

St. Alphonsus Liguori: Advice to Parents, II

Saint Alphonsus Liguori lived from 1696–1787, and was founder of the Redemptorist order. Here he discusses the grave duties of parents to raise children in the love of God and the Catholic faith, reminding them that they will one day have to render an account for their children's souls. [Read Part I of this sermon here](#).

Part II

Let us come to the second point, that is, to the means of bringing up children in the practice of virtue. I beg you, fathers and mothers, to remember what I now say to you, for on it depends the eternal salvation of your own souls and of the souls of your children.

Saint Paul teaches sufficiently, in a few words, in what the proper education of children consists. He says that it consists in discipline and correction. "And you, fathers, provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord" (Ephesians 5:4). Discipline, which is the same as the religious regulation of the morals of children, implies an obligation of educating them in habits of virtue by word and example. First, by words: A good father should often assemble his children and instill into them the holy fear of God.

It was in this manner that Tobias brought up his little son. The father taught him from his childhood to fear the Lord and to fly from sin. "And from infancy he taught him to fear God and abstain from sin" (Tobias 1:10). The wise man says that a well-educated son is the support and consolation of his father. "Instruct your son, and he will refresh you, and will give delight to your soul" (Proverbs 29:17). But as a well-instructed son is the delight of his father's soul, so an ignorant child is a source of sorrow to a father's heart, for the ignorance of his obligations as a Christian is always accompanied with a bad life.

It was related that in the year 1248, an ignorant priest was commanded in a certain synod to make a discourse. He was greatly agitated by the command, and the Devil appearing to him instructed him to say, "The rectors of infernal darkness salute the rectors of parishes, and thank them for their negligence in instructing the people; because from ignorance proceeds the misconduct and the damnation of many."

The same is true of negligent parents. In the first place, a parent ought to instruct his children in the truths of the Faith, and particularly in the four principle mysteries: First, that there is but One God, the Creator and Lord of all things; secondly, that this God is a remunerator, Who, in the next life, will reward the good with the eternal glory of Paradise, and will punish the wicked with the everlasting torments of Hell; thirdly, the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, that is, that in God there are Three Persons, Who are only One God, because They have but One Essence; fourthly, the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Word, the Son of God, and True God, Who became Man in the womb of Mary, and suffered and died for our salvation.

Should a father or mother say, "I myself do not know these mysteries," can such an excuse be admitted? Can one sin excuse another? If you are ignorant of these mysteries, you are obliged to learn them, and afterwards to teach them to your children. At least send your children to a worthy catechist. What a miserable thing to see so many fathers and mothers who are unable to instruct their children in the most necessary truths of the Faith, and who, instead of sending their sons and daughters to Christian doctrine, employ them in occupations of little account, and when they are grown up, they do not know what is meant by mortal sin, by Hell, or eternity. They do not even know the Creed, the "Our Father," or the "Hail Mary," which every Christian is bound to learn under pain of mortal sin.

[Free clip from CHURCH MILITANT premium](#)

WATCH NOW

Religious parents not only instruct their children in these things, which are the most important, but they also teach them the acts that ought to be made every morning after rising. They teach them first to thank God for having preserved their life during the night; secondly to offer to God all their good actions which they will perform, and all the pains they will suffer during the day; thirdly, to implore of Jesus Christ and Our Most Holy Mother Mary to preserve them from all sin during the day. They teach them to make, every evening, an examination of conscience and an act of contrition. They also teach them to make every day the acts of Faith, Hope and Charity, to recite the Rosary, and to visit the Blessed Sacrament.

Some good fathers of families are careful to get a book of meditations to read, and to have mental prayer in common for half an hour every day. This is what the Holy Ghost exhorts you to practice. "Do you have children? Instruct them and bow down their neck from their childhood" (Eccl. 7:25). Endeavor to train them from their infancy to these religious habits, and when they grow up, they will persevere in them. Accustom them also to go to confession and Communion every week.

It is also very useful to infuse good maxims into the infant minds of children. What ruin is brought upon children by their father who teaches them worldly maxims! "You must," some parents say to their children, "seek the esteem and applause of the world. God is merciful; He takes compassion on certain sins." How miserable the young man is who sins in obedience to such maxims.

Good parents teach very different maxims to their children. Queen Blanche, the mother of St. Louis, King of France, used to say to him, "My son, I would rather see you dead in my arms than in the state of sin." So then, let it be your practice also to infuse into your children certain maxims of salvation, such as, "What will it profit us to gain the whole world, if we lose our own souls?" "Everything on this earth has an end, but eternity never ends." "Let all be lost, provided God is not lost." One of these maxims well impressed on the mind of a young person will preserve him always in the grace of God.

But parents are obliged to instruct their children in the practice of virtue, not only by words but still more by example. If you give your children bad example, how can you expect that they will lead good lives? When a dissolute young man is corrected for a fault, he answers, "Why do you censure me, when my father does worse?" "The children will complain of an ungodly father, because for his sake they are in reproach" (Eccl. 41:10). How is it possible for a son to be moral and religious when he has had the example of a father who uttered blasphemies and obscenities, who spent the entire day in the tavern, in games and drunkenness, who was in the habit of frequenting houses of bad fame and of defrauding his neighbor? Do you expect your son to go frequently to confession when you yourself approach the confessional scarcely once a year?

It is related in a fable that a crab one day rebuked its young for walking crookedly. They replied, "Father, let us see you walk." The father walked before them more crookedly than they did. This is what happens to the parent who gives bad example. Hence, he has not even courage to correct his children for the sins he himself commits.

According to St. Thomas, scandalous parents compel, in a certain manner, their children to lead a bad life. "They are not," says St. Bernard, "fathers, but murderers; they kill not the bodies but the souls of their children." It is useless for parents to say: "My children have been born with bad dispositions." This is not true, for Seneca says, "You err if you think that vices are born with us; they have been engrafted." Vices are not born with your children but have been communicated to them by the bad example of the parents. If you had given good example to your sons, they would not be so vicious as they are. So parents, frequent the sacraments, learn from the sermons, recite the Rosary every day, abstain from all obscene language, from detraction and from quarrels, and you will see that your children follow your example. It is particularly necessary to train children to virtue in their infancy. Bow down their neck from their childhood, for when they have grown up, and contracted bad habits, it will be very difficult for you to produce by words any amendment in their lives.

To bring up children in the discipline of the Lord, it is also necessary to take away from them the occasion of doing evil. A father must forbid his children to go out at night, or to go to a house in which their virtue might be exposed to

danger, or to keep bad company. "Cast out," said Sarah to Abraham, "this bondswoman and her son" (Gen. 21:10). She wished to have Ismael, the son of Agar the bondswoman, banished from her house, that her son Isaac might not learn his vicious habits. Bad companions are the ruin of young persons. A father should not only remove the evil he witnesses, but he is also bound to inquire after the conduct of his children, and to seek information from family and from outsiders regarding the places his children frequent when they leave home regarding their occupations and companions. A father ought to forbid his children ever to bring into his house stolen goods. When Tobias heard the bleating of a goat in his house, he said, "Take care, perhaps it is stolen, go, restore it to its owners" (Tobias 2:21).

Parents should prohibit their children from all games that bring destruction on their families and on their own souls, and also dances, suggestive entertainment, and certain dangerous conversations and parties of pleasures. A father should remove from his house books of romances, which pervert young persons, and all bad books that contain pernicious maxims, tales of obscenity or of profane love. He should not permit his daughters to be alone with men, whether young or old. But some will say, "But this man tutors my daughter; he is a saint." The saints are in Heaven, but the saints that are on earth are flesh, and by proximate occasions, they may become devils.

Another obligation of parents is to correct the faults of the family. "Bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord." There are fathers and mothers who witness faults in the family and remain silent. Through fear of displeasing their children, some fathers neglect to correct them, but if you saw your child falling into a pool of water and in danger of being drowned, would it not be savage cruelty not to catch him by the hair and save his life? "He that spares the rod hates his son" (Proverbs 13:24). If you love your children, correct them, and while they are growing up, chastise them, even with the rod, as often as it may be necessary.

I say with the rod, but not with a stick; for you must correct them like a father, and not like a prison guard. You must be careful not to beat them when you are in a passion, for you will then be in danger of beating them with too much severity, and the correction will be without fruit, for then they believe that the chastisement is the effect of anger and not of a desire on your part to see them amend their lives. I have also said that you should correct them while they are growing up, for when they arrive at manhood, your correction will be of little use. ... I have said enough. Draw from this discourse the conclusion that he who has brought up his children badly, will be severely punished, and that he who has trained them in the habits of virtue, will receive a great reward.