

Christ In The Home

Booklet 4

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Catholic Truth Society of Oregon No.fam069 (1953)

Daily Meditations for Parents on Marriage and the Home.

(Some years ago, we reproduced 8 'Booklets', numbered 1, 2 and 3, each in several parts. It seemed opportune to reproduce several of these meditations, which will be particularly useful for Catholic parents. We have chosen some of the 'Daily Meditations' that have been found to be particularly beneficial.)

MARRIAGE AND THE PRIESTHOOD. (1) Some Similarities.

THERE is a greater resemblance between the sacrament of matrimony and the sacrament of Holy Orders than is immediately evident. The encyclical "Casti Connubii" of Pope Pius XI does not fail to point it out. Here are a few similarities:

1. Although the sacrament of matrimony does not, like Holy Orders, impart a special character to the soul, it does consecrate "ministers" appointed to communicate grace. The priest is but a witness at the marriage. It is not the priest who marries but the man and woman who marry themselves, who by exchanging their mutual "yes", give to each other more divine life. A sublime dignity, which we have considered before.

2. Both marriage and Holy Orders give and sustain life. Holy Orders, supernatural life; marriage, natural life. The object of marriage, however, is not only the formation of bodies, but also the education of souls; procreation is nothing if it does not duplicate itself in education. It is up to the parents to get their children baptized, to prepare them for their First Holy Communion, to help in their religious formation, to assist them to remain in grace: a ministry, which paves the way for the ministry of the priest, makes it possible and doubles its value.

3. Marriage and Holy Orders are both "social sacraments"; they are not intended only and principally for the personal sanctification of the recipients but are directed more especially to the general good of the Christian community. The priest is not a priest for himself; he is ordained for the sheep entrusted to him; he is commissioned to work for the flock the bishop designates for him. Parents are not married only for their own good; they are married for the good of the children who will be born of them.

When the number of priests decreases, what harm results for the spiritual future of society! (Isn't today's terrible proof of this a real anguish for the heart?) If marriage is not undertaken by the fit, or the fit determined to fulfill its obligations, what harm will ensue for the temporal future of society!

4. Those who receive the sacrament of matrimony are vowed just as truly as is the priest to the exercise of charity.

For the priest it is clear. A bishop is established in the state of perfection by his very function, which is to spend himself — to the giving of his life if necessary — for the welfare of the faithful. Because he is perpetually in the state of complete charity, we say that he is in the state of perfection, perfection consisting in the more or less extensive and permanent exercise of charity. Priests share in this state of holiness of the bishop. They must spend themselves for their sheep, be ready day and night to bring them spiritual help, to do all in their power to instruct them in the Word of God, to prevent them from losing their souls, to lead them back to the fold if they are tempted to go astray.

The married are, in their turn, and in a broad sense, established to a degree in a state, which can, if they live it as they should, bring them to high perfection.

Ought not the husband exert himself with his whole soul for the well-being of his wife and children; should he not work and spend himself for love of them?

And what about the wife and mother? The pelican appears on the chasuble of the priest to symbolize his duty to imitate Christ by giving his very heart's blood for the faithful. Could it not also be a symbol for maternal sacrifice?

MARRIAGE AND THE PRIESTHOOD (2) Responsibilities.

PRIESTS receive Holy Orders at the foot of the altar, so too do the bride and groom receive the sacrament of matrimony.

It is as if the Church appointed the same place for the reception of both sacraments because she wished to emphasize the relationship between matrimony and Holy Orders.

Now that we have seen the points of resemblance between them, we are ready to draw some profitable conclusions:

1. The two who are married are called to help each other in the life of grace. Therefore, the couple will become channels in the communication of grace in proportion to each one's own wealth in the divine life. What a long preparation the priest must have for his priesthood — long years in the seminary, the reception of minor Orders before admittance to the priesthood, the retreats before each of his ordinations.

By contrast, how many enter upon marriage with no preparation. Even when they do prepare for it and give it thought, how superficial and brief their preparation is; how easily lost are the effects, by a flood of social events and distractions. Strange conduct!

2. The two joined by marriage will have to propagate life, and what is more, a life which will resemble theirs. A most frequent comment made over a new baby, a comment which is quite telling is "Why, he's his father all over," or "She's a vest-pocket edition of her mother." What if this is to be true morally as well? What am I, the father, like? Or I, the mother? Do I really want this little one to resemble me? Oh, no! I want it to be better, much better than I!

But am I free, as I go along, to weaken what I expect to transmit and what I expect to keep for myself? No. I can refrain from begetting children, but if I do have them, I must know that they will resemble me. I ought not to have to say as someone said, "My children will be like me, but you will have to forgive them for it."

Is that not a thought that should move me strongly to sanctify myself?

Since I am not only to beget children, but I must also rear them, ought I not examine myself on the degree of my virtue? Is it such that I can really contribute to the advancement of other souls, to contribute to the growth of the Mystical Body of Christ, to intensify the supernatural in the souls around me — my partner in marriage, my children?

The Cure of Ars once asked a priest who was complaining over his lack of influence on his parishioners: “Have you fasted, taken the discipline, struggled in prayer?” In other words, “Have you pushed your efforts in prayer, penance, and sanctification to the highest point?”

Perhaps I complain of my powerlessness with one of the children. Have I taken all the means to draw down God’s maximum graces upon me? Souls cost dearly. To be sure, there is always individual free will to contend with; it can resist God; it can resist the prayer and the parents’ striving after holiness. I may not get discouraged. Have I not perhaps been measuring out my generosity a bit too carefully? I shall try to reach the heights. We cannot lift up unless we ourselves are higher.

I should see, in the light of the parallel between the sacrament of matrimony and the sacrament of Holy Orders, the extent of my responsibilities. Like priests, I have a heavy responsibility. A magnificent responsibility but a frightening responsibility! If I am only so-so, I shall — according to the logic of things and barring a miracle of God’s grace — rear souls who are only so-so.

Is that what I want?

Have I up to now measured how far-reaching my mission actually is?

MASCULINE TREASON.

WOMEN have their faults; while they are generally more irritating than man’s, they are less to be feared. Man more readily betrays; he is more truly all of a piece; when he falls, it is the whole way.

That should not cause a wife to be constantly on needles and pins; it is harmful for the man and she does herself great harm by so acting, for nothing will as quickly drive her husband into another woman’s arms as jealousy in his lawful wife.

The knowledge of man’s tendency should incite the husband to watch over himself more closely to avoid imprudence that might run into flirtation, then into a friendship, then into adultery. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak, above all in the strong sex.

Even in cases where the quality of the person, the honor of the family name, nobility of origin would seem to give every guarantee of perseverance in good, we sometimes meet lamentable examples of a man’s infidelity to his home.

In the diary of Eugenie de Caucy, the second wife of Marshal Oudinot (1767-1848), it is related that on Sunday of shrove-tide 1820, there was a very spectacular showing of “Le Carnaval de Venise” at the Opera.

Charles Ferdinand, the Duke de Berry had left the theatre before the last act to escort his wife to her carriage. Upon turning to go back to his box, he was mortally wounded by the anarchist Louvel.

He asked for a priest and then made another request: “I want to see all my children.” The people about him knew only of Mademoiselle, the four year old daughter, the child of his marriage with the Duchesse.

His wife, the Duchess, did not dare to understand his request.

He explained, “My wife, I admit, I have several children.

“Through a liaison of mine in England I had two daughters.”

He died shortly after, asking mercy for his murderer and regretting from the depths of his soul, a little late to be sure, his unfaithful conduct.

Many thoughts suggest themselves on hearing such a story. First of all, think of dying in such a setting! Yet, there is certainly nothing wrong with attending a play if the play is morally good; we just have to remember to be always ready wherever we are; death can strike us in society and even while we are in the proximate occasion of sin.

Another more appalling thought is the wife’s ignorance of her husband’s life. How can a man so betray the one to whom he has pledged his faith? Furthermore, how brazen, to ask a young girl to be his wife, the cherished companion of his life after giving if not his heart at least his body to another woman! Truly, man is not charming! Not that woman is incapable of betrayal and of giving herself unlawfully, but we should like to think that it happens more rarely.

Finally a third observation comes to mind — the picture of this man lying in his blood, confessing his past and by this act of humility, which is to his credit, trying to redeem the failings of the past.

Thanks to God’s grace, I have not similar failings on my conscience. But are there not many thoughts, many desires, certain types of reading, much imprudence even in act, and unwarranted liberties of which I have been guilty? If those about me knew what I really am, how would they judge me?

MARRIAGE AND THE COUNSELS. (1) The Spirit of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience.

IS IT possible to arrive at perfection without following the evangelical counsels?

Put in this way, the question can have two answers depending on whether the effective practice of the counsels is to be understood or simply the spirit of the counsels.

1. Perfection consists in the exercise of charity as the duty of one’s state implies it. “Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” was said to all not just to priests and religious.

And again to all, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole soul and with your whole mind and with all your strength.”

The perfection of charity is commanded to all and not only counseled.

That the evangelical counsels are a help to the exercise of the virtue of charity for those who have elected to live by them is certain; they are not the only means.

The Gospel makes it perfectly clear: There is the observance of the Commandments — a necessity for all; there is the observance of the counsels — for those who desire it; those only would be obliged to adopt this second means who have evidence that without them they could not attain their salvation — a rare case indeed.

2. But it appears to be a very difficult thing to arrive at the perfection of charity without adopting the spirit of the counsels.

In fact, there are three great obstacles to the perfect service of God: excessive attachment to the goods of earth; the tendency to seek purely selfish satisfactions where the affections of the heart are concerned; finally the habit of obeying not so much God's will for our life as personal caprice and the false demands of the world.

From this, it is evident that the pursuit of perfection presupposes the spirit of detachment; it means using things, as Saint Paul would say, as if we did not use them at all. That suggestion is good not only for life in the cloister but every bit as good if not more so, in view of the greater difficulty, in the simple life of observing the Commandments. The spirit of poverty in either case is essential.

The pursuit of perfection while living in the midst of the world likewise calls for the spirit of chastity, the chastity of the heart — not to the point of having to deprive themselves of everything as those do who are vowed to the virginal state, but to the point of the privations necessary to meet the demands of the conjugal state. Therefore, the spirit of chastity is equally essential.

Striving for perfection in the midst of the world still allows the individual entire liberty regarding many of the details of life, the so-called good things of life as well as ideas, companionship, dress. The soldier Ernest Psichari yearned as he used to say, "to be free of everything except Jesus Christ."

Strive for obedience to God alone who said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all the rest shall be added unto you." I must not let "the rest" take precedence over "the Kingdom."

Obedience to God should not be marked by formal passivity but by vision and conviction. Let me measure the distance from the place I am now to the summit of Christianity.

MARRIAGE AND THE COUNSELS. (2) Restoring Some Harmony.

THIS subject has too great significance for one meditation only.

Before the Fall, there was a triple harmony in man:

Harmony between God and the soul: Adam and Eve conversed familiarly with the Most High who used to walk with them at twilight in Paradise; He often left His footprints in the sands of their garden.

Harmony within man himself between his body and soul:

The senses were active but they were submissive to reason and will; concupiscence existed but it was just concupiscence not evil concupiscence; the powers of desire were not inordinate.

Harmony all about man, between him and nature: The animals were subject to him and were not hostile to him. Inanimate nature did not refuse its secrets to his work, which was but a joyous extension of his activity and not as it has become in part at least — fatiguing labor. "You shall eat your bread in the sweat of your brow."

Then came the Fall. Immediately this beautiful balance was destroyed. Man revolted against God. The result: Man's senses rose up against right reason, and against the will enlightened by faith; nature and all about man turned hostile. There would be wild beasts and venomous creatures among the animals; the earth would resist his toil and the labor of generations to come, revealing its treasures only with discouraging parsimony and at the cost of fearful toil and sweat.

What should be most profitable for my meditation is the consideration of the revolt in man himself, his lower powers against his higher powers. From then on, man would have to struggle against the triple and fatal inclination, which was born in him:

An inclination to take an exaggerated possession of the goods of the earth, the fruit of concupiscence of the eyes:

Man will rush after all that glitters. How many crimes have been committed because of an unregulated love of money!

An inclination to seek after excessive carnal satisfactions contrary to true discipline of the senses and the commands of God. What crimes have not the follies of lust produced!

An inclination to pride: Man, proud of his liberty, but not sufficiently concerned about keeping it in dependence on reason and the Divine Will, runs the risk of forgetting the majesty and sovereignty of God and the prime duty of obedience to the Master of all.

How can one struggle effectively against this triple and dangerous inclination?

Do violence to self, declare spiritual writers with good common sense. First and foremost among them in suggesting this technique is Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Choose the counterpart: poverty, chastity, obedience.

Religious men and women make it the matter of a vow. Their lives serve as an inspiring example to draw forward those whose lesser courage or less demanding vocation have kept in the common way of life.

I shall hold religious life in high esteem. Although my vocation is different, I shall learn to live in a wise spirit of detachment from created things, of chastity according to my state, and of obedience to the Holy Spirit.

MARRIAGE AND VOWS.

THE problem of personal vocation, as I have seen from my meditations, is not a problem to be solved in the abstract, in pure theory, but in the concrete, taking each particular case into consideration. The best vocation in an individual case is not the vocation which is best in itself but the best in fact, that is the one which Divine Providence prepares for each person.

I have recognized mine quite clearly. I have no worry on that score.

Without wishing to belittle in the least the merits of those who pronounce religious vows — for they are privileged souls — can I not in a way compare my life with theirs and find a resemblance between them?

In the writings of his mother, which the poet Lamartine published, we find these lines:

“Today I attended the Investment of some hospital sisters. The sermon which was addressed to them was beautiful: The speaker told them that they had chosen for life a state of penance and of mortification. A crown of thorns was placed upon their heads to symbolize this... I greatly admired their self-sacrifice; but I reflected that the state of a mother of a family can approach the perfection of theirs if she fulfills her duties.

“A person doesn’t give enough thought to the fact that when she marries, she also makes a vow of poverty since she practically puts her fortune into her husband’s hands, and that he has something to say about how she spends money.

“She makes a vow of obedience to her husband and a vow of chastity inasmuch as she is not permitted to seek to please any other man. She also dedicates herself to the exercise of charity toward her husband and her children; she has the obligation to care for them in sickness and to give them her wise counsel.”

Isn’t there much truth in this comparison? Evidently, in the case of marriage, husbands and wives are largely compensated for the sacrifices they have to make by the joy that comes to them from life together. In the virginal state, there is no such human compensation. That is no reason to underestimate the value of the married state. Because the one state is more beautiful, it does not follow that the other is not very beautiful.

It may well be that a certain father or mother who hesitated before entering the married state because they felt called to the life of consecrated virginity fulfilled God’s plans for religious vocations better by their marriage; God used them as instruments for a series of vocations that would develop among their offspring.

When (Saint) Pius X was promoted to the bishopric of Mantua, he paid a visit to his mother at Riese. “Mamma, look at my beautiful episcopal ring.” His eighty year old mother let her wrinkled fingers pass over the ring thoughtfully. Then she said, “It is true, Giuseppe; your ring is beautiful; but you would not have had it, if I had not had this one,” and she held up her wedding ring.

THE SOCIAL IDEAL.

YOUNG Maurice Retour found himself at the head of a textile factory upon the early death of his father.

Shortly before his marriage, he wrote to his bride-to-be.

“To know that more than three hundred persons depend on you for their daily bread, to be certain that with work, intelligence, and patience you can make them earn more, what else would you need to become inspired with the desire to discover all possible improvements.”

He let his fiancée know that he planned to have her share in the furtherance of his enterprise. He added:

“To be a Christian, to have the happiness of knowing your wife will one day work hand in hand with you, to feel that you possess this sister-soul to help bring to success the noble and beautiful ideal you dreamed of accomplishing is almost too great a bliss; it’s enough to make you beside yourself with joy.”

The young industrialist, in full agreement with his wife, set himself to the duty of providing the desired improvements: a free Saturday, a cafeteria for the workers, a benefit fund. Naturally, he was criticized by his fellow industrialists who did not have a like Christian sense. But he held his own and went even farther. Sometimes before some of his reforms, which had as their only purpose better conditions for the workers, a number of the workers themselves either from force of habit or from ill-will evidenced displeasure. He still kept to his plan, tried to win them over and was patient with them.

In spite of his firm principles, the exactness of his economic and sociological knowledge, his good judgment, his Christian spirit, which guaranteed the usefulness of his efforts, he was still eager to be supported in his labors; he told his wife his difficulties and asked for her opinion and advice. He counted on her either to help him to study and to grow in his understanding of social problems or more often still to have a part in his work.

In the fight against alcoholism, in the care of the workers' children, in the visitation of the sick, in planning for big celebrations, in organizing vacation camps, what a wide field there was for the wife of an industrialist!

Maurice Retour did not believe in getting himself involved in so many activities that he would neglect his factory; interest in free schools, attendance at Saint Vincent de Paul meetings were all fine, but they should not separate him from his factory.

“We ought to think first of our workers, of their children, of those who are in our direct contact, in order not to scatter our efforts in all directions uselessly. Let us try to sow a bit of happiness about us... Let us give as much as we can to others... We are responsible for the good we do not do... All our life spent in this work, hand in hand, united in the same ideal, the same faith, the same great love, would not be too much.”

From the Western Front in 1915, he often wrote asking for news: “Tell me about our dear workers of whom I think so often.”

What a god-send when a wife finds in her husband such a magnificent social spirit; when an industrialist finds in his wife someone who understands him and backs him up!

THE HOME.

GREAT ADVENTURERS.

CHARLES PEGUY, the great French poet, called all fathers of families, “these great adventurers of the modern world.”

How correct he was! What courage is needed to step out before life, with a companion on one's arm, aspiring to have children and hoping that Mother Earth will be able to support and nourish their own little world!

Certainly, the joy that attends the birth of a babe is sweet. Here is how a father describes it:

When one sees a little one so weak yet so well formed one loves the Creator still more and how much more one thanks Him for giving us life! What a beautiful mystery maternity is! To see a young mother feeding her babe suffices to incite one to adore God. There is nothing more touching than to see this dear little treasure resting in the arms of its mother. It was baptized on March 28. What a majestic ceremony it was and how proud one feels to be able to say his son is a Christian!

But what anguish is suffered if the children are sick; if the mother's strength fails beneath her work. How anxious one grows when the little ones cough and gasp for breath. And even if all goes well as far as health is concerned, there is no end to buying clothes, having shoes resoled, and providing food for the ever hungry mouths.

When the children grow up, one must be concerned about their education. One must start thinking about high school and college for the boys and the girls. Which school is best? Which teachers are

best qualified? Will they take the same interest in our children that we the parents do? Will they give them what they really need to face life?...

Then come the sudden worries — auto accidents, accidents in sports, war in which the worst bodily dangers threaten!

But worse still and more serious by far are the soul dangers — the boy who keeps bad hours, who has an evil tongue and a shifty glance, who evades questions and begins to lie.

Yes, indeed, what magnificent and courageous adventurers are fathers of families!

A reporter recounted the enthusiastic acclaim the people of Paris gave the intrepid sailor Alain Gerbault who had succeeded in sailing around the world in a very frail skiff after 700 days at sea, in 1929.

“For my part,” said the reporter, “I gave to Alain Gerbault the recognition that was his due.”

But in the crowd that had gathered about the famous sailor, the newspaper man found himself next to a family of rather humble means to judge by their appearance, although they did not lack dignity. There were five children with the father and mother, all modestly and neatly dressed. The father was explaining to his sons, “Oh, what an admirable type is this Gerbault! What a hero!”

“I shared that idea,” commented the reporter, “but I thought that father was also a hero to pilot a skiff loaded down with children on the Parisian ocean as he was doing... I even wondered if it were not more admirable than to guide a boat on the high sea with only oneself to think of.”

THE PSALM OF YOUNG MOTHERS.

A YOUNG mother — very true to her role of mother and at the same time very artistic — got the idea of comparing her role with that of cloistered sisters. Between her washing, her cooking and the care of her youngest, she managed to compose “The Psalm of Young Mothers” which appeared in the 8 November, 1941, issue of “Marriage Chretien.” It is full of love, full of spontaneity. Every young mother will recognize herself in these passages we are quoting:

“O my God,
Like our sisters in the cloister
We have left all for you;
We have not imprisoned the youth of our faces in a gimp
and under a veil,
And though we have cut our hair, it is not in any spirit
of penance...

Deign nevertheless, O Lord, to cast a look of complaisance
On the humble little sacrifices
Which we offer You all day long,
Since the day our groaning flesh gave life to all these little Christians
We are rearing for You.

Our liberty, O God, is in the hands of these little tyrants
who claim it every minute.
The house has become our cloister,
Our life has its unchanging Rule,

And each day its Office, always the same;
The Hours for dressing and for walks,
The Hours for feeding and for school,
We are bound by the thousand little demands of life.

Detached by necessity every moment from our own will,
We live in obedience.

Even our nights do not belong to us;
We too have our nocturnal Office,
When we must rise quickly for a sick child,
Or when between midnight and two o'clock,
When we are in the full sleep we need so badly
A little untimely chanter
Begins to sing his Matins.

We practically live retired from the world:
There is so much to be done in the house.
There is no possibility of going out anyway
without a faithful sitter for the little ones.
We measure out the time for visits parsimoniously.
We have no sisters to relieve us on another shift.

And when the calls for service reach high pitch for us
We have to sweep, to wash the dishes, scrape the carrots
for the stew, prepare a smooth puree for baby
and keep on going without stopping
From the children's room to the kitchen and to and fro.
We do big washings, we rub and we rinse
Aprons and shirts, underclothes and socks
And all the baby's special things.

In this life of sacrifice, come to our help, O Jesus!

UP TO DATE.

ONE of our modern novels gives us the following situation: Gina Valette is a woman who is "up to date" in the unpleasant sense of the term. Very rich and provided with a husband who thoroughly spoils her, she has dogs, cats, a parrot, and a monkey, but no children. Her brilliant existence palls on her. Among her friends are mothers with children who courageously use their modest resources to advantage and rear quite a family. Often when an epidemic breaks out among the children of a family, a friend of the family will take two or three of the others for the time.

To cure Gina of her depressed spirits, her friend Jamine persuades her to take young Gilles Perdrinix whose five brothers and sisters have the chickenpox. Gina is bewildered; she knows perfectly how to care for a monkey but she finds herself embarrassed before this little Perdrinix boy who judged her severely from the height of his four years.

"How ignorant she is! How much is lacking in her training!" Little Gilles sighed to think of it. "She knows how to smoke," he said to himself sadly, "but she can't give me a lift to button my shirt." He

did not complain nor did he reproach her; but on seeing her so clumsy, he thought she had much to learn to become a woman like other women.

Happily, there are other kinds.

A mother of a family and a brilliant author wrote in the preface of a volume on "The Mother" which she was requested to write by the editor of a series entitled "The Up to Date Woman," "How shall I ever write this little book? There are no up-to-date mothers. There are only Mammams."

And with charming dash coupled with irresistible conviction, she gave young wives this advice:

"Little Lady, you are embarking upon married life on the arm of a husband who is all taken up with you, who probably wants nothing more than to believe in you, to follow you and to approve of everything that touches the essence of your being. Do not listen to those frustrated women or those soured unmarried girls, or those Jezebels who have nothing of the matron about them but their age and have no real experience; do not let them draw you out of the right way. Be convinced, that the joy, which babies bring, is inexpressible and makes up for all the torment and fatigue of bearing them. Be certain that the sight of that plump, smooth little body; of those dimpled hands and feet, both like pink silk yet provided with sharp nails; of that darling little mouth with its toothless smile, so simple and so trustful that the bright look, so marvelously pure, the soft cheeks, the silky hair, the utter quiet abandonment of this little being who issued forth from us floods our soul with an intense and intimate ecstasy such as I have never known before.

If only the up-to-date woman would be a mother for the future.

After the dark hours of the war, new life must be born.

There will be lives only if there are mothers, mothers who respond to their essential and divine vocation.

Even if there were not this motive of special need, eternal reasons still have force — the law of fecundity and the law of chastity:

Although it is permissible for married persons to abstain from the conjugal act or to perform it only when there is the least possibility of conception provided their reasons are not selfish; if they do perform the marital act they may do nothing to prevent the generation of a life which is in the plan of God. That is clear.

Give me, O my God, the grace through respect for You and for Your work, always to have a devotion to and a respect for life; grant that I may never sully my own existence by any criminal attempt upon new life. Grant me also the grace to be in Your Hands a not too unworthy instrument of Your creative power. Let me be "up-to-date" whenever it is a question of enrolling a new name in the Book of Life.

PATERNAL SOLICITUDE.

IN ORDER to fulfill his task conscientiously, a father needs singular qualities.

First among these qualities is an unflinching courage. In homes where life is easy — and in what family today is life easy — he can rest on the fortune amassed by his ancestors. But that melts so soon. In homes where the family lives truly on the daily bread, how much he must exert himself to earn that bread for the day. There's more than one meal that has to be provided for a single day. And the clothing? And the shoes? And the bills — from the doctor, the pharmacist, the grocer? Days

follow upon each other, weeks overlap and months roll by; the home is augmented by one more. How shall he cope with this world of his?

With courage, the father needs a quiet confidence in God. Surely, if they understand their duty well, true fathers know how to space births somewhat without failing in the least against the laws of marriage; and this for some requires heroic courage. But even then when one does not tempt Divine Providence but lives in a prudent and continent moderation, it is still necessary in order to keep above the surface of life to cast anchor in the deep and wait for the desired help from God — imperturbably serene through it all.

And who will measure the untiring patience that he will need to bear those almost necessary difficulties of character in a most loving and attentive wife; to endure the crying and weeping of the babies at night; to bear with the noisy games of the growing children when he wants to work in quiet; to try to make the income at least balance expenses; to build up a declining business; to find new openings for his products; to develop a better and wider clientele? Patience alone will see him through!

How he will need authority with the children to reinforce the mother's control who, either because she is too busy or too easy going, lets them take advantage of her now and then!

He will not have this authority without insight, which will help him distinguish the predominant character traits of each child and determine the best means to provide for the training of all so that their virtues are developed and their faults are checked; to read their souls, their inmost thoughts, the progress of their dreams for the future...

All in all, what skill, what firmness, what adaptability, what sanctity he will need! And here is just a poor father consecrated such by circumstances and who, just a young fellow himself, has never weighed his future responsibilities — or not very seriously weighed them!

'Oh, how deeply I feel, Holy Virgin Mary, that you must help me. Our Lady of great courage, give me strength! Virgin most patient, give me patience! Seat of Wisdom, give me insight into characters! Mother and Queen of Jesus, give me a gentle, but firm authority!'

'Holy Mary, give me holiness more than all else! I have not attained the degree God wants of me for my mission in life; I am well aware of that. Draw me, O Immaculate Virgin, draw me to the heights; you are so near to God; you dwell in the radiance of His light and His omnipotence; lead me on, higher!'

THE FAMILY.

THE family, a workshop of life for earth, a workshop for eternity!

1. A Workshop of Life: What power to have control over the creation of life! God, who could have created human beings all by Himself wished to give His creatures the gift of a power, which belonged only to Him. Consequently, souls will not come into the light unless parents consent to it. They will not create souls, to be sure, but by generating bodies, they furnish God the means of increasing the number of souls.

Have I meditated often enough upon this magnificent power, which has been conferred on me? A power, which I share equally with her who is the companion of my existence? Have I meditated on the glory of fatherhood? The glory of motherhood? Have I considered what a grave sin it is to place

the act which generates life and then to prevent through perverted will the coming of life to a potential human being? Or to snuff out the life which is developing in the womb of the mother?

The author of the novel "Jeanne," though not a Christian, clearly pleads the cause of Christian morals in the play he produced from his novel. The following scene gives in brief the theme of the whole play:

MADELEINE — Jeanne is always present... Do you know the dream I often have? I see a little hand, which is trying to open a door. We are very comfortable you and I and we both push against the door with all our strength so that Jeanne cannot come in to take away a little of our ease, our luxury, our warmth... Then the little hand falls down and we begin to count gold pieces so as not to hear anything... A little whimper...

ANDRE — That's a nightmare!...

MADELEINE — For you yes. Remorse is a policeman...

ANDRE — Don't you love me anymore, Madeleine?

MADELEINE — Since we were accomplices... I loved you to folly, but this love was snatched away with my child. When I came back from that abortionist, you noticed no change in my attitude. But Andre it was another woman you clasped in your arms... a sort of dead...

ANDRE — Then, always, forever, that will be between us?

MADELEINE — Not between us, with us!

Have I ever thought of the tragic intimate dramas that conjugal cheating gives rise to in the lives of parents? Have I thought of the harm done to society in times of peace? To the country I love, weakening its defenses, threatening its safety in times of war? To the Church who would have had some saints among those children who were denied birth, in any case, some priests and religious... Have I thought of all that?

2. A Workshop for Eternity: The family not only contributes an increase to earthly existence but it also increases more divine life on earth, and that in two ways — from the moment of its establishment and later: The day the man and woman receive the sacrament of Matrimony, they produce, if we may so dare to speak, more divine life; each of the two become richer in the life of the Trinity within themselves; the Eternal is intermingled to a greater degree in the existence of both. Then come the children. Each will possess within itself the germ of eternity, something of the life that will never end. Death will come to end life here below, but this life is destined to bloom again: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting," we recite in the Creed.

To be sure, the children have free will; they can fail to attain their destiny. The devil and evil concupiscence must always be conquered. But if their origin is Christian, if the parents have done all they possibly could to do their duty and rear their offspring as they ought, it would be failing in Hope to think of the family as being eternally cut off from some of its members.

I shall pray fervently that we may all be reunited in heaven, that we eternally sing the Sanctus as a chorus with not one of us missing.

HEREDITY.

THE profession of fatherhood and motherhood has its responsibilities even before the birth of the children. Someone has said, "Every man is an heir; every man is an ancestor." Just as we receive through our ancestral line many of our traits, so too, we found a line of descendants, and we transmit to those descendants something of what we are ourselves.

If we were free to transmit only the good, how truly it would be worth transmitting! But it does not work that way. It is impossible to foresee what part of us will pass on to our successors. Whoever performs the work of imparting life runs the risk of imparting to the one born of him some of his worst with the best. Wherever there is propagation by generation the mystery of heredity has its place, a frightening place. It is not in vain that God gives this warning in the twentieth chapter of the Book of Exodus: "I am the Lord your God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate Me; And showing mercy unto thousands to them that love Me and keep my Commandments." There is a similar idea expressed in the prophecy of Ezekiel, especially in chapter 18, where the stress is emphasized that everyone has individual responsibility for his own choices.

A certain father took part as a young man in a sinful escapade. He corrupted his blood; a germ entered into him. Should he be astonished then that at the moment in which he transmits life, that very life will be contaminated? He took precautions; he was cured. That is possible. It is not always certain. There are often unpleasant surprises. Even when the malady does not recur in the first generation, it is possible that it may reappear in the second or third or even later.

It is the same in the case of lesser evils, which nevertheless leave their corrupting effects — habits of laziness, intemperance in the use of liquor, a wasting of one's forces. It all tells.

The mother also formerly lived too fast. Her life was characterized by an excessive effort to follow the capricious changes in styles, too intense a participation in strenuous sports, an abuse of strong liquors or over-indulgence in smoking, too much loss of sleep because of empty and sophisticated night-life or hours of reading thrillers or indiscriminate running to movies. Here she is now leaning over her baby's cradle. The little thing is weak and puny looking as if it were trouble just to breathe. The doctor is called. There are certainly many reasons for sicknesses and weakness in babies other than the imprudences of the mother and father. But is it not true that in many cases if the doctor were sincere he would have to say: "Madam, there are maladies here which wisdom could prevent but which science cannot circumvent." To have healthy and vigorous children, parents must deserve it.

But far be from us any unjust generalizations! It often happens that in the most deserving families where parents have always done their duty, God may send weak and sickly children either for the sanctification of the parents or for reasons known to Himself alone.

But it still remains true that in many a household an unbelievable thoughtlessness serves as the prelude for so serious an act as the procreative act. How many fathers and mothers ought to meditate on the words spoken by Our Lord with a different implication to the women of Jerusalem as He trudged along to Calvary, "Weep over Yourselves and your children."

What a tragic mystery is human heredity! Physical impurities, and in part, tendencies which foster moral weaknesses can be transmitted to one's descendants. Some children will issue forth victorious over terrible struggles only painfully because there is weighing upon them the crushing weight of faults or frightful frivolities to which others before them have consented!

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY.

IT IS worth considering more than once the responsibility that can rest with the parents when some children do not achieve their full possibility or even turn out badly.

Let us of course give due blame to the evil concupiscence which can provoke a painful transformation in children even when the parents have done everything possible.

It remains true just the same that in a good number of cases, the father and the mother or one or the other must plead guilty.

A boy is sent to college. He gets along fine until the sophomore year. From then on, he bungles everything, abandons right conduct, falls in with dangerous companions, carries on 'high' to such an extent that he has to be expelled. And when a professor expresses astonishment, the dean will give this explanation: "It's his background; unfavorable heredity; his brothers were just the same. The mother is a saint, but the father is one of those unfortunate individuals who is ruled by his senses; he has caused much suffering to his wife. It is just the traces of the father showing up in the children."

The explanation can be taken for what it is worth. The law of heredity is not a mathematical law. There is no doubt, however, that it is operative, more operative than one thinks.

When heredity is not to blame, it can often be a matter of bad training. How good parents are, how very good, too good, too weak! It is their own formation which is faulty; it should be done over.

A mother brought her young son to the doctor for an examination. The doctor prescribed a remedy. "The medicine was not pleasant to take but it was very potent," he said. Well and good; they had the prescription filled.

Some time later, they returned to the doctor.

"Well, now, how's our patient?" "Not any better, doctor." "How's that? Didn't the medicine take effect?" "No, doctor, it was too hard to take; he wouldn't touch it!"

How much botch-work of that kind goes on! Parents satisfy the child's every whim. They recoil before the first tears, before the mere signs of an outburst, before less than that — a frown, a pout, or a dejected look. They are lost!

Reversing the scriptural phrase, "Cain, where is your brother Abel?" an author speaking of social problems, which can well be duplicated in the family and in education asked, "Abel, what have you done with Cain?" In other words: "You good people, are you not responsible through your faults or your incapacities that some good individuals have become bad?"

I have charge of a soul; I may have a plural charge — several souls. What has been my conduct until now? Do I not have to reproach myself with many faults or at least many weaknesses? And I am surprised at the results obtained! Are they not the logical outcome of my bungling?

Let me examine myself; consider the whole problem seriously; if it is necessary, let me reform.

THE FAMILY SPIRIT.

BEFORE the terrible war of 1939-1945, family spirit was on the decline and on the verge of being lost. There were exterior and interior reasons.

Exterior reasons: Means of travel had become easier and encouraged people to go out as much as possible. At times, the whole household would take the train or auto for an excursion but more often than not, one or other member of the family would go off for himself with the car.

Young girls began to leave home more than formerly for purposes of study, Red Cross causes, Social Service training or simply to take a position. Many who had no such need at all left home for no other reason than not to have to remain at home. Anything rather than stay home!

Various activities and organizations were always sufficient excuse or pretext for absence. Household activities held no appeal for these young women and often repelled them. The remembrance of confidences from their mother in some of their intimate sessions frightened some of them.

The world with its perpetual and superficial and useless activity drew many young men and even more young women into its crazy dance and encouraged the desertion of the home.

Interior Reasons: Some homes make no attempt to be attractive; life in them seems too austere to the children; the mother is too busy, the father is always grouchy, upset by the least noise, easily irritated and perhaps, even without knowing it, frigid and abrupt in his manner of speaking... Sometimes there is an unfortunate lack of harmony between the parents. The atmosphere is always charged with a threatening storm. There is no relaxing, no peace, no trust... Each one wants his liberty, to go his own way. The children caught between two fires do not know to which saint they should dedicate themselves. Therefore, they too go away, or if they can't they close up within themselves... Each one in the house stands on his dignity.

It is quite true that children have become more difficult to train. They always have been difficult but they are more of a problem today than in the past. A tendency developed to give them greater leeway which created a greater distance than was wise between fathers and sons and especially between mothers and daughters; it was an imaginary difficulty rather than a real one in many cases but only too frequently it gave rise to a cruel estrangement.

No one can prevent the difference of twenty years more or less between father and son or mother and daughter; that it should be a difference is to be expected; but that it should be a barrier, no! And while there are parents who cannot remember that they were once twenty years old, most of them can.

"I dream of a daughter who will be like me but also very different," wrote a mother; "because I should not like to produce only a duplicate but neither should I like to be only a rough draft of a more perfect pattern."

Then she continues to explain that her daughter will be able to come to her in all confidence to tell her about her first infatuation; she will understand her and will even tell her how she herself at about the age of eighteen fell madly in love with a violinist of exceptional talent and that her own mother so completely entered into sympathy with her that she helped her daughter compose the burning letter of admiration in which her newly-born ardor was poured out... Together mother and daughter waited for the fervent response... which had never come!

Poor children, who feel that their parents do not understand them! But if they do understand! It is their duty not to approve of everything, but they understand! Then they are ready to help, not always by writing a love-letter, but to encourage, to warn, to support the children in their undertakings, to sustain their enthusiasm, to lead them to their goal.

“THE WHOLE SEA.”

PEOPLE sometimes say: “What is the use of trying to rear children as good Christians; they will be lost sight of once they enter upon life in the midst of the great masses. Will any one so much as notice their presence? Will they be able to leave their mark? Will they not run the risk of being crushed by the amorphous mass and quickly covered over by some all-embracing platitudes?” Or again, “What is the use of trying to establish a home that is a Christian community, a veritable monastery of Christian virtues — and by that we don’t mean an atmosphere like a morgue but an exemplary group governed by Christian devotion and love — when all about us there are only mediocre families? They are not bad but worldly, with no depth to their Christianity. We would be drowned by all the rest!”

Pascal gave the answer to these questions when he said, “The whole sea rises for one stone that is thrown into it.” Though it appear but an insignificant pebble in value, it at least assures one’s contribution to a common work. Has it not always been the minority groups who transformed the world?

You say, “What is the use of troubling ourselves and working to form Christians and real men when all about us the mass of humanity is becoming more and more de-Christianized and less virile? Lacordaire suggests an answer similar to Pascal’s, “Simple drops of water that we are, we wonder what need the ocean has of us; the ocean could tell us that it is made up of nothing else but little drops of water.”

That is true of individuals; it is true of families.

If we could do nothing to effect numbers we can at least effect quality — the policy of the leaven. What matters the thickness and weight of the dough, if the leaven which works in it possesses irresistible force?

Let us throw dynamic Christian personalities into society; where can they be better prepared than in Christian families and institutions? We ought to, that’s sure. In the midst of indifferent families, let us settle some distinctly Christian families who do not compromise when duty is involved, who radiate joy, manifest the beauty of virtuous living and bear witness to Christ by apostolic zeal. And then count on God to assure the result.

The result is certain. We must have faith in Him and believe in the power of radiating centers.

“Unless there are in our cities and towns, homes where Christian life flourishes, every hope for Christian civilization is doomed,” wrote a university man of note shortly before the last war.

To Christianize a town, a village, a neighborhood, in short any milieu, involves more than multiplying activities which do not even get into the blood-stream of real living; it means an invention of new ways of life, as for example group formation of families, who give a public example of Christian virtues by living in loving and fraternal communities, breaking with the forms of mediocre living and substituting for it in their relations with others a true form of friendship rooted in the Gospel spirit.

What was true before the last war is even truer now. There is still a desperate need for a renovation of the Christian world, and of the whole world for that matter; this renovation will be achieved only through Christian families, by thorough-going Christians within these solid Christian homes, and fervent community groups of Christian families.

HOME LIFE.

SOMEONE has suggested the following “slogans” for Happy Home Life:

1. Always appear before your family in a good humor. Nothing is so depressing for the rest of the family as a father or mother out of sorts. See that the family never has to suffer because of your attack of nerves or your irritability.
2. Never weary in cheering your family with your smile: It is not enough to avoid depressing the family; that is purely negative. You must brighten them up, let their spirits expand. Be especially vigilant when the little ones are around. You must give them the alms of a smile, hard though it be at times. What a pity when children have to say, “I don’t like it at our house.”
3. Tell what you may tell openly: If something must not be told, then don’t tell it. If you may share it then do so. We ought to let others profit by our experience, above all, the family.
4. Amiably show the greatest interest in the least things: The problems of family life are generally not affairs of state. However, everything that concerns the persons we love most in the world should be worthy of interest: the baby’s first tooth, the honor ribbon won at school, the entrance of one of the little ones into the Holy Childhood Association.
5. Banish exaggerated asceticism from your life heroically: If your home is Christian and each member of the family is learning to carry his cross, then it is essential to avoid making others suffer by a too ostentatious or inopportune austerity. Besides there is abundant opportunity for self-renunciation in devoting oneself to procuring joy for others. Marie Antoinette de Geuser used to sacrifice her great longing for recollection and her taste for a simple life by accompanying her brothers to evening affairs for which she wore dresses that she said “made her look vain.”
6. Be very attentive to treat all alike. Nothing is so disrupting to home life as the evidence of favoritism for one or the other child. The same measure for all!
7. Never think of yourself, but always of them, in a joyous spirit:

Henry the Fourth, King of France, used to crawl around on all fours, with his children on his back, to enliven the family get-together. Louis Racine, the son of the famous playwright Jean Racine, relates of his father, “My father was never so happy as when he was free to leave the royal court and spend a few days with us. Even in the presence of strangers, he dared to be a father; he belonged to all our games. I remember our procession in the garden in which my sisters were the clergy, I was the pastor and the author of “Athalie” came along carrying the cross, singing with us.”

8. Never begin an argument, always speak prudently. Discussion should not be banned unless it develops into bickering or argument. A free habit of exchanging ideas on a broadening subject cannot but be profitable; the children should even be encouraged and led into it to develop in them a wise and discriminating mind and a habit of suspended judgment. Unsavory and disturbing subjects as well as those beyond their depth ought naturally be avoided.

9. Act patiently always, answering graciously always: That it takes the “patience of an angel” to rule vigilantly over the little world of the family is beyond question. I must apply myself to it affably.

10. By good-will, you will gain hearts and souls without exception:

Love much — that is the key to it all.

These slogans for a Happy Home Life are not marvels of prose but they do express a precious rule of wise family discipline.

THE FAMILY TABLE.

MEALTIME should serve not only to nourish the body but also to comfort the soul.

Someone wittily said: "Repast, repose." Whoever it was made a good point.

While the children are still little the mother and father will probably breakfast alone. When they are older, if the father cannot be present because of his work, the mother at least should be present to set the example for table etiquette, to make sure that the children eat enough, properly, without greediness, and without rejecting what is not to their liking. This is the hour for the household to shake off sleepiness which still stupefies them, and to season the atmosphere with joy and genial good spirit.

At the main meals, all except the babies will be present. The parents should exercise the greatest care not to come to table laden with their worries, a prey to the preoccupations of their duties or their professional activities. The only possible exception to this rule would probably be during a time of family bereavement or exceptional sorrow. But even then, a just mean should be observed so that the young ones need not be unduly depressed. They ought to keep all their verve and to a certain point, their power of fancy.

Except when it is essential that the whole family share the concerns of all in common, the father and mother should not come to table looking downhearted and pass the mealtime discussing their hard lot in life. Children are quick to sense the worry of their parents, they feel that things are not going well, if there is tension or estrangement, if evil has hit the home. When they perceive things of this sort, their little hearts contract and a certain unease strangles them.

And why make someone who is not equal to it bear the burden and heat of the day?

After the first few moments in which the father and mother exchange a few words about decisions they must make concerning affairs which need not be kept from the children, they ought to direct the conversation here and there to the younger and the older; let them tell how they spent the morning or afternoon; show an interest in the efforts of all, in the work they did, the virtues they practiced or the disappointments they met. Even if the father and mother have heavy cares, they should force themselves to escape from them long enough to be attentive listeners to the thousand details that all wish to recount. Each one must know that he can speak freely, provided that it is always politely, discreetly and charitably. Should there be some little chatterboxes, they must be taught to moderate their intemperance, which would prevent others from having their say. If one of the children seems to be in bad humor, he should be stimulated by a little kindly teasing, a kind word or an opportune question.

When the children pull out all the stops, call for pianissimo; when they observe too long a pause speed up the tempo. Should one or the other strike a false note, get him back in the key again.

The parents should not be satisfied with listening to the little stories of their children. They too should contribute to the broadening of their knowledge by giving them worthwhile information, relating an amusing or instructive story or starting a discussion on an interesting subject.

Rene Bazin, the novelist, speaks of those families in the North of France who still keep to the custom of beginning the meal with a short reading from the life of some saint or famous hero.

Wasn't it Father Lourdel who entered the White Fathers after hearing the story of the African martyrs? All that relaxes, elevates, and lends variety. It might even be a reading from the letter of a relative or a selection from a newspaper. The main idea should be to entertain and as far as possible expand hearts.
