

ARE YOU A GOOD PARENT?

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Some years ago, a young man lay dying in a hospital — dying of a loathsome disease. In a chair by the bed of agony sat his helpless mother, a fallen-away Catholic who had not received the sacraments for years.

Suddenly the dying youth raised his head and cried in terror, “Ma, pray with me!”

She knew no prayers; she had forgotten them long since.

Again he whispered hoarsely, “Ma, pray with me!” and dropped back on his pillow. He was dead.

The next day the mother knelt before the altar.

“O God,” she cried in anguish, “I have come back. When I could not pray with my dying boy, I felt the enormity of my crime.”

Parental Delinquency

What was the crime of which this mother spoke?

Was it an act which by its viciousness and malice made it notorious?

Was it a crime of passion, committed in a moment in an intense blaze of emotion? Or was there an element of premeditation there?

The crime was none of these things. Instead, it was an offence — almost imperceptible — that began when the boy was an infant, continued through his adolescence, and culminated in a pathetic and bitter death.

It was a crime of parental delinquency, bad example, arid faith, and negligence.

Put briefly it was the crime of a mother failing to live up to her responsibility.

Not for a moment do we imply that the mother was answerable for every sin of her son, or for every evil deed that he committed. Certainly it is true that, as a separate human being, the son always had direct access to the streams of divine grace. His salvation was largely in his own hands and in God’s.

But yet, like all children, this boy had turned first to his mother for guidance, had reached initially for her helping hand, and had looked innocently to her for an example.

And she had failed him.

Enormous Influence

The responsibility of a parent is enormous. A mother or a father exerts an influence on the young beyond any exact calculation.

We are all familiar with the imitative habits of children. Boys and girls like to “play house”, to pretend that they are mommy and daddy, and to parrot the conversations that they hear from adults.

But the parental influence penetrates much deeper than just these superficial manifestations.

The rules of conduct which prevail in the home, and the moral atmosphere that envelops the family, are just as much a part of the child's inheritance as the colour of his eyes or the shape of his nose.

Instead of merely dressing up like mommy, or wearing daddy's hat, the child often grows up with the same moral out-look as the parents.

Parents imagine that these influences are only temporary and that they do not really count for much.

"We've got wonderful Catholic schools," they say. "When my Johnny or Mary starts into kindergarten, the nuns will give him the proper training."

It is true, of course, that our Catholic schools are our boast and pride. The Church recognizes the importance of the proper education by insisting that Catholic children attend their own schools where possible.

But however valuable and essential our Catholic formal education is, we must never forget that home training is more important.

Our great Pope Leo XIII assured us of this fact when he wrote: "All should be most intimately persuaded that the minds of children are most influenced by the training which they receive at home."

The Teachers Testify

Teachers in our Catholic schools constantly verify this judgment by their own experiences.

Some time ago a learned sister, a teacher of mature background in the parochial school, said to me, "Ah, yes, Father, we are doing our best to train them to live for God and to become useful members of society, but what they see and hear at home and on the streets more than outweighs our influence here!"

And her look of pain showed that her heart was almost breaking.

Small wonder that the nun was upset! Lack of co-operation at home is the religious teacher's greatest obstacle. Our wonderful Catholic teachers make every attempt to teach our children — by their example, by their instructions, by the daily prayers and religious exercises, by the Catholic atmosphere of the schoolroom with its holy pictures and sacred ornaments. In all these ways our teachers urge the children to pray, to go to Mass, to be kind and charitable, to utter no indecent or offensive word.

And when the closing hour comes, the children go home again. They notice no one pray; they notice that the older members of the family do not care much about Holy Mass; they witness quarrels, uncharitable remarks, unkindness, unrestrained criticism. They hear curses, bitter invective, even — God forgive the speakers then! — suggestive, impure talk and shameful stories.

Compared with the hallowed schoolroom they left, this home atmosphere is tainted. And children do not reason. Instead, they imitate. Someone truly said, "Children are imitative or nothing."

It is heartbreaking to visit certain hospitals for children in our large cities and to look upon the little ones there, physically crippled, maimed, deformed. Only one sight is more pitiable — that of children morally crippled, maimed and diseased in soul by the bad example of those who should have been a shining light to them.

The Home

Would to God that the Catholic home were always what it ought to be!

What ought it to be? Next to His own dwelling-place, Christ the Lord would have it be the holiest place on earth, just like His blessed home at Nazareth.

Do we sometimes pause to reflect upon the supreme importance of the home?

In the living body of civilization, the home is the central and most vital organ. What home is, society will become, since the nation is simply a magnified version. Home is the guardian of youth, the consolation of manhood, the resting place of old age. And it should be the seeding place of virtue.

Unfortunately, the club and the public places of entertainment are today usurping the kingdom of the fireside. How few there are today who can still pour forth from the heart the immortal song, "Home, Sweet Home"!

Head of the Family

The family may well be compared to a living body, of which the father is the head.

He is the king of the fireside and the master of property, of happiness, of life almost. When he does not guard the sacred, inmost flame of love, there is discord at the centre of the family, the whole household becomes hypocritical, and each lies to the other.

Where the father leads, all will follow. When he gets down on his knees and prays to his God each day in the presence of the rest of the family, they see him and are strengthened.

But where the father does not lead, how quickly others in the family go astray.

Once a father and mother were called away for the night, and an aunt was asked to stay with the children, a boy and a girl. When bedtime came, the aunt got the little girl ready and asked, "Where do you usually pray, darling?"

"Sometimes at my bed and sometimes at mamma's knees," she answered sweetly. So that night she prayed at auntie's knees.

But then the good lady got the boy ready and asked, "Now, dear, where do you usually pray?"

"I don't pray!" said the boy.

"What!" exclaimed the aunt, unable to believe she had heard correctly. "Where do you pray?"

"Don't pray!" he blurted again. "I'm like Pa."

Comment is unnecessary. We need do no more than compare such an example with that shown in the following episode:

Some time ago a father was punishing his little boy for using ugly words and phrases he had picked up on the street. I heard that father say, "Did you ever hear your daddy say that?"

I wonder how many fathers can thus proudly flash the diamond ring of fair example?

Heart of the Family

Of the home, of the family, the mother is the heart as the father is the head.

Throughout history, mothers have been praised for the depth of their love. Christ the Lord, when He would show us how unspeakably great His love is, says it is greater than the love of a mother for her child.

But the love of a mother is not static or fruitless. If it is a genuine love, it gushes forth in an unceasing stream of Christian example.

Paradise is at the feet of mothers, and the future destiny of the child is greatly her work. The cradle is a sacred quarry in which souls are shaped for heaven by the chisel that only a mother's hand can wield.

A mother who would fail to bring up her little ones in the fear and love of God would be crueler far than one who would stab her innocent babe and watch its lifeblood stain the floor. And as the child matures, it would come to despise that mother's sinfulness.

One day a chaplain visited a prisoner condemned to die for murder, and begged him to make his peace with God.

“Think of what your mother would want you to do,” he urged gently.

“My mother!” cried the man with a fearful oath. “If she had taken care of me as she should have done, I would not be where I am today.”

But though fathers and mothers may properly be awed by the seriousness and complexity of their responsibilities, they can also take courage from the fact that there is no scarcity of example and inspiration. The history of Christianity is packed with stories of men and women who have found saintliness in parenthood. We would like to point out two such persons.

A Model for Fathers

Fathers will find a worthy model in Sir Thomas More, the English martyr who was canonized together with John Cardinal Fisher by Pope Pius XI, May 12, 1935.

St. Thomas' own epitaph gives a concise and accurate description of him: “He was a man courteous, affable, innocent, gentle, merciful, just and uncorrupted.”

He was, indeed, a model of Christian manhood, who was born February 7, 1478, and who lived and died under the Royal Bluebeard of England, Henry VIII.

St. Thomas did not subscribe at all to the notion that piety was dull or crabby. “A man may live for the next world and be merry withal,” he said. And his keen sense of humour, which sprang from his piety, was joined with perfect refinement.

At the age of twenty St. Thomas began seriously to consider his vocation. With the thoroughness which characterized his every action, he spent four years in a monastery with the Carthusians, to see whether perhaps the religious life were the life for him. He finally decided it was not his calling.

Having made up his mind to marry, he looked about for the lady of his choice. Now, John Colt of New Hall, Essex, had three outstanding daughters. But of the three, the second was the fairest, most favoured, and best talented. At first St. Thomas thought he was in love with this one.

But when he thought it might grieve the eldest daughter if he simply ignored her, he began to pay her some attention too. Before long he had taken a fancy to her, and, as a biographer tells us, “soon after married her with all her friends' good liking.”

In his remarkable sense of honour and his extraordinary fidelity to conscience, St. Thomas was sustained by his spirit of prayer. That spirit he carried into the family he loved so well. He would go to church with the members of the family; he would pray regularly with them.

When alone, he would pray still more. He would scourge himself, keep midnight vigils, wear the rough hair shirt. Then, too, he was “busy about alms and hospitality, and the guesting of the best Poor Man and most gracious Guest that ever was guested in this world.”

Men who live thus, even though they cannot perform the extraordinary penances of the saints, are always ready to die. That is why St. Thomas More, in 1517, when the terrible sweating sickness broke out, could calmly write: “Multitudes are dying all around us. I assure you there is less danger in the battlefield than in the city. . . . I am prepared for any event.”

In 1529 Thomas More became Lord Chancellor of the Realm under Henry VIII. Then came the king's hypocritical scruples as regards his lawful marriage with the good Queen Catherine. Henry wanted his Chancellor's support in his deceit.

He did not get it.

St. Thomas stood up in defence of the sacred indissolubility of marriage and against divorce. His sense of honour and fidelity to conscience asserted themselves.

Here is what they cost him:

The first thing was his resignation from office in 1532. From riches and honour to poverty and rags he sank overnight — for the sake of justice and truth.

Later he was called upon to swear to accept the new marriage of the king. This, too, he refused; and accordingly he was committed to a dungeon in the tower on April 17, 1534.

His simple home joys were over forever.

Then his daughter Margaret, the apple of his eye, came pleading that he conform to the king's wishes at least outwardly. Others were doing it. His wife pleaded, too, with all the vehemence, affection and piteousness of love.

It was of no avail. Thomas More's sense of honour and his fidelity to conscience were as adamant.

When the Duke of Norfolk (formerly Thomas' close friend) called upon him and pointed out that he must support the lustful king or die, the noble layman said: "In good faith, my Lord, between me and you there is but this difference, that I shall die today and you tomorrow!" How true!

And so he died, true to God from whom he had come, for whom he had lived, to whom he knew he would one day have to go. He was led out of prison on the morning of July 6, 1535, his face pale and lean, his eyes raised to heaven, carrying a red cross.

A good woman offered him a little wine to strengthen him; he refused it. "Christ in His passion drank no wine," he said, "but gall and vinegar."

When he reached the scaffold he bandaged his own eyes. Then came the blow of an axe — and that pure soul sped to its Maker.

The valiant St. Thomas More makes a fine model for our modern husbands and fathers, and what his life tells them in effect is this: "Be cheerful always; cheerfulness is the daughter of innocence and charity. Be kind and affable: kindness is the sweetest music in the world. Be gentlemen. A gentleman is a gentle man, one who never wilfully hurts another. Make your homes better, brighter, happier. Whatever you fathers do, let it not be said of you that "Home is the place where you are treated the best and grumble the most."

And to all your friends be what Thomas More was to them. "He seems born and framed for friendship," it was said of him. "He is a faithful and enduring friend."

A Model for Mothers

A model Catholic mother, a saintly woman not at all beyond imitation, is the mother of the Little Flower.

Zelie Guerin was a Normandy girl, whose father bought a comfortable home in Alencon, France, in 1843. She thought for some time that she had a religious vocation, but after intimate conversations with the Superior of the "Hotel-Dieu," (the local 'Hospital of God' run by some devout religious.) she was told it was not the will of God that she should become a sister.

She then occupied herself making Alencon lace, having several other ladies help her in their homes.

Daily she prayed that God would find for her a husband who would not only be a good Catholic but a fervent Catholic. She asked from God the honour of having many children who would all in some way be consecrated to Him.

One day, passing over the bridge of St. Leonard, she first saw Louis Martin, a young jeweller — noble, dignified, distinguished. An interior voice seemed to say to her: "It is this young man that I have selected for you."

They were soon after introduced. And they were married in the church of Notre Dame, Alencon, July 13, 1858.

"That in all things God might be better loved," was the motto of this husband and wife. Each morning they assisted together at the 5.30 a.m. Mass; together they knelt at the altar rail oftener than once a week (daily Communion not then being practised in France). They said the family prayers in common. Each evening the lives of the saints were read in their home. Her husband spent one night each month before the Blessed Sacrament. She fostered his piety with gentle approbation.

Nine children were born to them. Mrs. Martin was very busy and ever happy in the fulfilment of all the duties of motherhood. The two boys, the fruit of their prayers to St. Joseph, died before they were one year old.

The trial of death came. Her father-in-law died. Then her two little boys died. Then her own father died. Two of her little daughters died. They died in the Lord.

Listen to what Zelig Martin could say in the midst of these tribulations:

“When I closed the eyes of my dear little children and prepared them for burial, I was indeed grief-stricken, but thanks to God's grace I have always been resigned to His will. I do not regret the pains and the sacrifices which I underwent for them.

“People say to me, ‘It would have been much better if you had not given birth to those whom you lost so soon after their coming.’ I cannot endure such sentiments. I do not find that pains and sacrifices can at all outweigh or compare with the eternal happiness of my little ones, eternal happiness which, of course, would never have been theirs had they never been born. Moreover, I have not lost them for always. Life is short. Soon I shall find my little ones in heaven.”

The world would never have been blessed with the Little Flower, her ninth child, had Mrs. Martin been inoculated with certain current views!

“My children, you have a little sister!” the father sang joyously on that January 2 in 1873.

The frail little girl was baptized two days later and given the name of Marie, to which was joined Therese. The little one was ailing, and they thought she would die; but the mother cast herself before a statue of St. Joseph, that patron of desperate cases, and the baby recovered.

There was much illness in the family, but Mrs. Martin was ever prayerful, patient and resigned.

Of the baby Therese, who was so attracted by the Mass at the age of two, the mother writes: “My little Therese becomes daily more and more sweet and gentle. She gurgles and hums from morning until evening. She sings us little songs but it is necessary to be accustomed to her to understand them. She says her prayers like a little angel. It is ideal!”

And on March 14, 1875, she wrote:

“Therese looks and is well. She carries on with us the most amusing conversations. She knows her prayers. Every Sunday she goes to Vespers and if by chance we cannot take her, she cries inconsolably. Some weeks ago, on a Sunday, it was raining. She started to cry, saying that she had not been to Mass. Unobserved for a moment by us, she opened the door and in the pouring rain started down the street in the direction of the church. I ran after her and brought her back, and her sobs continued for a good hour. She says to me very much aloud in church, “Mamma, I have prayed well to the good God.” When she doesn't see her father say his prayers in the evening, she asks, “Why, Papa, do you not say your prayers? Have you been to church?” Since Lent began, I go to the six o'clock morning Mass, and she is often awake when I leave, and says to me, “Mamma, I will be very good.” And she doesn't move until I return.”

And what did the Little Flower think of this sweet and attentive mother who constantly attended her? She writes in her autobiography, “I am sure that had I been brought up by careless parents, I should have become very wicked and perhaps have lost my soul.”

Mrs. Martin died August 28, 1877, at the age of 46. Who can doubt that she went straight to heaven?

Parents and Catholic Leakage

Analysing the lives of the two people we have selected as models, we note that their common concern as parents was to provide an atmosphere of Christian love in the home, so that the children might know, love and serve their God and Father.

Both St. Thomas and Mrs. Martin recognized that their children would not be good unless their homes were good. And when we hear of Catholics giving up the faith, or lapsing into indifference about religion, we frequently wonder about the quality of the home life they experienced.

There is no question that one of the fundamental causes of leakage from the Catholic faith is the lack of proper home

training.

The remedy for such loss of souls is simple.

Parents must introduce their children to the Catholic religion at home, have them read up and study their religion, and get them to live it at home and everywhere.

Parents, who are God's representatives in the sanctuary of the home, must co-operate mightily with the priest. Indeed, theirs is even the more important part.

Home training is far more effective than the work of any school. From the citadel of the home Catholic parents must lead their children to heaven. As we read in the encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth: "That education, as a rule, will be more effective and lasting which is received in a well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family; and more efficacious in proportion to the clear and constant example set, first by the parents, and then by the other members of the household."

But perhaps you are skeptical and wondering if parents really are to blame for the many defections from the Faith.

Let us answer that with a series of questions:

If the parents are not to blame, why do they (to mention only a few examples) give the children too little work to do and too much idleness?

Why allow them such untrammelled freedom in their comings and goings?

Why that unrestricted use of the car to carry them over the road to ruin?

Why that indifference to their choice of friends and where and how they spend their time?

Why are those infractions of home laws so indulgently tolerated that the breaking of laws becomes a second nature?

Is this home education?

In truth, the guardians of the characters of their children are blind, or asleep, or shamefully indifferent.

Billy and Mary must be educated mentally, dressed stylishly, but who thinks half that much of training them morally?

Modern hygiene and health and cleanliness of body are constantly being stressed, but who ever dreams of looking after their moral cleanliness?

The Child Observes

Ordinarily, what the parents are, the children will be. They are the witnesses of the daily life of father and mother; they are keenly observant; and they are imitative to a high degree.

Do the parents show that they consider the soul more than the body?

Do they live for God and heaven?

Do they live good practical Catholic lives of prayer and piety?

Then their children will ordinarily do likewise.

Or do the parents go to Mass and to the sacraments only when they must, because driven by the precepts of the Church, and omit all else?

If so, they teach their children that the Catholic religion is a religion of law, whereas it is a religion of love. By their example they teach that religion is a cold, dry thing of rule and regulation and formalism, whereas it should be a strengthening, consoling influence that permeates every moment of earthly existence and gives to life its truest meaning.

It is the Mass that matters; it is made complete by Communion, the spiritual food without which our souls must perish of starvation; and daily prayer and the avoidance of sin are both the result and the preparation for the one and the other.

How can Catholic parents expect their children to pray, to read Catholic books and periodicals, to go to Mass even on weekdays when possible, to receive the sacraments frequently or even daily, when they themselves do not do so?

It is the solemn duty of parents to instil respect for authority into the plastic minds of their children. They must insist upon prompt, unquestioning obedience.

Children of our day would have their own way; they will start a row in the family if the parents do not accede to their wishes.

Does that mean that Billy and Mary must be permitted to do as they please, to go out when they please, with whom they please, and to come home when they please?

By no means!

When the children are young, the opportunity for training them is golden. They are like pliant saplings: they may be bent to grow in any direction. But let them grow to young manhood or womanhood in a spirit of disdain for authority — what power can bend the mighty oak?

But who is to blame for this defiance of authority when parents themselves criticize, oppose, condemn priest and Church and God Almighty Himself, when they take the part of their children against their teachers, when they themselves are disobedient children of Holy Mother Church?

Yet again, the primary purpose of the Catholic school is to teach the child the value of his immortal soul and the knowledge and love of God.

What proof of abysmal ignorance, then, for parents to send their children to pagan educators—and our Australian schools have many of them — where they are taught there is no God, where the words “sin,” “immortality,” “future punishment,” and the like provoke a laugh of derision.

Vocations — Negative Duties

Although the parents should exercise control over their children and establish a rigid discipline, we do not mean to imply that the parents should attempt to make every decision for the child, or to lead its life.

There is an immense difference between a reasonable supervision and a possessive domination.

In the matter of vocations, for example, we state unequivocally that the parents may not force any of their children to embrace a certain state of life.

Disregard of this command, which we may say is included in the Fourth Commandment of God, is a great injustice against God; for it pertains to God alone to determine what state of life any particular individual shall embrace, whether the married state, single life in the world, or single life in religion.

It is, accordingly, utterly wrong for parents to force their wishes upon their children by peremptorily demanding or insisting, for instance, “You must get married” or “You must become a priest” or “You must become a sister.”

God is first and by excellence the Father of all men; and with right may He indignantly address these presumptuous parents in the words of Holy Writ: “If then I be a Father, where is my honour?” (Mal. 1:6.) “God is the sole Father, whom we in spirit know,” says St. Gregory. And therefore He alone has the sovereign right to direct the understanding and sway the will of men.

Let parents ponder well the example of the Boy Christ in the temple at the age of twelve. Though it pained His parents deeply, He yet remained behind because God would have it so. As He said to them afterwards, “Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?” (Luke 2:49.)

What injustice could be greater than to choose for children a vocation against their will?

Both natural and divine law demand that he who is to take upon himself the burdens and obligations of a certain state of life and is to carry them all his life long should himself be the chooser, under God. We must never forget that it is a question of one's eternal happiness, inasmuch as one will more surely and more easily save his soul and thus attain his last end if he be in that state of life to which he is called.

And for precisely that reason, just because eternal happiness comes into consideration here, parents have nothing whatsoever to say by way of command. This is a personal matter of each and every individual. The holy Fathers of the Church are very serious in their remarks when they speak of the freedom that each one should have in the choice of a state of life.

And yet, how often parents are the greatest, the almost insurmountable, obstacles in the way of their children's following

that vocation to which their inclinations and qualifications and desires, and even the interior voice of God, call them? Misplaced affection and utterly misguided parental love is only too often the cause of such injustice towards God and towards the children God has lent them for a little while.

Vocations — Positive Duties

But in addition to refraining from the conduct described above, parents likewise have positive duties toward their children relative to their vocation — duties as much neglected as the negative duties above mentioned are sinned against.

Parents know their children; they know their aptitudes and inclinations. They are the educators by excellence, knowing their offspring as no other teacher can possibly know them. By prudent instruction, helpful counsel, and wise guidance they can greatly assist them in the choice of a state of life; they can direct them in that choice; and they can powerfully support that choice once it has been made.

The Catholic home should be the seeding place of virtue. Family prayer should abound, and instruction, and good reading. In such a home the beauty of purity and virginity, and the exalted holiness of the priesthood and the religious life, and the sanctity of the married state will be known and understood. There will be none of that blind groping and hazardous guessing which so often paves the way to a life of misery and unhappiness.

But, unfortunately, many children just grow up physically! They are not really home-trained and educated at all; they are only guided by the passions of their lower nature in their choice of the holy state of matrimony, and know little or nothing of the higher life.

Duty of Opposition

There are certain times when opposition to the proposed vocation of a child becomes a duty binding on the parent.

Parents may and must oppose their children's choice of a state of life which would be manifestly harmful. Such is certainly the case when that choice is in itself so dangerous that, humanly speaking, one cannot at all attain one's last end, God and heaven, or can attain it only with great difficulty.

We think, for example, of a mixed marriage. And we think too of parents, and especially mothers, who connive at such marriages and even do their best to bring them about, sometimes furtively aiding the son or daughter against the father's express command. Apparently, such parents have no proper spiritual evaluation of such things.

Again, parents should dissuade their children from the choice of a certain state of life when it is quite clear that they have not the qualities and qualifications necessary for that state. But here great caution is to be used and advice should be sought from those who are really capable of giving it, particularly from those who have the care of souls, and more particularly, from their own pastor. And, in doubtful cases, the children are to be given the benefit of the doubt.

Many a vocation to the higher life has been nipped in the bud by a father's or a mother's hasty and injudicious decision — a decision that was based, not on the true facts of the case, but on misguided love or earthly ambition.

“You'd make a fine priest, you would!”

How crushing a remark such as this when it is even probably untrue and merely an unjust and sarcastic deterrent. And the same holds good for the sisterhood. Hence, we repeat, consultation is imperative here. Find out before you dissuade, and only then dissuade when dissuade you must.

And lastly, parents must unalterably oppose their children's choice of a state of life when the latter have recourse to unjust, unlawful and sinful means in choosing and embracing that state.

The Decrease in Vocations

Related to this question of parental duties in the field of religious vocations is the recent decline in the number of women who have entered religious life.

Pope Pius XII, addressing 700 Mothers General called the decline “a very serious crisis

The reasons for the decrease in vocations for the sisterhood have been determined to be two:

(1) the changed position of women in the world, particularly their greater success in getting jobs as compared with their brothers, and the spiritual satisfaction to be found in various types of social work; and
(2) the increasing state of affluence in the modern home.

It may well be, too, that the greater freedom, the good times, and the pleasure-loving, amusement-seeking spirit of our age and country have something to do with the decrease.

But we do know from numerous letters received by us in the course of the years that a lack of appreciation of the religious vocation on the part of the parents keeps many a girl from the convent. Either the girls are absolutely not permitted to go to the convent or they are urged or forced to put off their going for years with the result that many eventually lose their vocation or reach an age when they are no longer acceptable. All sorts of inducements are often offered.

Parents should realize that, in all truth, it is an incomparable happiness, a font of perennial joy, a heaven-sent blessing of priceless worth, and a distinguishing honour for a Catholic family to have one or more of the children consecrated to God's special service for the greater glory of God, the sanctification of self and family, and the salvation of immortal souls.

The Ideal Catholic Home

It has often been said — and it is true enough — that the nation is but a magnified home and that what the home is the nation will be. So we may say that what the Catholic home is, that the parish will be; and what the parish is, such will be the Church at large.

If we look at matters in this light, we cannot but realize the infinite importance of the Catholic home, since from it must go forth the virile strength of Catholicity.

The perfection of the home should be the goal of every Catholic parent. And what this perfect, or ideal, Catholic home would consist of can be determined by a few moments' reflection.

To begin with, the morning and evening prayers would be said together. One or the other of the family might be absent occasionally, it is true, but that exception would only confirm the rule. The prayers before and after meals would also be said in common, either father or mother leading those prayers or giving that privilege to the youngest members of the family as they reach the age of four or five.

And would it really be too much to say the Rosary together in the evening? It need not keep the older ones from their legitimate diversions; it may be said just before the earliest hour when the little children go to bed. Added to this prayer of the Rosary would be the reading in common of a passage from the Bible each week or even every day. All this would not be transforming the home into a monastery or a convent, nor would it be depriving parents or children of their freedom and legitimate good times. In the ideal Catholic home there would be crucifixes on the walls and pictures of Christ, or His Blessed Mother, and of the saints. Not only would they be in the bedrooms but in the living rooms as well. And what a beautiful sight it is to see on the dresser in the bedroom or in some niche in any room a shrine of the Sacred Heart, Our Lady, St. Joseph, or any favourite saint with lights burning before it and lights around.

Each home would have such a little altar; and if it can be in a separate room where family prayers are said together, it becomes a family oratory and a hallowed spot of Catholic devotion.

There would be holy water fonts at the bedroom doors at heights that all could conveniently reach; and they would always be kept neat and clean and supplied with holy water. Those who go in and out would devoutly bless themselves.

All the children would be enrolled in the scapular and wear either it or a scapular medal. All the members of the family would have a rosary and a prayer book; and often other religious articles would be numbered among their dearest treasures.

The sick-call outfit would be complete and always ready. There would be a little library of Catholic reading, and among them the Bible would occupy the place of honour. There would be two or more Catholic magazines or papers, among them the diocesan weekly. (Religious reading ought to be more and more recognized as a practical means of fostering the spiritual life in the family.)

Among the spiritual practices in the ideal Catholic home would be a Christmas crib alongside the Christmas tree, gifts

that possess a Christian symbol, Christmas Communion together — and similar things might be said of other great feasts. The family would make real feasts of First Communion and Confirmation days, and would have a little celebration for the saints' days of each member of the family. The family would sing Catholic songs and simpler hymns, and tune in on Catholic radio programmes, and include some Catholic masterpieces among the record collection. (Catholic Television programmes, or the EWTN Catholic satellite programme of Mother Angelica, should be added to today's Catholic home. Surely you have heard of the Eternal Word television Network?)

Having the house blessed on certain occasions is another sign of a Catholic home, and so is preparing for big feasts by a novena and letting the principal meal of the day itself take on the nature of a festivity.

Individuals in the ideal Catholic home would participate in the various parish activities and let their membership exert its influence upon home life also.

Instruments of God

Today we need more homes that fulfil these specifications.

Whatever the so-called experts may say about the techniques of child-raising, machinery can never replace the guiding spirit of the home. No man ever said his prayers at the knees of a vacuum cleaner, or drew his first lessons of manliness from the songs of a phonograph or the good-night stories of the television.

For the child there is no substitute for the strong and Christ-like faith of the father, or for the tender and inspirational piety of the mother.

It comes to this: God has confided souls to those who reign at the fireside.

Parents are His instruments, and to them is given the magnificent opportunity of shaping souls for heaven.

What parent can afford to refuse?

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