



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

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

CAHOLIC FAMILY CHARACTER – SUPPORTED BY GRACE

Character—the distinguishing feature of personality and behavior that persists, regardless of outside pressure or personal temptation—is the result of a repeated pattern of practiced choice but not choice alone. **Christian character** is a reflection of God and inspired by God and perfected by God. Goodness manifested in any situation is the very life of God expressed through a person. It is the power of God working within us that makes possible virtuous living. How else could members of a family work through hurt, disappointment, anger, and frustration and come out on the loving end?

Home is the privileged environment for growth in virtue. Catholic family character is based on truth, guided by principles, rooted in faith, shaped by trust, defined by love and supported by grace. Grace is the focus of this newsletter. Only grace makes it possible for family members to apply the teaching of Paul: “*Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony*” (Col. 3:12-15). You might well think: We’d have to be like God to do that! That’s right! We would. And that’s why we need God’s grace.

Simply put, **grace** is God’s life in us. “Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help that God gives us” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1996). “Grace is a participation in the life of God” (CCC #1997).

Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a permanent supernatural disposition that makes it possible for us to live with God and to act by his love (CCC #2000).

Actual grace is more a grace for the moment, an intervention of God. Always we remain free to respond to any grace or movement of God within our souls. **Sacramental graces** strengthen faith and express it. The sacraments are encounters with Christ at watershed moments of our lives that make us partakers in the divine nature and mission of Jesus. (1) **Sacraments/Signs of Initiation:** Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, (2) **Sacraments/Signs of Ministry:** Matrimony, Holy Orders, (3) **Sacraments/Signs of Healing:** Penance, Sacrament of the Sick

Special graces (**charisms**) “are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common

good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church” (CCC #2003). **Graces of State** (the vocational states) are among the special graces. For example, these graces help spouses to exercise the responsibilities of marriage which includes the building of Catholic family character.

Believe that you are supported by grace. Rely on the promise of God to be faithful—to never forget us and to be our ever-present help in distress (Isaiah 49:15-16). Jesus promised, “If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it” (Jn. 14:14) and he promised to ask the Father to give us another Advocate to be with us always (Jn. 14:16-17). That promise was fulfilled on Pentecost when the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Paraclete, the Promise of the Father and the Son (Acts 2:1-4). Call upon the Holy Spirit to activate the gifts most needed in your particular circumstances. Remember that Jesus is in the midst of your family. He promised, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among you.” (Mt. 18:20)

THE GRACE OF HUMILITY

Humility means that you know who you are and Whose you are; that you recognize and accept your strengths as well as your weaknesses; and that you detach from your ego and attach to the promises of God. With St. Paul you embrace the wisdom that “My grace is sufficient for you for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12: 9). Humility recognizes that all members of the family have equal worth. Certainly the members differ in age, experience, authority, talent, education, and gifts of nature and grace—but they each are equal as persons in the eyes of God.

Humility leads parents to accept their role as leaders in family character formation. It readies children to accept the wisdom of their parents and the human condition of their family members. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarized the graced-duty in these words:

“In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family necessarily has manifold responsibilities, rights, and duties. . . Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them. . . Children, in turn, contribute to the growth in holiness of their parents. Each and everyone should be generous and tireless in forgiving one another for offenses, quarrels, injustices, and neglect. Mutual affection suggests this. The charity of Christ demands it.” (#2203, 2223, 2227)

As you live out your vocation ask for help and trust that you will receive it. Christian parenting is a vocation, a mission from God and for God that leads to God. If it is viewed merely as a job, it will break you. Daily renew your awareness that your vocation is a participation in the life of God. God’s love does not call where God’s grace cannot keep! God will be faithful. Strive to respond by being faithful moment-to-moment. Trust the outcome and your

BE AN INSPIRATION

Fidelity to the vocation of Christian parenting is inspiring. Actions do, indeed, speak louder than words. Your children surely agree with the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: “What you do speaks so loudly, I cannot hear what you are saying.” Be who you say that you are. Be who and what it is that you want your children to become. You are the primary source of inspiration in your home. Beyond that, be intentional about creating additional sources of inspiration within your family: (1) **environment**—physical reminders of the sacred in your home, (2) **customs**—practices to sprinkle family time with the sacred, (3) **rituals**—routines that integrate awareness of God into the daily events of family life, (4) **spiritual practices**—prayer, works of mercy, family Mass participation on occasions other than Sundays, family celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, (5) **personal example** of prayer and your relationship with God.

transformation to God for as the words of a cyberspace maxim proclaim: “If God brings you to it, God will bring you through it.”

You received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Baptism. Through your baptismal anointing you were incorporated into Christ and, like Jesus, you were anointed to be priest, prophet, king, and heir to the promises of God (CCC #1241). In Confirmation you affirmed this covenant and claimed the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit. Your baptismal mission is threefold:

- to be **priest**—to pray, to intercede for others, to communicate with God, and to relay God’s response to others, particularly to your family. Teach your family how to pray.
- to be **prophet**—a messenger of God’s word, whether it is convenient or inconvenient, popular or unpopular, to speak and to live the values of Jesus. Reflect on the Word of God, particularly the Gospel, with your family.
- to be **servant-king**—imitate Jesus through service to others. Lead your family to practice the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Weave the concepts of Catholic Social Teaching into family conversations and practice.