



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

CATHOLIC FAMILY CHARACTER – DEFINED BY LOVE

Love makes the difference between a house and a home! Parents initiate their children into the experience and meaning of love and, in so doing, children learn to love. The Catechism of the Catholic Church expressed it this way:

“Parents bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery—the preconditions of all true freedom.” (#2223)

Love is the core value of Christian family character. LOVE is the focus of this newsletter. Parents play a crucial role in creating a culture of love and right relationships within the family.

What Does Love Mean?

God is love and all love is of God (1 Jn. 4:16). Love is generative. Love serves the true good of another. Love is a choice. Love proceeds from the intellect rather than from emotion. Jesus gave the command: “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:17). He did not command that we like each other. Liking another person is rather spontaneous and connected with warm feelings, attraction, mutual likes, approval, and shared interests. Liking connects with pleasure, personal tastes, and reactions. To the contrary, love leads us to make a life-giving response even in the midst of disagreeable circumstances or behaviors. Love moves us to give when our human nature prefers to ignore, shut down, or shut out.

Love is an attitude that moves into action. Paul enumerated the look of love :

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” (1 Cor. 13:4-8)

Love involves sacrifice and renunciation of self—not the “stuff” portrayed in many TV dramas, MTV music selections, or the “Me, myself, and I” messages of contemporary society.

Jesus, Love Incarnate, said that selfless love is the defining element of discipleship (Jn. 13:35). In clearest terms he related love and obedience and named them as requisites for relationship with him: “If you love me you will keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). Earlier in his ministry Pharisees tried to trap him. Knowing that devout Jews considered all laws to have equal importance, they asked him to name which law was the greatest (Mt. 22:34-40). Jesus responded with a single word: LOVE! The specific rules were each expressions of love—love for God, love for neighbor, love for self. If the Pharisees of yesteryear and folks of today understood the meaning of the word “love,” then the teachings of Scripture would be fulfilled by the single command: “Love!” It gives meaning to the Ten Commandments. It overflows into the Cardinal virtues. It nurtures moral development through ages and stages. It is the glue that holds together even the divergent pieces of family life.

Live and Teach the Law of Love

Present the Commandments as guides in loving rather than a list of do's and don'ts. Speak of them as life-giving practices vs. life-blocking practices. The **Law of Love** is a guide to life: "Love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind [**Commandments 1-3**]. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself [**Commandments 4-10**]. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments" (Mt. 22:37-40). Refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church #2052-2557 for detailed discussion of the Commandments.

- ***Cultivate a Loving Relationship with God.***

Value God and your God-relationship more than money, power, prestige, or peer acceptance. Set your relationship with God as top priority and let all other choices flow from it. Show respect for God, God's name, and the things of God. Give courtesy and dignity to all others because they are made in God's image. Give public acknowledgement of your love for God by participating with reverence, attention, and devotion at the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy. Make holy the Lord's Day by remembering who you are and whose you are!

- ***Cultivate a Loving Relationship with Others.***

Honor parents and lawful authority. Revere human life in all of its forms: physical, social, psychological, and spiritual. Appreciate the gift of sex and avoid persons, places, things, or circumstances that exploit sex or are irreverent about human sexuality. Respect the property of others because it represents the other. Use all things in the manner that they were intended. Be a responsible steward of creation. Safeguard the reputation and privacy of others. Refuse to participate in gossip. Be faithful in friendships and relationships. Support the relationships of others, especially marriage. Appreciate what you have. Work for what you want. Replace envy, jealousy, and greed with affirmation, appreciation, and generosity.

- ***Cultivate a Loving Appreciation of Yourself.***

"Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mt. 22:39). Self can be written with a capital or a small letter. Capital S is your true-Self, made in the image and likeness of God. That Self thrives with prayer, balance, moderate use of the gifts of the world, healthy personal boundaries, proper rest, and proportionate use of leisure. Teach a child how to cultivate true reverence for the gift that he is

and how to balance self-care with the needs of the family. Small s self is the ego-self; the self of "I want, I need, I deserve; me, myself, and mine." Teach a child through example and words how to how to master selfishness. Remember the caution voiced by Emerson: "What you do speaks so loudly, I cannot hear what you are saying."

- ***Be the Compassion of Christ.***

Jesus witnessed to the love of God consistently. He welcomed sinners. He initiated conversation. He cured the sick. He ate with outcasts. He wept for Lazarus. He felt pity for the crowds, and he fed them. He felt a grieving mother's sorrow, and he raised her son back to life. He called people to conversion through his teaching. He even gave energy to console the weeping women in the midst of extreme pain during his Crucifixion.

- ***Teach children to imitate the love of Jesus by practicing the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy.***

Help them to interpret them creatively. For example, "to feed the hungry" goes beyond helping in food collections and soup kitchens. The hungry are also those who are starving for affection, understanding, friendship, forgiveness, etc. Involve the family in pursuit of social justice through joint or individual service projects. Help children to see how the Moral Virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude contribute to peace and justice. Through his actions he taught a social gospel. He said, "Whatever you do for the least of my people, you do it to me" (Mt. 25:40). Jesus worked for justice. We are challenged to work for peace, truth, and justice. Tolstoy expressed the challenge with these words: "Where there is faith, there is love; where there is love, there is peace; where there is peace, there is God; and where there is God, there is no need