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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
TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Paternal Chastisement of Children

“Lord, come down before that my son die.” St. John 4:49.

The father was careful of his son's life! After having tried every means in vain, he at length ventured to ask Jesus Christ to heal his son by a miracle. So much concerned was this father for the temporal life of his son. Perhaps if the latter had been in danger of eternal death his father would not have been so uneasy. Oh, how many parents there are in our days who trouble themselves very little about that danger! If their children are suffering from bodily illness, and are in danger of death, how they weep and lament! Every means is tried to save the beloved child's life and to restore it to health; but if the soul is sick and dead through sin, hardly any one is concerned about it. There is still another point to be observed in connection with this duty, and that is, how chastisement is to be inflicted so that the children may be made better thereby, and be brought to eternal life. Many parents punish their children when the latter commit a fault, but they do not do it properly, and therefore do more harm than good to the souls of their children.

I. This chastisement must be inflicted with a good intention.

II. With moderation and parental love.

I. Everything must be done for the honor and glory of God, Christian parents, and consequently and especially the chastisement and correction of your children, when it is necessary, must be directed to the glory of God as to its proper end. You must have no other intention, when inflicting it, but to amend your children's way of life, keep them from sin, and lead them on to good, even by violent means.

1. That end is altogether disregarded, first by those parents who inflict punishment according to the humor they are in. If they are in a bad humor, if they are annoyed and put out about something, oh, then the children had better keep out of their way, for if the least thing goes wrong they beat them unmercifully, and do not always distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. If they are in a good humor, they are ready to overlook any number of faults and shortcomings, although they may be committed before their very eyes. That is not the way to inflict punishment for the glory of God, because God has commanded it, and the salvation of the children requires it. It is inflicting punishment because the father or mother is out of temper.

2. Those parents also fail in this point who use the rod only when the children are guilty of a fault that vexes the father or mother, while they allow serious faults to remain unpunished because they are not angry, nor displeased, nor hurt by them. For instance, a willful child breaks a glass through love of mischief; the father or mother immediately beats the child severely. And quite deservedly, too. But on another occasion the same child curses or swears, or uses indecent language, by which God alone is offended. That is another thing altogether; it is passed over unnoticed, or at most a half threat is uttered to deter the child from such expressions. So that the

punishment was not inflicted for the proper end in the first case, nor because God was angry at the fault committed, but solely because the parents were vexed at the loss they sustained.

3. Thirdly, those parents do not punish as they ought who beat their children in anger when the latter deserve it, but immediately afterwards commence to caress and talk kindly to them, to show that they are sorry and wish to be forgiven. That is clear proof that neither the amendment of the fault, nor the glory of God, was the reason why they inflicted the punishment, but simply a desire of giving vent to their anger. Such chastisement is neither parental nor salutary; it should be earnest and serious, so that the children may learn by experience that every fault they commit will be punished, and may see by the continued displeasure of their parents how great the wrong is that they have committed.

4. Fourthly, there are parents who make a difference between their children when punishing them, and who thereby commit a grievous error. For instance, there are in the same family two boys and two girls. One son and one daughter are never looked upon as guilty by their parents, while the other two are never able to please them; so that whatever happens the first two are never wrong, and the others never right. Every venial sin of the latter is magnified into a mortal sin, while if the former commit a fault that ought to be punished, the father and mother only laugh and are amused at it. But if the latter are guilty of the same fault, their parents have only sour looks, and cross words, and even blows for them. What is the cause of this different treatment? The fault is the same in both cases, and deserves the same punishment, in order to be corrected. Yes, that is true, but the one son and daughter are their parents' favorites, or their grandmother's pets. They must not be beaten, nor spoken crossly to; that would cause too much sorrow to the father, or mother, or grandmother! The others, who are sometimes more beloved by God, "have not yet found favor" with their parents, either because they are not so beautiful and clever as the former, or because they are a little stupid and backward, or suffer from some other natural defect, for which they are not to be blamed, as it is inborn in them; therefore they get all the beatings and cannot stir in the house, while the favorites may do as they please. What an injustice, what a wrong! Is that the way to punish children with a good intention, for the glory of God and for their last end, and to correct their faults? The punishment that you inflict on the child whom you care less for, can do it little good, and will only serve to embitter and render it desperate. For it is quite able to see that the punishment does not come from parental affection and love, but from hatred and dislike. A necessary consequence of this favoritism is envy, discord, and enmity between brothers and sisters, which sinks deep into the tender minds of children, and remains with them their whole lifetime. The Sacred Scripture says of Jacob: "Now Israel loved Joseph above all his sons" (Gen. 37:3). And what was the consequence? Nothing but bitterness, envy, and vindictiveness amongst the brothers of Joseph, which they made him feel. "They could not speak peaceably to him." They wished to kill him: "Behold, the dreamer cometh; come, let us kill him." They cast him into a deep pit, to let him die of hunger, but when the Ishmaelite merchants passed by, they sold him as a slave into a distant land, and caused his father great sorrow. The same faults must be punished in the same manner, without any distinction; all the children must be treated with the same affection and the same severity, if their good or ill-conduct is alike; nor is there any other way of making punishment profitable to them.

5. Those parents do not punish their children with a proper motive who, in place of chastisement, or while administering it, give way to cursing, swearing, or abusive language against their children. Is that a Christian, or a parental way of punishing a child? Can that be for the glory of God, since God is offended and his commandment is broken in the very act? Can there be any inducement to amendment, to avoid sin, or to practice virtue, in a chastisement which teaches children wickedness, and induces them to follow their parents' bad example, so that they, too, curse and swear? Is that chastisement salutary, and apt to make children more obedient and respectful to their parents, and more ready to follow their advice in future, by which children lose all respect and esteem for their parents, and have not only a bad opinion of them, but even hate and detest them on account of their horrible habit of cursing? No; all such chastisements are not administered for a good end, and therefore they cannot help either the parents to merit, or the children to amend. But, in addition to the proper end it must have, chastisement must also be inflicted with discretion and parental love.

II. Christian parents, you must use discretion in chastising your children! The faults that your sons and daughters commit are the maladies of their souls, which, if not cured in time, will cause them eternal death. You are the physicians of their souls. God has entrusted you with that office, and the medicine you have to administer is parental correction and chastisement.

1. Just as too much medicine often does more harm than good, so those parents do not correct their children properly who always cuff or beat them or pull their ears for the least fault, and who never overlook anything, but punish the slightest mistakes even more severely than they do serious ones. The children are not improved by that; on the contrary, they become dulled and callous, so that they do not feel the punishment; like an old horse that is so accustomed to bit and spur that neither has any effect on him in the end. The correction of children does not always consist in beating and striking them, especially when such punishment is inflicted too frequently. Parental chastisement is a medicine that must be given at a suitable time, and it must not be used as daily food. Sometimes, especially when a fault is committed for the first time, a cross look, at other times a serious threat, has more effect than any amount of beating, in making children amend their shortcomings.

2. As a skilful and prudent physician studies the constitution of his patients, so also parents must always take into account the characters of the children whom they are about to punish. When they are still very young, and have not come to the full use of reason, they require far different treatment from that which would suit them when they are more advanced in years. Little children must be governed by fear, and therefore, if they do anything wrong, they must be made to feel the rod. But with other children this means is not always salutary. The rod should be the last resource, just as burning and cutting are the last resources with sick people, and should not be used until all other means have failed. But when it is used, it should be done in earnest, so that a second application may not be necessary. Yet it must always be done with due regard for parental affection. Hence those stern fathers are wrong who make their poor children tremble and fly before them, as if they had seen a wild beast. Of such parents the Wise Man says: "Be not as a lion in thy house, terrifying them of thy household" (Ecc. 4:35). No; children should have a childlike, and not a servile fear of their parents. They must be corrected and punished, certainly, but in the same way in which the heavenly Father corrects his elect children; he sends them many trials and crosses during their lives, but only because he loves them, and because he wishes them thereby to atone for their past sins, to be freed from vicious inclinations, or to be strengthened in virtue, and thus to acquire greater merit for themselves and greater glory in heaven. With the same parental affection should the rod be used on children, with the sole purpose of punishing their faults and vices.

3. Therefore it is advisable for parents never to punish their children immediately after a fault, and while they still feel angry. They should wait till their anger is over, although they might then be obliged to defer the punishment for a whole week, provided, that is to say, that the child has been admonished of his fault. For instance, you might say to him: You see now what you have done; you must not expect to get off without punishment. And believe me that such a mode of chastisement is best for the children, and makes far more impression on them, than if they were punished at once for a fault, for while they are waiting they are apt to be far more careful, and more afraid of giving their parents displeasure, since the punishment is still hanging over their heads. I know myself from experience that teachers have tried this plan, and have found it so successful that, after having kept the children in expectation of punishment for a fortnight after the fault was committed, they could afford to let them off altogether, because the latter were in such a state of suspense that they suffered more during that time than if they had actually been punished, and that they would have been quite pleased to have received due chastisement at once, so as to have it over. But many parents say: I cannot punish my child unless I am angry. More is the pity, for that is a sure sign that punishment is inflicted in anger, and not with parental affection. You must overcome yourself, although the tears are forced from you while correcting your child; the punishment will then be all the more efficacious, because it will be in accordance with the command of St. Paul: "Bring up your children in the discipline and correction of the Lord" (Ephes. 6:4). Mark the words, "in the correction of the Lord," according to what the prophet says: "When thou art angry, thou wilt remember mercy" (Habacue 3:2). Chastisement of this kind convinces children that their parents really love them, and punish them only for their good. And to you, Christian children, I must again speak, in conclusion. You must not think that the rod is an instrument of hatred and vengeance; it is rather one of love, and is used to correct your faults or to prevent them, so that your parents may thus lead you to heaven. If the young plants in a garden had sense and reason, they would not complain when the gardener comes with a knife to cut off their superfluous branches. On the contrary, they would say: Cut away everything that is useless and injurious to us, although you have to hurt and wound us thereby; for we wish to be properly trimmed, so that we may adorn the garden and produce better fruit. Such should also be your sentiment, Christian children, when your father or mother takes the rod to punish you. You should think: I have deserved it; it is good and useful for me to be thus corrected and purged of my

evil habits. What you cannot or will not understand now, you will see clearly enough later on, and will say with grateful hearts: Oh, what a good father and mother I have had; they did not allow me to do wrong when I was young, and punished all my faults! What better would I be now if my parents had always flattered and caressed me, so that I should hereafter be obliged to do eternal penance for my sins in hell? I must say: Blessed be the hand of my father, of my mother, which, next to God, I have to thank for eternal happiness. Amen.

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