Are Parents Primary Educators of their Children?

One of the most fascinating characteristics we possess as human beings is the desire and ability to learn. Every moment of our lives provides us with an opportunity to gain new insight into things and then begin the process of applying this new insight in our daily lives. We place hope that this new formative knowledge will help us gain a better handle on the challenges of the day and provide an advantage for how we will handle situations in the future. The irony here is that this process of learning is what God intended for us. His clear desire is to seek Him and know more about Him. This is why his Divine Revelation is so important for us to know and understand because it is a revelation of love which took on human form in the incarnation of His Son Jesus Christ.

Relating this position within a biblical context the letter to the Hebrews tells us that it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who try to find him (11:6). What the author in Hebrews is telling us is that we must have a basic or minimum understanding of faith in order to comprehend our journey toward salvation with Christ. In other words, our natural aim is to have an intimate relationship with Christ that will hopefully lead to a union of grace with God in Heaven (salvation).

**The Parent as Teacher (Catechist)**

A child cannot learn unless he has someone to guide him and more importantly witness to him in a loving and charitable way. The premise of our human condition as created and ordered by God is to seek a relationship with Him if we freely desire. Our nature as children of God driven by our soul and intellect reflects a unique quality all of us possess i.e. to seek a relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we place this understanding within an authentic Catholic religious education context, our role as parents takes on greater significance because our principal aim is to help our children mature in intimacy with and in Christ. If this process is reflective of the parent child relationship then at the moment of conception we as parents should be preparing our children for this relationship with Christ.

Pope Paul VI sheds further light on the primal importance on parents being primary witnesses of the Gospel toward their children in that “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers. And, if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” (Evangelization In the Modern World, 41).

Our children mimic everything we do good and bad especially during early stages of development. These moments of imitation tend to stay with them as they mature in their intellect and will which is why our behavior and demeanor can either strengthen or weaken their understanding of Christ and His Church. One of the most effective ways we can evangelize and catechize our children is what St. Augustine describes “to be a beggar before God.” What this means an exercise in the virtue of humility (Lk 19:9-14) because it is an act of the will to submit ourselves before Christ. Christ reflects this point when he tells the Apostles; “if you knew the gift of God” (Jn 4:10).

**Teaching Our Children**

The meaning of the Greek term Padeia refers to a child, but it also means the instruction of a child within the context of culture. Hence our principal aim is to introduce an authentic Catholic culture to our children one that is visibly ordered to this way of living.

Parents often ask me; “what is the first thing they should teach their children about the faith?” The simple answer is show them how and what it means to live an active sacramental life in the Church e.g. immerse them in the Word of God through prayer; faithfully participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, expose them to the sacramental life of the Church i.e. begin the process of helping them understand their baptismal call. What these suggestions echo is that our children should know that they are part of God’s plan and that they have a unique place in salvation history.

Children need to know that they are part of the family of God as reflected in their own family. This serves as a distinctive motive of credibility that helps them mature in their Catholic faith. Here are a couple of suggestions to consider when catechizing your child:

* Be a witness of Christian Living to all. (Jn 15:5)
* Proclaim the Gospel i.e. daily scripture reflections. (Mt 28:17-20)
* Engage and participate in an active sacramental life e.g. confession and reception of the Holy Eucharist. (CCC 1324)
* Actively live a holy moral life in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. (Rom 2:14-16; CCC 1750-1754)
* Promote and witness an active prayer life. (Mt 5:23-24, 44-45; 7:21; 9:38; Lk 10:2; Jn 4:34)

Parents are the primary educators of our children. There is no substitute for what you and I as can lovingly and intimately offer our children in light of Jesus Christ. From the moment of conception our parental responsibility should be in high gear and involve preparing our children for their ultimate journey with Christ in Heaven. We are called as St. John Bosco would say: “to desire souls and nothing else.”