Are You Spiritually Neglecting Your Child?

Blessed Cardinal Newman once said that “Faith is illuminative, not operative; it does not force obedience, though it increases responsibility; it heightens guilt, but it does not prevent sin. The will is the source of action.” When you take a moment to analyze Blessed Newman’s words, they can easily be directed toward the spiritual relationship between parent and child.

One of the constant challenges any human being faces in this world is illuminating any form of faith. Because the human condition is in a constant spiritual tug of war between grace and vice our own free will is in constant need of seeking the Divine condition versus the human one. And because of this very fact, how we either assent or turn away from our faith in Jesus Christ will have lasting consequences to those who witness these acts i.e. our children.

**The Parent as the First Evangelist**

As a father of four I remember the day I REALIZED that every little thing I did or said around my first born son molded his Catholic world view and that of the rest of my children for better or worse. The first time you encounter mimicked behaviors i.e. mannerisms and words that come out of their mouths you are left wondering where those “things” came from and then all of sudden realizing with a shocked expression that they came from “me.” This becomes the time where we do not want our children to be referenced as “a chip off the old block.”

The manner by which we live out our kerygmatic (Gospel) call is tantamount to what our own children will perceive and apply in daily life. If our faith life is nothing more than a side bar in the grand scheme of the soul then don’t be surprised to see your child act out in the same way. When you honestly and earnestly begin to reflect on these things you have to wonder how our own lack of faith affects those around us especially our children. We are reminded to “be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48) whereas St. Paul tells us that we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

**The Call to Christian Holiness**

The Catechism tells us that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity (2013). In other words all are called to holiness. This means that our parental primacy should always be directed toward the spiritual well-being of our children. The book of Hebrews echoes this point reminding us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (11:1). Our participation into the life of Christ through the Holy Trinity sets the stage to faithfully transmit the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our children and in turn not leave them feeling spiritually neglected. If you think for a minute that a child does not recognize when a parent is not prayerfully interceding for them, think again.

The effect of our own spiritual progress cannot be achieved unless it is intimately bound with Jesus Christ. Our Trinitarian character cannot exist without this fundamental trait because it reflects not only a desire to know and live in Christ but it also reflects a willingness to die for Him by dying to self and embracing His Cross. When we honestly come to our prayerful senses; we know that Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity bearing these sins in order to free us from the bondage of sin. This means that our way of life is directed to actively denounce all manner of sin that takes us away from our duties as authentic disciples in Christ especially toward our children.

**Avoiding Spiritual Neglect**

A sound way to avoid the spiritual neglect of our children is to first make an examination of conscience and prudently reflect and discern those times you and I have not prayed for our own children. At times, what we as parents are dealing with spiritually often inhibits our capacity to pray for our children because we are so wrapped up in our own devices. Another spiritual method to consider is renewing your baptismal promises. This method allows us to reflect on the Creed which leads us to make a profession of faith to Christ and His Church. By nature of our baptism, we enter into a faithful relationship with Christ which calls us to live out our baptismal call. The Catechism expands this point even further:

The fidelity of the baptized is a primordial condition for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church’s mission in the world. In order that the message of salvation can show the power of its truth and radiance before men, it must be authenticated by the witness of the life of Christians. The witness of a Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have great power to draw men to the faith and to God (CCC 2044).

**Making Spiritual Progress**

Our spiritual aim is to always be in communion with Christ which in turn leads us to freely intercede on behalf of our children. Spiritual progress means a more intimate union with Christ. This union is called “mystical” because it participates in the mystery of Christ through the sacraments . . . the holy mysteries . . . the mystery of the Holy Trinity (CCC 2014). Our way of perfection must reflect the way of the Cross. The Catechism reminds us that there is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle (2015).

As I mentioned earlier our children do have a sense of knowing when we pray for them. Our spiritual progress is hinged on whether our devotion to Christ is reflective of our sacramental living in particular our faithful observance of the Lord’s Day. And this progress will indeed help us stay on course when it comes to the spiritual well-being of our children.

St. John Bosco, pray for us!