



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

CATHOLIC FAMILY CHARACTER – SHAPED BY TRUST

One day Jesus encountered a dead child and her grieving family. He said, “Fear is useless. What is needed is trust” (Mk. 5:36). Jesus knew that fear paralyzes and blocks possibility. Fear holds our hearts hostage and leads to isolation. Trust in **Divine Providence**—that is, **God’s loving care for us**—opens us to find life even in the face of death. Trust in Divine Providence gives assurance that hurt will not harm. Jesus raised the girl to life and returned her to her parents. Peter, on the other hand, learned the trust lesson the hard way. He was doing quite well walking on water until he switched his focus from Jesus to himself and his own ability or inadequacy (Mt. 14: 28-31). At that moment Peter began to sink.

Without a doubt, parenting is incredibly complicated, fraught with tension, challenge, and many opportunities to feel inadequate. In the midst of the storm, Jesus invites you to trust him -- to discern what you need to take hold of; to know what is in your power; and to know when to let go. In other words, balance trust with intervention, take hold of effort, and let go of results. Practice this creative balance: “Work as though everything depends on you, but pray as though everything depends on God.”

Through the example of your life and the concepts that you teach your children, you weave Catholic family character based on truth, guided by principles, rooted in faith, shaped by trust, defined by love, and supported by grace. TRUST is the focus of this newsletter. Trust in God. Trust yourself. And give your children reason to trust in you.

People of Trust

God is faithful. Believe what God said: “I will never forget you.” I have carved you on the palm of my hands” (Is. 49:15). Take Jesus at his word: “I am with you all days even till the end of the world” (Mt. 28:20). “We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who love him” (Rm. 8:28). Trust that all things do work together for good. Recall past failures and disappointments that turned into grace with time. Let your experience teach you to trust in the present. God is God of the present! God is present to you at every moment of your existence, loving you, trusting you, and believing in you. For people of trust, disappointment becomes His-appointment. Learn to live through the tensions, to become better rather than bitter.

Mary modeled trust. She had no blueprint, nor script

for the future. She uttered her “Fiat” (Lk. 1:38) and welcomed God’s will to be done through her day by day. Like Mary, allow obstacles to become opportunities. For instance, when Mary observed a shortage of wine at the wedding feast she did what she could which was to raise the awareness of Jesus. Then she trusted her son, her mother’s intuition, and the relationship that she shared with Jesus. The result? Jesus’ first public miracle.

Children learn to trust when parents are reliable; that is, when the pattern of parent practices include routine, procedure, and system; keeping promises; and providing emotional safety, consistency, continuity, and predictability. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Live by the standards that you teach your children.

Parents also encourage trust within children by modeling how to deal positively with mistakes. A mistake can become the steppingstone for future success.

Teachable Moments

Mistakes and even sin become the context in which we experience *redemption, forgiveness, and mercy* [CCC 1846-1848]. These are core Gospel values taught to us by Jesus and celebrated in our Sacraments. During the Easter Vigil, the greatest celebration of the Church year, the *Exsultet* proclaims: “Oh happy fault! Oh necessary sin of Adam.” Happy? Necessary? Though it was never God’s intention that humankind would break relationship with him, the sin of our first parents and our subsequent sin cannot impede the mercy of God.

The Son of God is *co-eternal*, always existing with the Father and the Spirit; yet, it was not until “the fullness of time” that the Son of God took on human flesh and human nature to become our savior (*Sacramentary of the Roman Missal*). Jesus

introduced us to the concept of God as a loving father. Through his example of conversation with God and through the parables that Jesus taught we came to know God as extravagant in love, forgiveness, and mercy. And so we celebrate: “Oh happy fault! Oh necessary sin of Adam.” No thing, no sin is beyond the power of God to redeem.

If God so loves us, we need to imitate that loving acceptance with one another. Parents, apply God’s mindset to your mistakes, sins, and failures and to those of your children. Turn those obstacles into opportunities, into teachable moments. Instead of focusing on life-blocking attitudes, redirect the focus to life-giving antidotes. Instead of being paralyzed by what “I cannot do” or what “I should not do,” focus on the possibility of what “I can do.” By way of example, consider the seven capital sins and their corresponding capital virtues.

Vice and Virtue - Seven Capital Sins and their Corresponding Virtues

Vice is a habit or tendency toward a life-blocking behavior like pride. *Virtue* is a tendency that helps you to practice a life-giving behavior like humility. Instead of trying to control the vice (pride), be intentional about practicing its opposite virtue (humility). In this way you allow an obstacle to become the opportunity for growth.

1. Pride: excessive self-love, an exaggerated opinion of self, arrogance, a sense of entitlement. **Humility:** Christian self-esteem, truthful opinion of self, crediting God for successes and talents, appreciation for others. **2. Covetousness:** avarice, greed, excessive desire for wealth and possessions. **Generosity:** free gift of time, talents, or money for the good of others; stewardship. **3. Lust:** excessive desire for sexual pleasure, reducing people to objects for personal gratification. **Chastity:** control of sexual desires by conforming them to right reason and the Christian faith; modesty. **4. Anger:** emotion that resists anything displeasing; leads to quarreling, hatred, and violence. **Meekness:** mildness, gentleness, Christian courage, does the right with calm courage, controls anger, bears suffering without complaint. **5. Gluttony:** excessive desire of food or drink. **Temperance:** moderate use of food and drink, avoids overindulgence. **6. Envy:** resentment of another’s success, happiness over another’s failure or misfortune. **Charity:** love of others shown through prayer, acts of kindness, and encouraging words. **7. Sloth:** laziness; neglect of religious obligations, social responsibilities, or personal duties. **Diligence:** persevering effort, faithfulness to tasks, industry.

Aristotle remarked: “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.” Make it your habit to trust in God who will never disappoint. Trust in yourself for you are made in the image and likeness of God. Give your children reason to trust in you and in God’s power to take all the pieces of their lives and transform them for the glory of God.

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