



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

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

## CATHOLIC FAMILY CHARACTER – ROOTED IN FAITH

Faith is personal but it is not secret! John Paul II said it clearly: “Being disciples of Christ is not a private matter. On the contrary, the gift of faith must be shared with others.... Moreover, do not forget that faith is strengthened and grows precisely when it is given to others” (*Breakfast with the Pope*, #43). Parents are the first to bring their children to faith. Children ease into believing in their parents and believing in love when parents establish credibility based on a pattern of consistency, fidelity, and reliability. When children experience security in the parent relationship they are more ready to trust in the God who is unseen. When parents witness to the power and presence of God in their lives during mundane, ordinary events, children see that relationship with God is an integrating dynamic rather than an add-on activity or an afterthought.

Passing on the faith is the privilege and responsibility of Christian parents. Families that are shaped by faith develop a spiritual character that is based on truth, guided by principles, rooted in faith, shaped by trust, defined by love, and supported by grace. FAITH is the focus of this newsletter.

### Baptismal Promises—Formula of Faith

Like the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed that we pray together in the Sunday liturgy, the promises made at Baptism and renewed at Confirmation and throughout the Easter season are a **formula of faith**. Articles of faith are enumerated in the form of three questions. We are asked, “Do you believe?” and we publicly witness to our beliefs by proclaiming “I do!” At the conclusion of the interrogation we say: “This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus Our Lord.” Parent instruction transforms this ritual from formula to *living faith*. Let us examine these core Christian beliefs and some implications for a faith-filled character.

• **Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?** As father, God is pro-creative, loving, providential, and forgiving, and we are blessed beneficiaries—children of God—connected by bonds of relationship, not by fear. God is superior to all created beings: all-mighty, all-seeing, all-knowing, and all-present. God always was, always will be, and always remains the same.

God is constant. God is faithful. God is dependable. God’s love is unconditional. God created everything that is. God invites us to procreate (create with God), to build up, to mend, to heal, to include. God calls us to exert responsible stewardship for all creation.

• **Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is seated at the right hand of the Father?** Jesus is God’s love made flesh. Though existing from all eternity, at a moment in history he came to earth in the form and nature of a human person in order to redeem humankind from the separating effects of the sin of Adam and Eve. His birth into history was possible because Mary, a virgin full of grace (God’s life), gave the free gift of her obedience to the message of the Angel Gabriel. With the guidance of Mary and Joseph, Jesus grew “in wisdom, age, and grace” (Lk. 2:52). Jesus came to do the will of God the Father. That will is that we come to know that, like God who created us, we are love. We came from love; we are returning to love; and we are to be love in our world. Jesus showed

his love through his prayerful example, teachings, and miracles. This gospel (good news) questioned the “status quo.” It threatened those in positions of power. As a result Jesus was rejected, betrayed, mistreated, scourged, crucified, and died.

Throughout his unjust suffering, especially on Good Friday, he continued to proclaim in word, action, and purposeful silence that he chose to love! Like his Father, Jesus demonstrated that he loved even when people were hateful to him. On Easter Sunday he rose from the dead, triumphant! He appeared many times and conversed with the disciples. He promised to send an Advocate who would remain with us all days. Forty days after the resurrection he ascended into heaven.

• ***Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?*** Fifty days after resurrection, on Pentecost, the apostles received the Holy Spirit. They experienced gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, reverence for God, and awed wonder at the greatness of God. Through signs and wonders they preached Christ crucified. Listeners from many lands believed and were baptized. On Pentecost the Church was born—a church that is *holy* because its founder Jesus is all holy; a church that is *catholic* because it is universal, open to all people; a church that is *apostolic* because it is established on the apostles and their successors. The Church is a communion of the faithful who have died and gone before us and who now intercede for those still on earth and for those in purgatory. We believe that all sin can be forgiven and that one day our bodies will reunite with our souls to live forever in love for eternity.

## **Faith and Family**

This is our faith -- celebrated in the Sacraments and witnessed in the lives of Mary and the Saints. It is all about relationship with a loving God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Made in the image of God we, too, are called to create love; to offer redemption and reconciliation to those who experience brokenness through sin, failure or mistakes; and to support growth in holiness and wholeness. Faith sustains us in time of doubt and comforts us in times of loss. Faith is a theological virtue based on the word of God not on tangible proofs. St. Thomas Aquinas said, “To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.” Faith is a gift; it is not earned but it can be cultivated through example.

### **Following are ten suggestions for shaping a family character that reflects a faith-filled experience of God:**

- Recognize that God made you. God only makes good. God does not make mistakes.
- Strive for personal best. Do not make comparisons with others.
- Apply the slogan: “Good, better, best. Never, ever rest until your good is better and your better is your best.”
- Let expectations be high, but reasonable. When you ask too much of a child, you frustrate. When you ask too little, you insult!
- Value effort more than results, and process/ideas more than product. Often you cannot control results, but you do have command over your effort.
- Do your best in an endeavor and then release worry about the outcome. As Sebastian Temple proclaims: “Trust and pray. Go do your best today. Then leave it in the hands of the Lord.”
- See that all things have the potential for growth. You can learn something from everyone, even if it is what not to be! Everything and everyone has the power to teach you valuable life lessons.
- All things, turned over to the hands of God, can be used for your growth.
- You can learn more from your failures and mistakes than from your successes. Therefore value both success and failure. Let both be tools for learning.
- Walls or bridges can be built with bricks. It is not the brick that makes the difference but, rather, what you do with the brick.