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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 + + +  
VOL. 4 = THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE  
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### The Watchfulness of Parents over their Children

*“Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee.” St. Matthew 9:2.*

Christ could say that; for no one but God can forgive sin, except those to whom he has given that power. Christian parents, God has given you great power over your sons and daughters! But he has not empowered you to forgive them their sins. Oh, if you had that power! If you could say, whenever your children are guilty of sin: “Be of good heart, son, or daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee,” it would be easy for you, then, to bring up your children to heaven. But what am I saying? You can bestow on them a still greater benefit than the forgiveness of their sins. What is that? You can, if you manage matters properly, prevent your children from committing any grievous sin, so that they do not need forgiveness; and that depends upon your giving them a Christian training. I have treated, last Sunday, of the good tongue, that is, the good instruction that is necessary to a Christian training. But that alone is not enough: you must also have sharp eyes, so as to watch carefully over all their actions, as I shall show in today’s instruction.

*Parents who wish to bring up their children for heaven in a Christian manner, and to keep them from sin, must be watchful over all their actions.*

When children see that no one is looking after them they are generally wild and naughty. We can see that in a school where a lot of little boys are sitting together. As long as the teacher is there, and looking about him, they are all as quiet and diligent as possible. There is not a word to be heard, unless when they are repeating their lessons. But if the teacher turns his back for a moment some begin to whisper and talk together; and if he goes out of the school altogether, and they know that he is wanted outside, what a noise they make then! There is nothing to keep them quiet but the sharp eye and unceasing vigilance of a teacher.

A Christian household in which there are little boys and girls is nothing but a school, over which the father and mother are placed by God as teachers to instruct their children in the Christian faith, and to bring them up to virtue, piety, and the fear of the Lord, that they may live well and die happily. Now, if parents fulfill this duty and often teach and exhort their children to good, they do a great work, that is unfortunately rarely done nowadays, even by Christians. But what good is it all if they do not continually watch their children to see if their instructions are followed? If the children find out that they can go where they like, out of sight of their parents; that they can go with whom they like, and do what pleases them best, what will become of their conduct then? It is only their father and mother, whose authority is from God, who can keep them in order; and therefore God has inspired children with a natural respect for their parents.

No child is so naughty and disobedient as not to be afraid of doing anything unlawful before its father or

mother, unless it is neglected and trained to evil from its infancy. No child is so good, modest, and inclined to virtue as not to be guilty of a few pranks now and then, when its parents are not looking. When did the prodigal son begin to drink, and gamble away his money, and live riotously? Was it not when he went to a foreign land, away from under his father's eye? For he certainly would not otherwise have dared to lead such a wicked life. Moses was placed by God over the people of Israel as their leader and law-giver. He gave them many pious exhortations to be always faithful to God, and yet when he went away from them for a short time to the mountains how did they act? "The people, seeing that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, gathering together against Aaron, said: Arise, make us gods, that may go before us" (Exod. 32:1). Nor did they stop until they had brought him all their golden earrings, out of which he made a golden calf, and set it up for them to adore, and to offer sacrifice to. "And the people sat down to eat, and drink, and they rose up to play" (Exod. 6). Old and sensible people, who had preserved their fidelity to the true God in the midst of the persecutions of Egypt; that chosen people, who had seen so many wonders of the divine goodness always accompanying them in their journeys, now abandoned the true God, because their leader and law-giver was away from them for a short time! What may we not, then, expect of children, who are unable to govern themselves on account of their youth; who do not yet feel much desire for a supernatural end or motive, and who are inclined to all sorts of distractions and amusements when they are left to themselves by their leaders and guides, their fathers and mothers? What must become of them if they fall into the hands of wicked, ill-reared children, from whom they can learn nothing good, and by whom they will be led into sin, if the vigilance of the parents does not save them?

Therefore, for a Christian training to be given in the proper way, it is absolutely necessary that parents should keep a watchful eye on all the actions of their children, so as to see how they live and what they do; what evil they commit; what good they do; whether they fear and love God; whether they go to Mass every day; whether, and how often, they go to confession and Communion; whether they attend sermons and catechism; when they go to bed, and when they get up; whether they say their morning and evening prayers devoutly; when, where, with whom they go out; what they learn from their teacher; whether they can hear, see, or learn anything evil from the servants in the house; how the relatives of the family and the neighbors act with regard to them when they are allowed to visit them; whether the children with whom they play are well or ill-reared; what books they read. Every care must be taken to keep them constantly occupied in some lawful manner. They must never be allowed to remain idle, for that would give the devil every opportunity of leading them into all kinds of sin and vice. They must be carefully kept away from dangerous company, and even from the least occasion of sin. Without this care and watchfulness all your teaching and exhorting will be of no avail.

This was the principal thing with all pious, God-fearing parents who wished to bring up their children for heaven. When Sara saw her son Isaac playing only once with Ishmael, the son of her handmaid, she could not rest until the latter and her son were turned out of the house. Jacob, too, was ill at ease when his sons, although they were grown up, were away from him, minding their flocks. His father's heart was filled with anxiety to know what they were doing, and how they were getting on. Therefore he used to send his beloved son Joseph to them: "Go," he said, "and see if all things be well with thy brethren, and bring me word again what is doing" (Gen. 37:14). The same anxiety troubled Isai when his sons were absent from him, and therefore he sent David to see, not merely what they were doing, but in what company they were. "Go, see thy brethren, if they are well, and learn with whom they are placed" (1 Kings 17:18).

What a great want there is in this respect with most parents! Some are occupied with far different things the whole day, either at home or elsewhere. The last thing that troubles them is to look after the children. They are very curious about what is going on in town, or in the country, or in the homes of other people. They pay no attention to what occurs in their own homes, or to what their sons and daughters are doing. Sometimes they do not see their children for the whole day, unless at meals. They allow them to go out when they please, to stand talking in the streets, or at the door, in the morning, the evening, or even at night, with whom they like. How can that have a good effect on young people? Do they watch over the actions of their children when they are allowed to run through the streets as they like, boys and girls together, Christians and Jews, playing, shouting, fighting with each other in full liberty? I have myself seen, with much bitterness of heart, girls of ten, eleven, and twelve years of age, of decent families, playing with very wild and naughty boys in the public streets. Is that the way to exercise parental vigilance, when sometimes all the neighbors can speak of the willfulness,

wickedness, and vices of certain children, while the fathers and mothers know nothing at all about them? So little do they watch over their children! Alas, unhappy children, whose father and mother think as little of you as a runaway dog! People are anxious enough to know if the sheep and cows have come home at the proper time in the evening from the pasturage; but they trouble themselves very little to know whether their sons and daughters are at home early in the evening.

Those parents sin in this respect who allow their children, and particularly their grown-up daughters, to have free intercourse with persons of the opposite sex, although it may be in their own houses, and under the pretext of securing a suitable match; also they who permit their engaged children to be alone with the person whom they are about to marry. To leave two people of opposite sexes alone; two who love each other foolishly; two who know that they will soon be married! Oh! The countless sins that are committed in such circumstances by impure desires, looks, and actions! How many lose their virtue thereby, before their marriage! How can there be luck or grace in a marriage that is begun by offending God? Careless parents, what answer will you give hereafter to your just Judge, if you deliberately, or through carelessness, allow your children to act thus, and make yourselves responsible for the sins they commit; and if they do not commit sin you leave them, at least, in the proximate danger of it? Yet so many fathers and mothers think so little of it that these sins are hardly ever mentioned in confession, and never repented of and atoned for!

What sort of care do those parents take of their children who not only allow them to do what they like at home, and to go out walking and talking when and with whom they please, but even place them beyond their reach, in such a way that they could not watch over them, even if they wished to do so?

Finally, what must I say and think of those parents who are not only careless in watching over their children, so as to keep them from sin and its dangers, but actually lay snares for them at home and elsewhere, and lead them into the occasions of sin? What a fearful thing! Many fathers go to the saloon, their sons must go with them; mothers go into company, and bring their daughters with them into places which ought to be shunned by young people who wish to preserve their innocence. They have pictures in their houses, and statues in their gardens, that no man or woman, not to speak of curious children, could look at without being scandalized. They allow their little boys and girls to occupy the same bed. They are not at all cautious of what they say in their presence, and are very remiss in teaching them Christian modesty. Thus the poor children learn wickedness in their very tenderest years. Christian parents, poverty does not excuse you from the duty of seeing that your children are never placed in the occasion of violating modesty. Are they still innocent? Then keep them so; but they will not long remain so, unless you are very careful. The philosopher Aristotle says that children begin to dream in their fourth or fifth year; I go a little farther, and say that they begin to hear and see in their fourth or fifth year, or even earlier. And although they cannot sin, because they have not the use of reason, yet many sins can be caused in after life by what they hear and see in their childhood. If we were to ask many of the perverse, corrupt youths of our times what Jesus Christ asked the father in the Gospel: How long is your son in this miserable state? They could answer, as that father did: "From infancy" (Mark 9:20). How long have you been so wicked? From infancy. When did you learn to commit that sin? From my very childhood. I learned it from my parents, from my brothers and sisters at home.

Christian parents, be watchful over the actions of your children from their very infancy if you wish to preserve them from sin and to keep them in the fear of God. If you had a hundred eyes you should keep them all open for this purpose; but you have only two, and therefore must be all the more careful. You should inspire yourselves with a holy fear by thinking: I must one day stand before my Judge to answer for the sins of my children, if I have been the cause of them by a want of vigilance. Nor must you imagine that this is too unjust or severe toward you, for you judge in the same way of others. If your watch goes wrong, you accuse the watchmaker, and say that he does not know his business. If you see a child with a distorted foot, you get indignant, and think that if the mother or the nurse had been more careful the foot would have been all right. And in the same way the divine Judge will say, when he sees a son or a daughter living in an unchristian manner: Father and mother, what have you been doing? Why have you allowed the unfortunate children to be thus perverted? And what answer will you make to him? You may say: I have not perverted them, they have done it themselves. I could not prevent them from leading wicked lives. But the Judge will answer: You should have been more watchful over them in their youth. I look upon you as the first cause of their destruction. And such is really the case, Christians! You have, for instance, a clerk in your shop, to whom you give a yearly

salary on condition that he looks after your goods and takes care of them. Now, suppose that, while you are absent, the clerk goes to sleep and a thief comes in and steals your things; what would you say in that case to the clerk? Unfaithful servant, you would cry out, full of anger, you must either make good the loss or go to prison! But why? What has the poor man done? He went to sleep when he should have remained awake. But there is no harm in that; when a man is asleep he can do no evil. But he should have kept his eyes open, and not allowed my things to be stolen. He is the cause of the loss I have suffered; he must go to prison! You are quite right; for, according to every law, he who has charge of anything is responsible for injuries that happen to it through his negligence. Fathers and mothers, the most precious treasures you have are the immortal souls of your children, whom God has confided to your care with the promise of eternal happiness, if you are faithful in your duty. But if you go to sleep, and do not watch over your children, so that the devil comes and steals one of them away, then woe to you when you appear before God! How can you make good that irreparable loss? Do not say: What have I done? I have not taught my children anything bad, nor given them bad example, and I have often exhorted them to fear God. That may be; but you have slept when you should have been awake. You were wanting in vigilance, and so your son or daughter is lost. I will require their souls at your hands, the Judge will say to you. Think, too, for your consolation, how much you may do for the honor and glory of God, if by your watchfulness you can save your children even from one mortal sin, and how much you can do for the salvation of souls if you bring them, by your diligence, to heaven, along with yourselves. What a pleasing and joyful sight it will be for you on that day when St. Peter will appear with the thousands of Jews that he converted, St. Paul with the countless multitudes of heathens that he gained over to Christ, and the other Apostles and missionaries, preachers, confessors and priests, with all the souls that they instructed and led to heaven! Ah, parents, do what you can now, so as to be able to take your place amongst them, with your children at your side, and say to your Judge: Behold, I have kept those souls, and saved them by my watchfulness! With what joy and gladness you will then hear the happy words: "Well done, good and faithful servant;" thou faithful father; thou good mother! "Because thou hast been faithful over a few things," in being watchful over a few souls, "I will place thee over many things;" come, "enter," with thy children, "into the joy of thy Lord" (St. Matthew 25:23). Amen.

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