

How to Raise Faithful Children

If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creature, teaches the Apostle (II Cor. 15:17). This new creature a Christian becomes in baptism. From the font a man comes out not at all the way he went in. As light is to darkness, as life is to death, so is a baptized man opposed to one who is unbaptized. Conceived in iniquities and born in sins, a man before baptism bears in himself all the poison of sin, with all the weight of its consequences. He is in a condition of God's disfavor; he is by nature a child of wrath. He is ruined, disordered in himself with relation to his parts and powers, which are directed primarily towards the multiplication of sin. He is in subjection to the influence of satan, who acts in him with power by reason of the sin which dwells in him. As a result of all this, after death he is unfailingly the child of hell, where he must be tormented together with its prince and his helpers and servants.

Baptism delivers us from all these evils. It takes away the curse by the power of the Cross of Christ and returns the blessing. Those who are baptized are the children of God, as the Lord Himself has given them the right to be: *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ* (Rom. 8:17). [...]

Grace descends upon the soul of an infant and produces in it exactly the same result as if its freedom had participated in this, but only on the condition that in the future the infant, who was not then aware of himself and did not act personally, when he comes to awareness, will himself willingly dedicate to God, will receive out of his own desire the grace which has shown its activity in him, will be glad that it exists, will give thanks that this was done for him, and will confess that if, at the moment of his Baptism, understanding and freedom had been given to him, he would have not acted otherwise that he did act and would not have wished otherwise. [...] And thus through Baptism the seed of life in Christ is placed in the infant and exists in him; but it is as though it did not exist: it acts as an educating power in him. [...]

Because of the more or less prolonged interval between Baptism and the dedication of oneself to God, the beginning of Christian moral life through the grace of Baptism in infants is broadened, so to speak, into an indefinite period of time, during which the infant matures and is formed into a

Christian in the Holy Church in the midst of other Christians, as previously he had been formed bodily in the womb of his mother.

Stop, O reader, a little longer on this idea. It will be very necessary to us to define how parents, sponsors, and educators should behave with regard to the baptized infant who is entrusted to them by the Holy Church and the Lord.

It goes without saying that after Baptism of the infant a very important matter stands before the parents and sponsors: how to lead the baptized one so that when he comes to awareness he might recognize the grace-given powers within himself and accept them with a joyful desire, together with the obligations and way of life which they demand. **This places one face to face with the question of Christian upbringing, or the upbringing which is in accordance with the demands of the grace of Baptism, and has as its aim the preservation of this grace. [...]**

And so, the whole attention of those who have the obligation of preserving whole the Christian child who has been received from the font should be directed **to not allowing sin in any way to take possession of him again, to crushing sin and making it powerless by every means, and to arousing and strengthening the child's orientation towards God.** One must act in such a way that this attitude in the growing Christian will grow by itself, even though under the guidance of someone else, and that he will more and more become accustomed to prevail over sin and conquer it for the sake of pleasing God.

Our attention should be directed to the infant in the cradle, before any kind of capabilities have awakened in him. The child is alive; consequently one can influence his life. Here **we should think of the influence of the Holy Mysteries**, and with them **the whole churchly way of life**, and at the same time **the faith and piety of the parents.** All this together constitutes a saving atmosphere around the infant. By all of this the life of grace which has been conceived in the infant is instilled mystically.

The frequent communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ (one should add as frequent as possible), joins His new member of the Lord in the most lively and active way through His most pure Body and Blood. It sanctifies him, gives him peace within himself, and makes him inaccessible to the dark powers. People who follow this advice notice that on the day when a child receives Communion, he is immersed in a deep calm without the powerful movements of all his natural needs, even those which are most powerfully felt in children. Sometimes the child is filled with joy and a playfulness of spirit in which he is ready to embrace everyone as his own.

[...] A great influence is exercised on the child by **frequently taking him to church, by having him kiss the Holy Cross, the Gospel, the icons, and by covering him with the veils.** Likewise, at home **frequently signing him with the sign of the Holy Cross, sprinkling him with Holy Water, the burning of incense, making the sign of the cross over his cradle, his food, and everything connected with him, the blessing of a priest, the bringing into the house of icons from church--the service of molebens--**and in general everything from the church, in a wondrous way warms and nourishes the life of grace in the child and is always the most safe and impenetrable protection against the attacks of the invisible dark powers who everywhere are ready to penetrate into the developing soul so as to infect it by their activity. Behind this visible protection (taking the child to the church, frequent communion, exposure to church life, etc), there is an invisible one: the guardian angel placed by the Lord to protect the child from the very minute of his Baptism. He watches over him and by his presence invisibly influences him, and when necessary inspires the parents to know what they should do for a child who is in danger.

But all these strong protections and these powerful and active inspirations can be dissolved and made fruitless by unbelief, carelessness, impiety, and the bad life of the parents. This is because the means mentioned here are either not used, or are used not in the proper way; here the inward influence of the parents on the child is especially important. It is true that the Lord is merciful to the innocent; but there is a tie which we cannot understand between souls of the parents and the soul of the child, and we cannot define the extent of the influence of the former on the latter. At the same time, when parents exert a bad influence, to some extent the mercy and condescension of God are still given to the child. But it sometimes happens that this divine aid ceases, and then the causes which have been prepared bring forth their fruit. Therefore, the spirit of faith and piety of the parents should be regarded as the most powerful means for the preservation, upbringing and strengthening of the life of grace in children.

The Influence of the Parents Upon the Child

[...] There is a certain special way of communication between souls **through the heart.** One spirit influences another by means of the feelings. The ease of exerting such an influence upon the soul of an infant is in direct proportion to the fulness and depth of the parents' feelings for the child. The father and the mother as it were disappear into the child and put

their whole soul into his welfare. And if their spirit is penetrated with piety, it cannot be that in some way this will not influence the soul of the child.

The best outward conductor in this respect are the eyes. Whereas in the other senses the soul remains hidden, the eyes open their gaze to others. **This is the meeting place of one soul with another.** Let the openings be used for the passage of **holy feelings from the souls of the mother and father to the soul of the child.** Their souls cannot help but anoint the soul of the child with this holy oil.

It is necessary that in the gaze of the parents there should be not only **love**, which is so natural, but also the **faith** that in their arms there is something more than a simple child. The parents must have the hope that He Who gave them this treasure under their watch as a vessel of grace might furnish them also with sufficient means to preserve him. And finally, there should be ceaseless prayer performed in the spirit, aroused by hope according to faith.

When in this way the parents protect the cradle of their child with this **spirit of sincere piety**, and when at the same time, on the one hand **the guardian angel**, and on the other the **Holy Mysteries and all of Church life**, act upon him from without and from within--by this there is formed around the newly begun life a spiritual atmosphere akin to it which will pour into it its own character, just as blood, the principle of animal life, derives many of its characteristics from the surrounding atmosphere. It is said that a newly made vessel will preserve for a long time, perhaps permanently, the odor of whatever was poured into it at that time. This can also be said about the atmosphere surrounding children. It penetrates in a grace-giving and saving way into the forms of life just being established in the child and places its seal upon him. Here also there is a protection that cannot be penetrated by the influence of evil spirits. Having begun in such a way from the cradle, one must continue it later, and during the whole time of upbringing: in childhood, in adolescence, and in young manhood. **The Church, its life, and the Holy Mysteries are like a tabernacle (tent) for the children, and they should be under it without leaving it.** Examples indicate how saving and fruitful this is (such as the life of the Prophet Samuel; the life of Saint Theodore Sykeote--April 22, and others). These alone can even replace all the means of upbringing, as indeed has been done in many cases successfully. The ancient method of upbringing consisted primarily in precisely this.

When a child's powers begin to awaken, one after another, **parents and those who are raising children should double their attention.** For

when, under the influence of the means which have been indicated, the longing for God will grow in increase in them and draw the powers of the child after it, at this same time the sin which dwells in them also does not sleep, but strives to take possession of these same powers. The inevitable consequence of this is **inward warfare**. Since children are incapable of conducting it themselves, their place is understandably taken by the parents. But since this warfare must be conducted through the powers of the children, the parents must strictly watch over the first beginning of their awakening, so that from the first minute they may give these powers a direction in harmony with the chief aim towards which they must be directed.

Thus begins the warfare of the parents with the sin that dwells in the child. Although this sin is deprived of points of support, still it acts, and so as to find a good resting place for itself **it tries to take possession of the powers of the body and soul. One must not allow it to do this, but must as it were, uproot these powers from the hand of sin and give them over to God.**

But so that this might be done with a good foundation and with a rational knowledge of the reliability of the means that have been chosen, one must make clear for oneself what it is that sin desires, what nourishes it, and precisely how it takes possession of us. The fundamental things which arouse and draw one towards sin are: **arbitrariness of mind (or curiosity) in the mental faculty, self will, in the faculty of will, and pleasures in the faculty of feeling.**

Therefore one must so conduct and direct the developing powers of the soul and body so as to not give them over into captivity to enjoyments of the flesh, to curiosity, to self will and self centered pleasures--for this would be a sinful captivity--but on the contrary, one must train the child how to separate himself from them and master them, and thus as much as possible to render them powerless and harmless. This is the chief thing in the beginning. The whole of the upbringing can later be brought into harmony with this beginning. Let us look again, with this aim, at the chief activities of the body, soul, and spirit.

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