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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 + + +

VOL. 4 = THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

### The Necessity of Parents Giving Good Example to Their Children

*“Whose image is this?”* St. Matthew 22:20.

From the image we may learn the appearance of a person whom it represents. In today's Gospel, Christ, in order to show the Jews to whom they should pay tribute, asked them to bring him a piece of money: “Show me the coin of the tribute,” and then he asked: “Whose image is this?” “They say to him: Caesar's.” Therefore, answered the Saviour, since the image represents Caesar, it proves clearly enough to whom the tribute is to be paid. “Give, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.” A child is called “the image of his father,” so that if I see a son or a daughter, and consider their character, I have nothing more to do in order to know of what kind their father and mother are than to ask: “Whose image is this?” Who is the father of this son? Who is the mother of this daughter? And when I hear their names, although I may not be personally acquainted with them, yet I can form a sufficiently accurate judgment of their manner of life, so as to know whether they are pious or not, according as I have seen whether the children are good or bad. For as a general rule, the character of the parents is reflected in the children, these latter being the images of the former, and generally speaking, imitating their example. Therefore, people say of the pious son or daughter of wicked parents: Oh, that child is not at all like its parents; and the same thing is true of a wicked child whose father and mother are good and pious. Christian parents, you may again conclude from this how important it is for you to give your children a good and holy example. For

*Unless parents lead pious lives and give good example, all their efforts to train up children in a Christian manner will come to nothing, or will do very little good.*

There are many things required for a field to produce good fruits: The ground must be ploughed, then it must be freed from weeds, thistles, thorns, and stones, and unless this is done a good crop cannot be expected. The seed must also be planted in the ground that is thus prepared to receive it; the seed must be harrowed in, and protected from birds. All these things are necessary, but they are not yet sufficient to insure a good crop; for if the light of the sun and moon are wanting, all the former preparations are of no avail. The sun, with its light and heat, the moon, with its wonderful influence, must assist the decaying seed to shoot forth and grow. If the sun and moon were taken away the whole earth, no matter how much it is ploughed and sown, would be a desert. Furthermore, the condition of the earth depends on that of the sun; if it is cool, so is the earth; if it is cold or hot, so also is the earth.

Now, the fruits that parents who desire to train up their children for their last end expect and wish the latter to bring forth, are piety and good works, by which all who come to the use of reason must gain heaven. Such, too, is the comparison that Jesus Christ himself uses: "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and cast into the fire" (Matthew. 7:19). Now, that fruits of this kind may grow in children, many different means are required, namely, good instruction, constant vigilance, and parental correction. Correction prepares the tender minds of the children, as the plough does the ground, and purifies them from thistles, weeds, and thorns; that is, it corrects their present evil propensities, and guards against future ones. Good instruction plants the seed: "The seed is the Word of God" (Luke 8:11), whereby parents continually instruct and exhort their children to good. By constant vigilance over the actions of children, the birds of prey that seek their souls are prevented from carrying off the good seed, and the children themselves are saved from the dangerous occasions of sin. All these things are good and necessary to a Christian training.

But they help little or nothing to the sanctification of children if the sun and moon do not shed their light, and bring forth fruits of eternal life. Nor do I speak here of the light of God's grace, for, as a matter of course, no good can be produced in us without that. Without God's help no one is capable of doing a good work that is meritorious of heaven; but God is never wanting in his part of the work. Fathers, mothers, you are the sun and moon to your children by the example you give them. Joseph says of his dream: "I saw in a dream, as it were, the sun and moon worshipping me" (Gen. 37:39). It is not necessary for us to seek another interpretation of these words besides that which Jacob gives: How, my son, he asks, with evident indignation, what are you thinking of? "Shall I and thy mother worship thee upon the earth?" That vision of Joseph, therefore, shows that the father is the sun, and the mother the moon in the house; and to them in particular does Christ say: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matth. 5:16); and they especially who are daily under your training should see that light, in order to be encouraged to do good works. If the sun and moon are eclipsed, the whole earth is in darkness: if the father and mother do not give forth the light of virtue, piety, and the fear of God, the minds of the children are cold and tepid in the divine service. In a word, if the good example of the parents is wanting, all other means of rearing up their children in a Christian manner will be of little or no use. Let us now consider that more in detail.

1. Although it is true that good instruction does wonders for the salvation of children, and, if it is wanting, they live and die in ignorance of many divine truths, yet, I ask, how could a father or mother hope to instruct others in good, to teach and exhort them to lead Christian lives, if they themselves do not know how to live well and as Christians ought? "No one gives what he has not." Now, suppose that those parents who do not lead a good life spend a long time every day in instructing their children in the truths of salvation. The children see that their father and mother do not practice what they teach; how, then, can their teaching have any effect, since they contradict it by their example? Which of the two are the children most likely to follow? We are far more apt to do what we see others doing than what they command us to do.

Besides, what impression can mere teaching make on children? They could answer their parents: Parents, we see in you few signs of piety, or of the fear and love of God, and on the contrary, a great desire for earthly things, a great neglect of morning and evening prayer, and very little desire to hear the Word of God. And do you think you can teach us to be devout, to attend sermon and catechism on all Sundays and holydays, a thing you never do, to say our morning prayers and make our evening examen of conscience on our knees? How does your teaching correspond with your practice? Children, God forbid that you should ever dare to make such reproaches to your parents! Even from wicked teachers, and much more from your father and mother, although they may not give you good example, you must take their instructions and exhortations to good, for your souls' sake, not otherwise than if they came from the lips of Christ himself. But you, parents, see whether your children have not reason to reproach you, at least in their own minds, when they have sense enough to see that your conduct is not what it should be. If they cannot see that, what good will your teaching do them?

Jesus Christ, although he is the Holy of holies, and the Supreme Lawgiver, who is bound by no law, did not begin to teach until he had first given a holy example of his doctrine in himself: "And Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1), is written of him when he commenced his public mission during the last three years of his mortal life. Mark these words: doing goes first, and preaching comes next. Christian parents, if your teaching is to do your children any good, and to help them to save their souls, you must give them good example. Whenever you speak of piety, devotion, virtue, or the service of God, you must not be content with merely saying:

Son, daughter, “do this;” but you must say: “Come, let us all do it!” It is not enough to say: Imitate Jesus Christ; you should say, with the Apostle: “Be ye followers of me as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 11:1). Children must be led by the hand. You must act like the mother. That was the way in which St. Monica taught her son Augustine to leave the path of error and to embrace the truth, as the latter tells us: “She watered her words with her tears, and strengthened them by her example.” In short, good example alone, without words, can do much with children, but good words, without example, are of no use.

2. Another means necessary to bring up children in a Christian manner consists in the parents being watchful over all their actions. It is true that this vigilance can prevent many sins that the children would in all likelihood commit if they were not watched over; but what good can it do, if the parents had a hundred eyes, and kept them always open, without good example? For how is it that the watchful eye of the parent keeps the child from sin? That comes from a natural inborn shame that prevents us from doing what is wrong or unbecoming in the presence of others, and that shame is very powerful with children, on account of the reverence and respect that God has inspired them with for their parents. Therefore, there is no child so impudent as to dare to act improperly in presence of its father or mother. But this shame and reverence must of necessity disappear when the children see and know that their parents do wrong. They think, then: Oh, I need not be ashamed to do what my parents do, and to behave as they behave.

3. Besides, vigilance is required of parents, principally, that they may prevent their children from hearing or seeing anything that would scandalize them, from going into the danger of sin, and from being corrupted and made vicious by bad company. There are, alas, so many traitors and deceivers almost everywhere nowadays that one cannot be careful enough, and very often finds danger to the soul where it ought least of all to be feared. But tell me now, you parents who lead bad lives and give your sons and daughters bad example, what use is it for you to prevent your children from hearing or seeing anything scandalous when you yourselves are a stumbling-block in their way every day at home, when they remark in your lives and conduct things that must necessarily be an occasion of scandal to them? What good is it for you to save your children from other dangers of sin outside, when they find dangers enough at home, in the conduct of their own father and mother? Are the dangers that come from their parents less to be dreaded than those that come from strangers, or should they not rather be more feared, since they are much more powerful? No! Be as watchful as you like over the actions of your children, but if you do not give them good example your vigilance is useless.

4. The last necessary means of bringing up children well consists in parental correction and chastisement of the children’s faults, so that they may be induced to repent, and to avoid such faults in future. Oh, if many fathers and mothers had not such a blind, foolish, and senseless love, or, to speak better, such a hatred and dislike for their children, that they overlook all the faults of the latter, lest, as they say themselves, they should cause the dear children pain, then most children would not be so ill brought up! But now I ask for the last time: You fathers and mothers who do not give good example, how can you dare to punish in your children a vice that you and they know you are yourselves subject to, so that you are as deserving of punishment as they are? Christian parents, do you not think that your sons and daughters secretly laugh at you when you punish them for a fault that they are well aware you suffer from also? The same reproach might be made to you which Christ addressed to the envious Pharisees: “Hypocrite, cast first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to take out the mote from thy brother’s eye” (Luke 6:42). Parents, if you see that your children have done wrong, punish them, but if you wish the punishment to do good you must see that you are not laboring under the same fault; for otherwise your children, or at all events your conscience, would cry out to you: Hypocrite, punish yourself! As water comes from the fountain, so do children come from their parents. If the spring is worthless, the water is no good; so that if children are to be corrected the parents must first correct themselves. You may learn from this, Christian parents, that all your instructions, and vigilance, and correction, and every other means you may use to train up your children in a Christian manner, are of no use unless you live piously and give them good example.

If you give a good example your instructions and warnings will make an impression on your children, your vigilance will keep them from sin, they will require no punishment, or, when you have to inflict it, it will produce the desired effect, and you will thus train up your children properly. Oh, would that all parents acted thus! How much hell would then lose! How many chosen souls would be gained for heaven! How God’s honor and glory would be increased!

And you, Christian parents, whatever you do, see, above all, that you fulfill exactly that great and most important duty of rearing up your children well! That is the earnest prayer of the immortal souls of your children, for their going to heaven or to hell for all eternity depends on whether you give them a good training or not. The Angels of heaven make the same request of you, for on you it depends to help them to bring their charges to heaven. Christ, who gave his life amidst unspeakable torments for you, and to whom you cannot, therefore, refuse anything, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, asks you to do it, for thereon depends the saving of the souls he has purchased with his Blood, from the infernal serpent, into whose toils they would fall if you were careless of their training. The heavenly Father himself asks it of you, for he has given you a share of his authority to this end, that you may give him back the souls of your children, which he has confided to your care. Your own souls demand it, for if your children are lost through your negligence you must account for the loss and pay for it.

Therefore, pray daily to the Almighty God for your sons and daughters, that he may govern them by his grace, inspire them with his fear and love, keep them from all sin and all occasions of it, by his holy Angels, lead them on the right way to heaven and keep them on it to the end. Pray to God often with all your hearts rather to take your sons and daughters, no matter how much you love them, out of the world, than to allow them to offend him by a single mortal sin. Never warn, chastise or correct your children without first offering what you are doing to God, with a pure intention, and with the humble prayer that the correction and punishment may be for his greater honor and glory. Pray daily, in the words with which Jesus Christ recommended his Apostles to his heavenly Father: "Father, keep them in thy name, whom thou hast given me; that they may be one, as we also are" (John 17:11).

Think often of what you have hitherto heard on this subject. Let it not be with you, as is the case with most people, who go away from a sermon and forget all they have heard, and are not a bit better for it. Nor must you be like those who now and then remember what they heard in a sermon, but still are drawn back to their old courses by the bad example and way of living of worldly people, so that they think: Oh, preachers only want to frighten us; it is not so bad as they make it out. Other people, who are known to be pious and who wish to go to heaven, bring up their children in a far different manner from what the preacher advises. Do not think that I wish to burden your consciences, and make sins where there are none! You may believe firmly that what I have hitherto said to you is the teaching of the Catholic Church, of the holy Fathers, who have written on the training of children, and even of sound reason itself. But that the manners and customs of men are generally opposed to such teaching is evident from what St. John writes: "The whole world is seated in wickedness" (John 5:19). And from what St. James writes: "Know you not that the friendship of this world is the enemy of God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God" (James 4:4). And from what Jesus Christ has said: "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matth. 22:14). You have heard what we said to you, you have known the truth, but you have not practiced it! And against those who do not believe: You have heard the truth, but had no faith in it. The world and its perverse usages made more impression on you than the infallible Word of God. You preferred to follow the example of the children of the world, rather than to walk in the footsteps of the Saints. Not so, Christian parents, must you act: often call to mind the truths you have heard; forget them not, and live according to them. Amen.

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