



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

A Guide to Catholic Parenting: CATHOLIC PARENTS HERALD THE GOSPEL

At baptism when the celebrant anointed you with holy oil (**chrism**) he said: “As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always...” How, specifically, can parents imitate Jesus in the role of **PROPHET** so that children grow to mirror Jesus?

Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel or John the Baptist were inspired messengers of God – who did not speak their own agenda but delivered the message that they received from the Holy Spirit. The prophets spoke God’s word and will. Because they did they suffered death.

A frequent purpose of prophetic message was to urge repentance from negative behaviors and a return to the practice of God’s ways. Prophets warned that personal choices have consequences. Prophets also spoke of God’s promises and God’s love for sinners. They were agents of hope, consolation and mercy.

Jesus, the greatest of the prophets, repeatedly declared that he said only what the Father told him to say (John 5:19, 6:38, 8:28, 12: 49-50). Jesus **IS** *the Word of God*. Jesus spoke the Word of God, in word and action.

Loving Like Jesus

Parents function as prophets when they teach children how to love as Jesus loved. When a lawyer asked Jesus which of the commandments of the Old Testament was the greatest, his reply was LOVE! Jesus quoted the Hebrew Scriptures:

“ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’ (Deuteronomy 6: 5). This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18). On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22: 36-40).

The structure of the Ten Commandments reflects this twofold goal. The **first three commandments** illustrate ways to show love for God. The **next seven commandments** highlight expressions of love for neighbors. All ten are about relationship. They are the minimum ways, the bottom-line choices that cultivate a loving relationship with God or fellow human beings. Mature love freely exceeds minimum expectations.

Jesus told his disciples that the example of his way of life was the New Law. He said clearly: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13: 34-35). What did his love look like? He prayed, initiated interaction, respected differences, healed, forgave, taught, sacrificed, and even gave his life so that we might live eternally. His love was universal. He included all people, saints and sinners! His love transcended race, creed and culture. There is no limit to the ways that parents can be this prophetic voice for their children. A **prophet-parent** will have multitudinous opportunities to instruct a child to practice love that is patient, kind, and enduring rather than envious, boastful, arrogant or rude, irritable, resentful, and insisting on its own way (1Corinthians 13: 4-7).

Thinking Like Jesus

To be messengers of God, we must know the Word of God. Because Jesus is the clearest reflection of God the Father, we need to know how Jesus thinks, to understand his values, and to connect them to contemporary situations. **Prophet-parents** teach children love for the Scripture, particularly the Gospels, and they help children to become familiar with its messages. Strategies for accomplishing this goal are limitless. Some starter-ideas include:

- Read stories from a children’s bible.
- Make a collection of favorite Gospel sentences. Display them or post them.
- Play scripture games. Professional games are available in a religious-goods store.
- Encourage the children to act out the Sunday Gospel.
- Teach children how to use “Gospel ABCs”(attitudes, behaviors, consequences) to break open the Sunday Gospel. Choose a character from the Gospel. Name one attitude of the person, the behavior that surfaced, and the consequence of the character’s choices. What life-message or connection exists between the Gospel character and personal life?

Parent-Heralds are official messengers of the Good News. As John Paul II said: “By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are through the witness of their lives the first heralds of the Gospel for their Children” (*Familiaris Consortio*, #39). Embrace your call to be prophet to your child. God’s grace will guide and sustain you.

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