they say, that gentleman, that merchant, how well he has got on in a short time by his industry. What a beautiful house he has! What a rich inheritance he has succeeded to! He is certainly fortunate. How well that son, that daughter, is married! What would you think, my child, if such good luck fell to your share? Such teaching as that makes a very strong impression on tender minds, so that they afterwards come to look upon money and riches almost as their god. Christ says: “Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart”

(Matth. 11: 29). “Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Ibid. 18: 3). If you are invited by any one, “sit down in the lowest place” (Luke 14: 10). But what do parents say? My son, my daughter, you are as good as such and such a one. You must not give way to them, nor yield to them; you are superior to them in rank and position. “I say to you,” says Christ, “love your enemies, do good to them that hate you” (Matth. 5: 44). What do parents say when their children suffer anything from another? My child, will you put up with that? Can you not defend yourself? Will you let yourself be treated in that way? Many fathers are quite pleased to see their sons fighting. If they are victorious the fathers even praise them, and say: The young fellow has courage; he will turn out well some day!

How do mothers sometimes instruct their daughters, who would otherwise willingly be pious and devout? Is it according to the teaching of Christ: “Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world”? (1 John 2: 15.) Is it according to the teaching of St. Paul, who condemns all superfluous, and much more all scandalous luxury in dress, and who even tells women to veil their faces on account of the Angels? No, indeed! Quite the contrary. Go to your father, they say, and tell him you want another dress; you ought to be ashamed to appear like that in the streets. What will people think when they see their own children better dressed than you? Sometimes the daughters say to their mothers: I have heard in the sermon that it is not right to dress in that way, or to follow that fashion, and that it might give scandal. What! Says the mother, let preachers say what they like. They do not understand these things, nor how people must live in the world. Everything they say is not Gospel. We must not mind them, but do as others do. Other pious people do the same, and we do not want to be any better than they! You must be dressed as I wish. There are daughters who, through natural bashfulness or through a love of virginal purity, wish to remain quietly at home, to avoid the society of the other sex, and to occupy themselves in some lawful manner, and the mothers, who ought to strengthen them in that good resolution and approve of their modesty, cannot bear it, and drag them about into all sorts of company. What! They say, you must not be bashful, but friendly with people. You must learn how to go about and let yourself be seen; otherwise, who will have you? Thus their innocent souls, even without their own knowledge and consent, are filled with the love of idleness and vanity, and are led astray on the broad road by those who should lead them to humility, modesty, virtue, and heaven.

I have seen little girls who were taught by their parents to dance like ballet girls. It must have taken a deal of time and trouble to teach them all that. When I saw it I could not help sighing to myself, and saying: What a wretched lesson for their immortal souls! I saw the father and mother laughing and enjoying the scene when their little children sang impure love songs, or repeated conversations of the same character. They even ordered the children to begin again, so as to prolong their pleasure. Alas! What a training for Christian children? There are parents, too, who cannot bear to see their children piously inclined. They cry down piety in every way possible. See, they say, what a devotee we have! That boy will be good for nothing; he is too pious; we shall not know what to make of him; he is only fit for a priest. These are the fine lessons that many parents give their children nowadays! What wonder is it that the latter, reared in such a school, grow up to be vain and foolish? Wicked parents, for whom do you bring up your children? Have you had them baptized, that they might serve under the standard of Jesus Christ, or under that of the devil?

Christian parents, teach your children from their childhood “to love the Lord their God,” that they may serve him alone with all their hearts. If you know not how, or cannot undertake to perform the office of a Christian teacher, and instruct your children in goodness, then send them where they will get proper instruction from others. Bring them with you to sermons, although they may be still very young; they will hear many salutary things that will be for the advantage of their souls their whole lives long. They will at least have a wish to hear the Word of God from their tenderest years, and that is a sign of predestination. And you, too, will learn much that you can afterwards teach your children. If you do not do even that much (and, alas! there are many who hardly go to a sermon once in a year, through indolence and

laziness, or through fear of being disturbed in conscience!), what wonder is it that you and your children live and die in culpable ignorance of what concerns your eternal welfare? What wonder is it that you live a sensual life, according to the fashion of the world?

You must send your children every Sunday to catechism. If the mother is not able to nurse her child, does she neglect it altogether? No, for she would thus cause the child's death; she hires some one who can take care of it in her place. In the same way, if some parents do not know how to instruct their children, they must not, therefore, allow the souls of the latter to perish. If they did so they would be murderers in a spiritual sense; and therefore they must have recourse to others, who will teach their children for them. Alas, what great negligence parents are often guilty of in this respect, too! So that ecclesiastical superiors must often compel them, by penalties, to send their children to catechism. Who ever heard that a magistrate had to compel people to look after their cows, and sheep, and pigs, and goats? But the souls of poor children are left without any one to attend to them! It was that thought which so often drew tears from St. John Chrysostom. He says: "We take more care of our asses and horses, than of the souls of our children." Certainly, what the Emperor Augustus used to say of Herod: "It is better to be Herod's pig than his child," might be affirmed of many Christians.

Therefore, "teach your children," or at least see that they are taught by others. Think often, for your consolation, that there is no work more holy, nor more divine, than to co-operate in the salvation of souls. You can daily practice zeal for souls, and for souls that are most closely connected with you. Spare neither care nor labor herein! You could not find a better employment. Rejoice at the promise made by God: "They that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars to all eternity" (Dan. 12: 3). Amen.

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