

Christ In The Home

Booklet 3. Part 3.

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Daily Meditations on Marriage and Children: Character and Adolescence.

FORMATION OF CHARACTER. (1) Childhood's innate grasp of right and wrong.

CHILDREN are naturally upright. They are weak and easily become afraid like the rest of us but they are upright.

They know what they ought to do and what they must not do. They discover that very quickly since they are not only aided by the restraints and prohibitions of their family but also enlightened by the interior verdict of their conscience.

They have no difficulty surmising that if they do not do what is good they will grieve Mamma and Papa and likewise God; furthermore they realize that they will incur a punishment in proportion to their wrong — the principle of the proportion between the sin and the punishment familiar to the Doctors is already implicitly in the heads of these little theologians.

To be sure, it is in no abstract fashion that they acquire such knowledge; they achieve it in situations that are part of their everyday life, to the accompaniment of emotional experiences, which are often quite impressive. They feel an inward approval, peace and joy when they have been good and, on the contrary, disquiet, unease, and interior reproach if they have not fulfilled a command. They do not have precise ideas on the subject but an intense feeling; they would not be able to explain the words 'responsibility', 'law' or 'liberty'; however, a real and profound experience discovers moral reality to them. They were supposed to behave well and they have acted badly, they are in the wrong and deserve to be punished. They feel it, they know it, and they suffer from it. Their childish language, their very silence and embarrassment bear witness to it. The day they learn the correct vocabulary for all of this they will be capable of putting these realities under their proper classification. Before they have ever learned the words for these realities, they have lived the realities.

What a precious advantage for the child to be brought in this way into the region of the invisible!

The great philosopher Leon Olle-Laprune stresses this point:

The child "who it seems is entirely controlled by sense impressions, he whom visible nature seems to dominate by its charms and the thousand causes for fright it spreads about him, stops respectful and troubled before an invisible law. Invisible also is the Master, invisible too the Judge whose presence this law makes the child feel. God — the august and Sacred Name that he used to pronounce with docility but without comprehension — now becomes for him a mysterious reality whose invisible smile or secret threats are for him the most precious cause for hope or the greatest

reason for fear. God — whom he does not see but who sees him, God — whom he knows so little yet by whom he is perfectly known. God — of whom he thinks only at intervals but who is constantly mindful of him. God — all powerful, wise, good, completely good, better than a father, better than a mother, perfectly good and just and holy; what care he must take not to displease such a God! What misfortune to offend Him. How good he ought to be himself, how he ought to be truthful, to be just to all, to do good to others because those are the things God loves; those are the things He commands; those are the things God Himself does in His own sublime fashion, and he must resemble God.

“Invisible grandeurs, invisible beauties: the child who enters into life with all his senses open and avid for stimulation of every sort can nevertheless fall in love with these realities that are inaccessible to the senses; he can aspire to know them better some day, somewhere and finally to look forward to the joy of possessing them then as the best reward for good will and the pain of being deprived of them as the worst punishment for an evil will. This is the way the moral and religious life of the child gets its start.”

FORMATION OF CHARACTER – CONSCIENCE. (2) The act of Contrition.

THERE is a story that at a certain Honor’s Day, a prize was offered to a lazy little fellow by way of consolation; since he did not come in for any victories in achievement, he was given a prize for the best health. He must have had a flair for rhyme for according to the legend this was his response:

I don’t care for the prize I did not really earn; Why, to get my good health, I did not make a turn.

To be rewarded for something which had caused him no effort, which represented no attainment on his part seemed odious to him. Lazy though he was, he did not lack intelligence or a sense of disinterestedness.

Most children are quicker to understand the notion of punishment as a just consequence for a wrong done.

They are well aware that to be able materially to accomplish an act is not one and the same thing as being permitted to do it. Children very quickly grasp the idea that Maurice Le Sage d’Hauteroche d’Hulst, (Monsignor d’Hulst) explained in one of his masterful talks at Notre Dame in Paris:

“We can compare physical necessity to a rigid iron or wooden barrier: As long as it holds out it is impossible to break through; if one does succeed in breaking through it is only because the barrier was knocked down or broken. Duty, moral obligation, is also a barrier, but a spiritual barrier; we can cut through it as we would through a ray of sunshine. Its bright line marks out very clearly the limits beyond which we must not pass; if we happen to violate it, it lets us pass but closes behind us to continue forming a frontier of light between good and evil.”

Whoever does break through this bar of light merits punishment.

How easy it is to profit by the awakenings of morality in the child to help him see clearly into his conscience. We teach him his prayers, the Act of Contrition for example: “O my God, I am very sorry...” “I confess to Almighty God.” He has no trouble understanding; he knows he has acted badly, that he should not have pulled his sister’s hair, disobeyed papa, wanted his own way. He has broken through the bar of light. Even if mother did not see him, someone did and that was God; a kind of inward voice tells him very quietly that he is guilty, that he must make up for it by being sorry, by asking forgiveness, by accepting the little pain that will come to compensate for the

pleasure that he had no right to take. "I confess to Almighty God" that I have sinned, "through my fault." "Therefore I beseech You" to help me to be good "by means of Your holy grace".

God is infinitely good; an offence against God: penance; sorrow; regret. Can a child understand these words?

Perhaps it will be necessary to reverse the order of the words, proceeding from the natural to the supernatural. Nothing is simpler: "Regret, sorrow, penance, offense against God, a God infinitely good... How many difficult words; yet their meaning will unfold bit by bit.

Then when the time for confession comes, when he must say "I confess to Almighty God" only the word confess will seem strange, but only the word not the act; the child will have no difficulty making his accusation. Get him into the habit of making his little examination of conscience; he will tell you his "sins" out loud. I "confess" that is I "admit"; he will understand that he ought to admit and admit to God, who is so good, all the wrong that he has done.

"Through my fault," I should not have done it. But when I have confessed it, it will disappear, it will be wiped out. And then, of course, I must not do it over again; I must not break through the bar of light again. "Therefore I beseech You..." Another difficult word he must learn, but a reality which he does not yet see... to be good he must have God's help. By himself, everything would be too difficult! How children do stumble over that "by means of Your holy grace" in their Act of Contrition and sometimes we don't blame them! Yet beyond the vocabulary so poorly adapted to them lies a reality, which is quite within their power to grasp!

FORMATION OF CHARACTER. (3) Discrete and scruple-free.

SOME children, perhaps the majority of them, readily admit their peccadilloes.

There are others though who are very proud, very jealous of that little interior kingdom where an intimate voice, God's voice, is heard, where they can judge their conduct in the light of what that voice demands; into this domain they want no other person to penetrate.

We must respect a child's interior life and not seek to enter there without being invited, not try to learn what he does not wish us to know of that interior life, nor try to find out what he hides with a sort of naive but respectable modesty. Neither should we remind him of painful scenes, now past and forgiven, in which he was clearly off his good behavior; there is danger of humiliating him, of causing him to close up. Discretion always!

This virtue will be an absolute necessity later; it will be no easy virtue to practice either. How painful for the father and the mother not to know what happens in the intimate life of their child! True there are indications that everything is all right or that something is wrong: Eyes that can no longer meet one's gaze, the tilt of the head, the sudden blush of shame, the general appearance that has become less vibrant and more embarrassed, may tell much. But there are some young people, boys and girls, who excel in putting on an act and who never reveal their true depths; they remain closed temples.

It is ideal if parents do know everything about their child. They must however be willing to know only a little and in some cases nothing at all.

One very important lesson we must teach a child is not only to observe the number of his peccadilloes but the kind. He should learn to distinguish between important matter, a slight infraction, and simple imperfections. It is a sin when one resists a command of God, an

imperfection only when one resists a simple desire of God. When there is question of a command of God, he must know too if the command is concerned with something serious, ('grave matter') for then the infraction of that command is a mortal sin provided of course that there was full knowledge and real (and full) consent.

Most scruples are caused by inadequate and ill-adapted Catechism instruction at the age when the first conscience problems arise.

It is vitally important that we take great care not to cause the child to live in a perpetual fear of sin. Let him learn to be motivated by love. It is easier by far; the child quickly advances beyond 'attrition' or imperfect contrition and finds love and perfect contrition much more understandable.

Souls that have been warped in childhood by exaggerated fears are in danger of living for the rest of their lives with nervous consciences, without freedom of spirit or joy.

We are to form children of God and not future prisoners of an iron-collar religion. The Gospel is not for a convict squad; we are at ease in our Father's house.

Many defections of later life are due to inadequacies of education. A false conscience is easily made; a soul is easily warped.

EDUCATION IN REVERSE. Or 'How not to raise a Child'.

IT HAS been said (with some irony) that education is the art of developing in a child all the faults he has received from nature and adding all those nature failed to give him.

In this same vein, a rather facetious author dared the comment, "Providence gave us parents to show us how we ought not act toward our children."

Someone else even more caustic drew up an infallible recipe for rearing children badly. All he had to do to determine the ingredients was to observe the behavior of certain parents. Could we not put definite names behind a few of the points ourselves? All we must do is observe; examples unfortunately abound: Here is the infallible recipe:

1. Begin from babyhood to give the child everything he asks for.
2. Discuss his wonderful qualities in his presence.
3. Observe in his presence that it is impossible to correct him.
4. Be sure to have father and mother wrangling in his presence and in disagreement about him.
5. Let him get the idea that his father is only a tyrant and good for nothing but to chastise him.
6. Let the father show little respect for the mother in his presence.
7. Pay no attention to his choice of playmates.
8. Let him read anything he wants.
9. Try to earn much money for him without giving him good principles to live by and let him have money freely.
10. Let him have no supervision during recreation.
11. Punish him for a mere awkwardness and laugh at his real faults.

12. Take his part against teachers at school or in college when they try to make him come to task.

As far as punishment goes for wrongdoing, how many parents prove cowardly and unwise. Consider the mother's statement, "The only way I can keep my authority is by not exercising it." What a confession of failure!

Some parents let their children do anything and everything.

Others intervene but in what a clumsy fashion:

Perhaps they are profuse in threats. "If you do that, this will happen." The child does the wrong and "this" does not happen; the punishment threatened remains hanging in the air. The child knowing what to expect is no longer impressed. We must never make a threat we do not intend to carry out when the infraction has been committed!

Then again, they may take to bargaining: "If you do that, I will give you this present."

Or they may stoop to argument to force compliance:

"Louis, take your coat."

"But, Mamma it's not worth while."

"Yes it is; take it because it looks threatening. I looked at the barometer and it's low."

"But, Mamma, I tell you it won't rain..."

"Thursday, you didn't have your coat and you were soaked to the skin."

"Yes, but Sunday you made me wear it and it didn't rain..."

And so it goes on and on...

Then parents sometimes permit coaxing to lead them into multiple concessions: A child may be convalescing and wants something to eat which would harm him.

"No, you may not have it."

"Oh, yes Mamma, give it to me."

"You know very well the doctor said you should not have it."

"Only this once, I won't ask again."

"Well, just this once since you want it and because you are sick but it will be your own fault if you get worse."

Who is to be pitied in all these instances? The child whose every whim is satisfied? Or the parents whose inexperience or weakness lead the child to the greatest dangers?

Lack of character in children is often the outgrowth of lack of character in the parents. One can give only what one has.

IMPORTANT 'NEVERS'.

NEVER make a promise you don't intend to keep. It brings discredit on you and teaches your child to lie.

Never shout. To rear a child you must control him. Now we are controlled only by qualities we do not have ourselves, a talent beyond our reach. If there is one quality a child does not possess, it is calm, which is the direct opposite of the extreme mobility of his nature, his impulsive impressionability. Calmness controls him, not shouting.

Never deceive: "Give me your whistle; you will see what fine music I can make." The child with no defense gives you his whistle and you put it in your pocket: "Now with the whistle there, you can't annoy us anymore."

Or if you want the child to take some disagreeable medicine, you may say, "Oh but this is good! Drink it, you will see." The child sips it and pushes away the deceiving cup. You have failed him in your words. A few scenes of this kind and the child will lose all confidence in those who speak to him. If we wish to be believed, we must not abuse belief.

Never do yourself what the child with a little time and ingenuity can do himself; otherwise, he will never learn to take the initiative. On the contrary, confront him as soon as possible and as often as possible with tasks that are beyond him but which are capable of challenging him a bit so that he learns to gauge his strength, to remain humble because of non-success and eager for struggle because he wants to conquer the obstacle.

Never tolerate backtalk to a command, or grumbling, or any argument about it. Never take back a prohibition especially if the child tries to work its recall by tears and coy maneuvering.

Never present a task to the child as beyond his capabilities as "Could you do that? Don't you think you would be afraid to do that?" — so that he gets the idea of a possible sidetracking of the issue or a sliding out of it altogether. No, tell him squarely what to do as if it were just an ordinary simple matter. "Do this. Go there please." In this way, the child will not question his ability to do what is asked. If he says he can't do it or shows that he can't do it, there will be time enough to chide him for his cowardice or lack of nerve.

Never seem to attach importance to little scratches, bumps, and bruises he gets (naturally proper attention should be paid to real needs). The child often cries when he hurts himself just to get attention, being pitied makes him a more interesting individual. If you do not appear excited, he will understand that it is useless to make a tragedy of the affair. Care for the hurts that need care, and far from magnifying the case, explain that it isn't anything much: "You will have many others! Try to have more nerve about it!" The child grows calm.

Never inflict a humiliating punishment in the presence of others, except in the rare case that might need it to punish an ineradicable pride. Aside from such a case, however, you would be degrading a child beyond reason: "Look how ugly he is!" "How clumsy you are!" et cetera... Or what is worse — "Look at your brother, see how good he is!" Such comparisons are odious and only excite jealousy.

Never flatter either: "Isn't he darling!" The child knows it only too well. Encourage him but don't praise him. To praise him is to admire him for an advantage he has without merit on his part; to encourage him is to congratulate him on meritorious effort. Never tolerate the adulations of people who visit you either.

TRAINING THE ADOLESCENT.

TO TRAIN little ones is difficult enough. When these little ones grow up the difficulty of educating them grows with them.

There is a particular age — between thirteen and seventeen — when the rise of new energies generally produces a crisis. The child is no longer a child; neither is he a grown-up. He is in a period of transition which we must not fear but which we must consider sympathetically; it is a time when we should be ever ready to come to his help at opportune moments.

It is also a time when restraints weigh upon him. Until now, the child did not distinguish his individual identity much from those about him. What they thought and felt he was satisfied to feel and think in perfect harmony. But now his personality is emerging. Before this, it was indistinct. Oh yes, at times traits of it would shine out and predict the future character but it was only a faint sketch. Now the design takes form and definite lines.

It is thrilling to see the dawn of manhood and womanhood in the young as they rise up to meet life. It is depressing to think of possible deformations! A design can so easily change into a caricature!

There is no question now of a dead image on inert paper! We are concerned with an animated potentiality, with an intense dynamism — a soul seeking itself. It is like a person lost in the night groping about here and there to find the right road. We can speak to the adolescent, guide him, but nothing takes the place of personal experience and it means much to allow the young the liberty to try their luck.

Even as a baby, as soon as he takes his first steps, the child uses all its baby strength to pull away from its mother. The mother had until then held him in her arms. But one day she put him down so that he could learn to stand and to put one foot before the other. As soon as he learnt this new game, the little one is ready for his first expedition. And what mother, even though she rejoices at the prowess of the young explorer, does not suffer when she realizes that her arms and her heart can no longer hold back this little conqueror already setting out to meet life?

As the adolescent boy or girl grows older, the span of their investigation widens. There is the immense field of their own individuality. How many realities, how many mysteries they encounter at every step! Fortunate that youth who, avid until now to ask questions, remains willing to ask some still! He wants to learn certainly, even more than ever before, only he wants to learn by himself so he withdraws into himself to solve his problems. Who could ever know as he does his little domain; he is jealous of it; he closes his arms about his riches; he yields to no one the right to violate his treasure.

We should not be astonished at this but stimulate their research unobtrusively, provide them, without appearing to do so, with the means to solve their problems; we should not pry into their confidence but rather cleverly inspire and provoke it. Let them realize that mother and father themselves formerly discovered this whole world that challenges their discovery; that mother and father can therefore serve as prudent but well-informed advisers to the young novices of life.

Then there is the whole world outside of themselves — the frame of their life, their surroundings, and other people; that is quite a universe. What is the significance of such a smile, such a silence, such an action? They thought everyone was good — that was a mistake! They thought that life was conquered without difficulty — they have to struggle hard: How much work to learn the least thing!

And then the whole domain of religion. It was all so simple formerly. Now there are problems on every side. And love? This whole transformation that they sense within themselves? Those impulses

of feeling? Those sensations never before experienced, organic phenomena whose nature and reason they do not know?

We need great sympathy before their laborious and often worried seeking, and also much vigilance mingled with a gentle firmness, high moral principles, and exceptional psychological insight almost bordering on prophecy. Above all, we need much prayer.

GIRLS VERSUS BOYS. (1) They're different.

THE training of adolescence ought to make much allowance for the difference between the sexes and for the difference of individual temperaments within each sex.

The boy as he grows older becomes more and more individualistic. Everything exists for him. His little person makes itself conspicuous without fear. He loves to make noise not only because of his love for activity but also to assert his presence. In games, he likes to direct and if he envisions the future, he always sees himself in the role of a leader...

He must be taught that other people exist and what is more, that he has the duty not only to refrain from harming them but also to help them. Every opportunity for him to render service should be used to advantage — to take care of his little sisters gallantly and willingly, to run on errands for father or mother or someone else in the household. The boy and later the man is a great egoist. It is wise to counteract very early this tendency of his to make himself the center of interest, to turn his attention to careers of devoted self-sacrifice, to impress him with the repercussions his actions have upon others and to enlighten him on his duty to give much since he has received much and to penetrate him with the realization that he has a responsibility toward his own.

The little girl as she advances toward womanhood — and this begins quite early — very quickly becomes conscious of herself as part of a relationship. She feels herself physically weaker than her brothers and her powers of feeling orientate her even at that early age whether she is aware of it or not, toward love — in the beginning toward the couple "mamma and baby" but later toward the couple "husband and wife."

Much less individualistic than the boy — although she can be so in her own way and sometimes fiercely so — she is above all family-minded. She loves to rock the baby, to help her mother. If she prefers one study more than another, history, literature or mathematics, it is more often because of the teacher who teaches it than the subject itself. Early in the little girl's life are verified the words of 'George Sand' (the great female author) concerning woman, "Behind the things that she loves there is always someone."

Because of the complexities of feeling, the education of the adolescent girl is more delicate and more difficult than the education of the adolescent boy. The boy is more heavy, more blunt, more matter of fact, less given to fine distinctions; the phenomena of puberty are more tardy in him and are generally not at all or scarcely ever accompanied by any fits of feeling but rather a mere hunger for sensations: he is still the individualist.

Because of her periods, a phenomenon which often troubles the adolescent girl even after its mysterious significance has been chastely and adequately explained to her, she becomes more curious and uneasy about all that bears on the problem of life and is much more susceptible to emotional unbalance and the fascination of abandoning herself to daydreams than a boy of her age. If the adolescent boy is healthy, he doesn't indulge in dreaming; he makes noise or pulls all kinds of

pranks. The girl, even when she loves study, loves still other things and she is much attracted by the perspective of an eventual giving of herself.

Beautiful is the task of giving her a clear idea of her essential vocation; to guard her from false notions; to get her to be diligent in the tasks of the moment, her house duties and school assignments; to direct her need for unreserved giving so that what is but a vague instinct within her becomes translated into terms of clear duty; to impress her with the immense responsibility of having been chosen to give life, unless God chooses her to renounce this power, for love of Him, in virginity.

GIRLS VERSUS BOYS. (2) Prepare well.

EVERYDAY experiences give many examples of the distinctive differences between the two sexes especially during their adolescence: the egocentric interests of the boy, the self-radiating tendencies of the girl. The boy thinks about his future exploits; the girl dreams of possible children. In the one, love of glory; in the other love of love itself.

The following bit of conversation between two sisters is in itself an amusing commentary on feminine adolescent psychology. "What are you thinking of," the twelve year old asked her fifteen year old sister, "of your future husband?" "A husband," protested the elder, "I am too young. I have a lot of time before I begin thinking of a husband!" "Well then what are you thinking about?"

"I was planning what kind of trimmings I would have on my wedding dress."

Even when we take into account the differences created by nature between boys and girls, we still must make allowances for different temperaments within the sexes. Each child lives in a world of his own, in a world that is strangely different from the world of those about him. With one individual maternal influence will have greater force; with another, paternal influence. One child may have vigorous health, whereas another is delicate. In the one, a melancholy temperament may predominate; in another, the exact opposite, the sanguine with extrovert tendencies is conspicuous. One child may be calm and poised; another, a little bundle of nerves... Consequently, if the educator has but one method of dealing with all, a single and only method, he can expect to meet with disappointments.

However, in providing for these individual differences, a real problem must be faced: It is not sufficient to correct the one child and refrain from correcting the other; to congratulate the one and ignore the success of the other and so on through all the possible variations that might be in order. All this must be done while preserving the impression of treating all alike. If children perceive, as they sometimes do with reason, that there is partiality shown to one or other of the family, authority is broken down, jealousy enters and soon constant wrangling results.

The ideal is to maintain poise, serenity, evenness of temper, and a steadiness of behavior that nothing can upset.

Superiors of religious orders are advised to make use of a practice, which is beneficial for all — an honest examination periodically of their faithful fulfillment of the trust confided to them. Have I given evidence of any partiality or any unjustifiable toleration of wrong? Have I seen to it that the rules have been observed, the ways or customs of the order and its holy traditions held in honor?

In what way are things not going as they should? One can pass quickly over what is as it should be, thanking God humbly for it but direct attention by choice to what is defective and faulty to

determine to make the necessary corrections either in one's person or one's work. Mussolini's comment has a point here: "It is useless to tell me about what is going along well. Speak to me immediately of what is going badly."

If only parents would make it a habit to practice this counsel suggested to monks: Stop a moment to observe the train pass; look to see if the lighting functions, if the wheels are well oiled, if there is any need to fear for the connections. People do that from time to time in regard to their personal life and we call it a Retreat. It is strongly advisable to make a retreat to examine oneself on the conduct and management of the home, of one's profession; such a retreat should be sufficiently frequent to prevent painful surprises.

Our Lord said that when one wishes to build a tower, he sits down to calculate the cost and requirements for a solid structure. What a tower is the Christian home! That is something to construct! How necessary are foundations that will not crumble, materials that will hold solidly! How essential an able contractor, attention to every detail, care to check every stone, exactitude in the measurements for every storey...! Then when the story of that family is told, it will be an edifice to the Glory of God!

Perhaps I have forgotten to sit down... to calculate... to get on my knees. There is still time!

A FATHER'S LETTER.

JEAN RACINE the great classic dramatist wrote a letter to his son urging him to complete fidelity in his religious duties and to love for the interior life.

"You beg me to pray for you. If my prayers were good for anything, you would soon be a perfect Christian, who hoped for nothing with more ardor than for his eternal salvation. But remember, my Son, that the father and mother pray in vain for their children if the children do not remember the training their parents gave them. Remember, my Son, that you are a Christian, and think of all that character makes of obligation for you, all the passions it requires you to renounce. For what would it benefit you to acquire the esteem of men if you would jeopardize your soul? It will be the height of my joy to see you working out your salvation. I hope for it by the grace of Our Lord."

When Racine was thirty-eight and at the height of his power, his religious directors through the misguided zeal of their Jansenistic spirit commanded him to give up writing for the theatre which he did with untold pain. Consequently, when he spoke to his son of the practice of renunciation, he could speak with authority.

Especially sensitive to physical suffering, he accepted sickness humbly and generously: "I have never had the strength to do penance; what an advantage then for me that God has had the mercy to send me this."

It is a great grace for children to have a father who teaches the divine law with firmness, and who, moreover, lives this divine life, joining personal example to precept.

'Am I sufficiently attentive to give my children the supernatural equipment they need? Am I sufficiently careful about that still more important duty of giving them a good example always and in everything?'

If there was too much severity in Racine's manner, it was due to his own training at Port-Royal, the Jansenist center. When his brother Lionval was only five years old, he insisted that he would never go to the theatre for fear of being damned. Madelon, his daughter, at ten years had to observe Lent

to the very end even though she felt ill because of it. The mother, Racine's wife, kept them in step. Did she not command young Louis Racine, Racine's youngest son, who had indulged in writing about twelve stanzas of poetry on the death of a dog to betake himself to Boileau (Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, France's most eminent critic, and friend of the family) for a good scolding?

There must be no exaggeration in the exercise of authority; it would no longer be Christian in character but an erroneous way of understanding the morality and perfection of the Gospel. It is essential to retain a zealous will on the part of the children and a courageous practice of generosity. We must however always remember that they are children and not impose upon them too heavy a yoke thereby running the danger of giving them an incorrect idea of religion or of disgusting them even with its most balanced practice.

We must be mindful too that some day they will be confronted with fearful difficulties. They will need a training that is not harsh but strong, otherwise we can fear shipwreck or at least ineffective returns.

'If my profession or my health prevent me from fasting, am I careful to get a dispensation, to substitute another mortification for it, to manifest an exemplary moderation on all occasions, in general, a real detachment from food and body comforts; to deny myself amusements that might prove dangerous?' {Since the Church's requirements for compulsory fasting are now so light, can I not, of my own free will, impose on myself some of the fasting discipline that my forebears regularly undertook?}

MISUNDERSTOOD CHILDREN.

ANDRE BERGE in his book on "Bewildered Youth" gives us the story of a young man who had been left completely to himself by his parents. Taken up with their own affairs, business and pleasure, these parents let their son grow up with no concern at all for his soul, his ambitions, his difficulties, his temptations, his failings.

At first, the youth relished this liberty, which he interpreted as reserve on the part of his parents. But soon he came to realize that it was nothing more than cowardice, abandonment of duty and flagrant desertion of obligation on their part; he was living in the home but was not of the home — a mere boarder in a hotel. As soon as he was out of his childhood, they showed no more care for him; he found himself confronting life alone, confused, cut off. He should have been able to expect counsel, affection, protection, light. Nothing of the sort did he receive. Instead he met with selfishness; faced by loneliness, life began to pall upon him; he had no one to untangle his problems, no one to point out definite steps to follow on the bewildering way.

Unable to bear living any longer in this way with no vital ties binding him to those who should have been nearest to him, he decided to break all connections, to go away. Material separation from his own would but serve to accentuate the separation of their souls.

He left this note as an explanation of his conduct and a reproach for theirs:

"To my parents,

"Why do you desert me? You do not understand that I am stifled between these walls and that my heart is bursting. Do you not understand that I am growing up and that life is calling me, that I am alone all day with its voice? You who could have so lovingly directed me in life, why do you abandon me?

“Well, so much the worse, I will meet life alone. I am so far from you already through your fault.”

How heavy the obligations of parents! Let us not consider now the case of grossly selfish parents as described in the preceding story. We shall consider parents who are concerned about accomplishing their mission.

Are they not in danger of two extremes in the fulfillment of their duty: either to exaggerate their control or to exaggerate their reserve?

If they try to exercise too much control over the young adventurers in freedom, who are making ready for their first flights, will they not incur the blame of tyranny, excessive watchfulness and supervision?

If, on the other hand, they try to avoid this reproach, are they not going to lack firmness? By trying to win confidence through a gentleness that gives free rein, are they not going to see all the restraints, which they deem good, broken down and the advice they judge opportune utterly ignored?

‘How have I succeeded in this problem of training? Do I steer my bark with proper mastery? The reefs are many; a solid craft is needed, a steady hand at the helm. Am I acquainted with the route, the true merits of my crew?’

‘My God grant me the grace to know how to rear my little world as you want me to; to know how to form each of my children according to Your plans; to know how to attain balance in sharpness, firmness and restraint. Grant that the youth formed in my home may never be confused, lost before life, but rather know always where to find counsel, support, the warmth of love and guidance, an understanding and patient heart that can give help with enlightened insight.’

A DEFAULTING FATHER.

A RELIGIOUS was trying to extricate a young man of twenty-two from a distressing and almost insurmountable difficulty; the young man wrote him the following explanation for falling so low:

“...I was endowed as any normal person and would have been able to succeed in my studies as anyone else but for some wretched habits — and I say these words, trembling with a powerless rage — wretched habits which came to poison the work of God. A cousin and a friend bear with me the responsibility for the first steps toward those devastating sensations that enkindled the odious flame, which in turn upset my mental and physical health. No more willpower or rather no more strength despite good will; no more memory; all these results followed in succession. I blame my parents especially my father who had given up all religious practices. He never spoke to me with a view to understanding me; never did we have the least conversation which could indicate any common bond of ideas or feeling; he fed my body, that is all...”

What a terrible indictment are these words! How they prove the necessity of watching the associations of the children, their work, the reasons for their laziness; the importance of keeping their confidence, of knowing how to win that confidence; of showing them understanding and a willingness to help; of giving them an assurance of victory.

“I was endowed as any normal person and would have been able to succeed.” Nothing more readily weakens the resilience of the powers of the mind and the heart than lust. What the young man said is exactly true; he had abandoned himself to impurity; he lost the keenness of his intelligence, the

retentiveness of his memory and a relish for effort. Even grave physical injuries sometimes result. “Devastating sensations” and “the odious flame” quickly depleted and consumed vital energies.

“A cousin and a friend.” How absolutely necessary is vigilance over the friendships that circumstances and relationships often provide, and sometimes alas that certain corrupted individuals seek to establish to give vent to their secret taste for perversion.

If the child had confided in someone at the onset of the first serious difficulties! But nothing in the attitude of the parents invited confidence, a request for enlightenment, a humble avowal of imprudence or faults already committed. How many children, how many youths yearn to speak! Someone, their father or mother or a director must take the first step. Nothing happens. Nobody imagines that they want help; nobody deigns to interest themselves in them. The mother is absorbed in her worldliness or completely oblivious of their needs; the father is wrapped up in his business; the spiritual director if they have one at all does not find the time or the means to help...

And the child, the young boy or the young girl carries the weight of inward suffering and is stifled by it.

“I blame my parents... never did my father speak to me with a view to understanding me; never did we have the least conversation which could indicate any common bond of ideas or feeling; he fed my body, that is all.”

Did this father realize that even while he was nourishing the body of his son, he was contributing to the death of his soul by a double sin of omission! He did not help his son in his moral life when he needed it; he gave him a very bad example by openly abandoning the Christian law.

Such sins are paid for and paid for painfully. How prevent lack of training and mistakes of training from producing their disastrous effects?

To develop the body is fine, commendable, and a duty. Even more important is it to develop the soul, to protect it, to strengthen it, to uplift it.

A MOTHER TO HER SON

WHEN Leon Bloy was about twenty years old, he fell into one of those crises not uncommon in youth, particularly in youth whose environment brings contact with unbelievers and persons of loose morals, and he drifted from his religion. He was wretchedly unhappy besides, unhappy because of the very direction he was taking; but an involuntary confusion and probably a certain amount of willful pride prevented him from breaking with doubt to return to the path of light.

The mother read her son’s soul clearly. She did not reproach him, nor did she speak to him exclusively nor immediately of his religious problem; she attributed his interior troubles to different causes of an inferior order which more than likely played a part in his wretchedness. She wrote to him:

“How is it my dear child that you do not write to us? I feel heavy hearted because of it for I am sure that you do not realize what is taking place in your poor soul; all kinds of things are conflicting within it — it is ardent and lacks the nourishment proper to it; you turn from one side to the other and you cannot tell what really bothers you. Ah! Poor child, be calm, reflect. It is not that you feel your future lost or compromised; at your age, one cannot have established his future or despaired of it; it is not for most persons your age still uncertain. No, it is not that. Your work, your studies do not show sufficient progress? Why? Perhaps because you want to do too many things at once; you

are too impatient. No, not that either? Your mind is willing enough but your heart and your soul are suffering; they have so many yearnings that you are scarcely aware of, and their unease and their suffering react upon your mind sapping from it necessary strength and attention.

“You are suffering, you are unhappy. I feel all that you experience and yet I am powerless to console you, to encourage you much as I should love to do so. Ah! That we might have the same convictions! Why have you rejected the faith of your childhood without a profound examination of your reason for and against it? The statements of those whom faith irritates or who have no religion for lack of instruction have made an impression on your young imagination; but just the same, your heart needs a center that it will never find on earth. It is God, it is the infinite you need and all your yearnings are driving you there. You belong to that select number of elect to whom God communicates Himself and in whose regard He is prodigal of his love when once they have consented to humble themselves by submitting to the obscurities of faith.”

What a frightening duty mothers have! To bring forth the bodies of their children is a beautiful ministry; to rear their souls is an even greater ministry.

What anguish for a mother when a grown child, a son in early manhood or a daughter in early womanhood cuts loose from faith, and considers God lightly! If ever she feels that she has lost her hold over her son or daughter, that they are escaping her, it is when she sees them follow the paths of doubt or fall under the spell of the intoxicating enchantments of flirtation.

A mother must continue to bring forth her children all her life. In this sense, they are always her little ones. Not that she makes them feel their bonds of dependence any longer but that she watches over them. And she prays! Except for a brief reminder from time to time, the clear statement of her hopes joined to the definite but loving message of the father, an occasional letter in which true principles are recalled, the chief role of a mother whose adult child has strayed is prayer, patient waiting and sacrifice — the persevering effort to become a saint.

What if she were to die before she sees the return of the Prodigal? What if the Child were to die before she has seen him “return”?

She should not be discouraged. Can we know the mystery of souls? Can we know what takes place in the last moments? Can we know what goes on within when the exterior reveals nothing? Can we know the value of a mother’s tears? Monica will continue to the end of time to convert Augustine; but Monica must be a saint.

TICK TOCK.

THE mother of Cardinal Herbert Vaughan had fourteen children — eight boys and six girls. Remarkable educator that she was, she believed that she owed the best part of her time to her little world.

The children’s special room looked like the nave of a Church for each little boy and girl had his statue to care for and they never failed to put flowers before it on special occasions.

With what art this mother settled a quarrelsome boy or a vain or untruthful little girl! With the littlest ones, she was not afraid to become a little one and like them to sit on the ground. Thus, placed on their level, as the biography of her Jesuit son expresses it, she used to put her watch to their ears and explain to them that some day God would stop the tick tock of their lives and that He would call to Himself in heaven His children whom He had lent to earth.

In the course of the day, Mrs. Vaughan loved to pick out one or other of her band, preferably two, chosen on the basis of their earnest efforts or some particular need for improvement, and make a visit to Church. Yes, they should pray at home too; they had God in their hearts; but in each village or in each section of town, there is a special house generally of stone where Our Lord lives as He once lived at Nazareth except that now He remains hidden under the appearances of a little Host. She explained to them that prayer consists not in reciting set words but in conversing with Jesus. And if they had been very, very good, she would let them kiss the altar cloth and sometimes the altar itself, a favor the children regarded as most precious. When they had beautiful flowers in their green house they brought them to Church; happy and proud were the ones who were entrusted with delivering the bouquets or the vases of flowers!

Besides the visits made to "Jesus, the Head" there were also visits to the "members of Jesus," "What you do to the least of My brethren you do to Me." And Mrs. Vaughan explained to each child according to its capacity to understand, the great duty of charity and the reason for this duty. She did not hesitate to take them into sordid homes. Sometimes people were horrified to see her take the children to see the sick who suffered from a contagious disease. Wasn't she afraid her children would contract it? But kind, firm Mrs. Vaughan did not allow herself to be the least disturbed by such comments. "Sickness? Well if one of them contracted a sickness while visiting the poor, that would still not be too high a price to pay for Christian charity. Besides, God will protect my children much better than mother-love can."

Here was true formation in piety, true formation in charity.

Here too was encouragement to follow a high ideal.

Herbert, the eldest of the boys, was once quite concerned over a hunting trip that the weather threatened to spoil. "Pray mamma," he said, "that we have good weather!"

And Mrs. Vaughan more concerned to lift her son's soul than to secure him a pleasurable time answered smilingly, "I shall pray that you will be a priest!" How the boy took such an answer at the moment is not recorded. We do know this:

Herbert was... the future Cardinal (the archbishop of Westminster)!

Mrs. Vaughan also gave her children an appreciation of the fine arts. She herself played the harp delightfully. From time to time, she gathered her household about her for a gala time playing, singing, and a bit of mimicry; she always used the occasion to remind the children that there are other melodies and other joys more beautiful than those of earth.

TRAINING IN GENEROSITY.

THE child is instinctively selfish, but he easily learns generosity.

His training should be directed toward it.

Little Rose of Lima's childhood was marked by a series of accidents, maladies, and sufferings which the crude treatment of that time often aggravated rather than relieved. When only three months old she crushed her thumb under a trunk lid and the nail had to be removed. She also had to undergo an ear operation, which was followed by a skin disease that began on her head; her mother treated it with a salve, which burnt her so severely that the surgeon had to treat her for weeks, removing proud flesh so that the healthy skin could heal.

Thanks to her mother's exhortations, this little girl of four years bore the cruel pain with an astonishing calmness and in perfect silence. Are not the staggering mortifications we see her imposing on herself later due to her early training?

Like all little girls, she was vain and took considerable care of her hair, which was very beautiful. Her brother used to throw mud at it and get it all dirty, just to tease her. Rose became very angry, but the brother, recalling perhaps some sermon he had heard, assumed a preaching tone on one of these occasions and said to her solemnly, "Take care, vanity will be your ruin; the curled hair of girls are cords from hell which bind the hearts of men and drag them into the eternal flames."

Rose did not answer, but bit by bit began to understand... and she detached herself. That detachment prepared her for greater sacrifices and soon we see her offering her virginity to God. Now, of course, we know she is a saint.

Jacqueline was another little girl, a little girl of our own day, who learned the lesson of sacrifice. She was sick and suffering much. "Oh, I believe nobody has ever had pain like mine!" "Where does it hurt?" she was asked. "In my stomach, in my head, everywhere!" "Think of Saint Francis who had a red hot iron applied to his eyes as a treatment..."

This time her attention was caught. She forgot her own misery to sympathize with her dear saint whom people had hurt. "Did they cure him after all that?"

Guy Pierre de Fontgalland had to have many strychnine injections in his leg. "Offer it to Jesus, my darling," suggested his mother. "He was crowned with thorns for love of you." "Oh yes, that is true and He kept the thorns in His head while they quickly removed the needle from my leg."

A mother had three children; the oldest was four, the second, three, and the baby, twenty months. It was Good Friday. Why not encourage them to offer Jesus on the Cross some little sacrifice which would cost them a little? "My children, I will not deprive you of your chocolate candy at lunch today; but little girls who love Jesus will know themselves how to sacrifice their chocolate."

She made no further reference to it. None of the children answered. That evening the mother was very much moved to see the three chocolate bars at the foot of the Crucifix. Our Lord must have smiled at the childish offering; one of the candy bars bore the teeth marks of the baby who had hesitated before the offering and begun to nibble on her chocolate.

'These stories of successful lessons in generosity are encouraging. What others have achieved, can I not achieve too?'

MOTHERS AND VOCATIONS.

WHEN Giuseppe Motta was elected to the Swiss Federal Council his first act was to send this telegram to his mother: "To my venerated mother, who remaining a widow while I was still a child, engraved in my heart the concept of duty by teaching me that duty dominates all interests, all selfishness, all other concerns."

To be sure, God remains the Master of vocations. Motta was not entering upon Holy Orders. His providential position was to be quite different and very fruitful besides.

What is certain is that never — or shall we say rarely, very rarely — is a vocation born into a family unless the mother has inculcated in her children a sense of duty and a habit of sacrifice. Of course, all children who receive a strong supernatural training do not enter the priesthood or religious life,

but no child enters upon any career calling for great self-sacrifice, prescinding some unusual influence, which is rare, if he does not acquire early in life a solid spirit of renunciation and generosity in the accomplishment of duty.

On the other hand, where mothers know how to go about teaching and above all practicing complete fidelity to duty and total renunciation, where they always put the supernatural love of God before material love for their children, Our Lord finds it easy to choose His privileged souls.

Monsignor d'Hulst said many a time to Abbe Leprince, "It takes a truly Christian mother to make a good priest. The seminary polishes him up but does not give him the substance, the sacerdotal spirit."

All things considered, that holds true for novitiates and religious life. Nothing replaces family training, above all the influence of the mother. But that training and that influence must be wholly supernatural.

Madame Acarie, foundress of a French Carmelite Convent where she was known as Sister Marie of the Incarnation, (she was later beatified as Blessed Marie of the Incarnation) strove earnestly to rear her six children for God. She explained to them: "I would not hesitate to love a strange child more than you, if his love for God were greater than yours."

However, individual free will always remains and God is 'Always Master of His gifts'. That thought ought to calm the fear — unjustifiable as it is but humanly understandable — of certain mothers who think, "If I conduct my home along lines too thoroughly Christian, if I instill into my children too strong a habit of the virtues which lead to total renunciation, to an all embracing zeal, I shall see my sons and daughters renouncing marriage one by one and setting off for the priesthood or the convent."

If that were to happen, where would be the harm? But that rarely happens in practice. Furthermore, is marriage a state of life that does not require a sense of duty or abnegation?

Let there be no anxiety on this score but perfect peace. The important thing now is not that God might choose so-and-so but that the home give Our Lord maximum glory; that each child, whatever its destiny, serve an apprenticeship in generosity and the true spirit of the Gospel. Everything else as far as the future is concerned should be left to God.

PRIESTS IN THE FAMILY.

THE supreme honor for Christian families is to give priests to God. The father can do much to inspire a priestly vocation but the mother who is often closer to the children can do more. For this, she needs a priestly soul, a gift that is not so rare in mothers as one might believe. "There are," said Rene Bazin, "mothers who have a priestly soul and they give it to their children."

The lack of priests is a terrible sickness of the world today, a sickness that is growing worse. The war has depleted their number and the absence of priestly influence in many parishes before and during the war has damaged more than one vocation.

It is necessary that Christian families desire to give priests to the Church; that they beg God for the grace to prepare to the best of their ability for the eventual flowering of the priesthood.

Christian families should desire to give priests: Such a desire presupposes a profound esteem for the priesthood on the part of the parents. What a pity it is when a child who broaches the subject of

becoming a priest meets with his father's unreasonable anger, "If you mention vocation to me again, I'm going to strangle your confessor for it!" Can there be any greater blessing than a priest in a family?

Christian families should pray: A priestly vocation is a supernatural favor; prayer is essential to obtain it. God's gifts are free, that is true, but we know that He makes some of His choice graces depend upon the prayers of His friends.

Christian families should prepare for vocations: Parents should know how to detect the germs of a vocation. "I hear the grain growing," said an old peasant as he walked about in his field. No one can better read the soul of a child than the mother. "I know him through and through as if I had made him." This rather common but profound statement, expresses very well the sort of intuition mothers have for all that concerns their child. Although the boy himself may not have discovered the divine germ, the mother, if she is keen and close to God, has been able to discern it.

How then help this germ to bud?

Help it gently, for there must be no pressure brought to bear upon the child. Suggest, yes; force, no.

Inspire great esteem for the priesthood. Consider a priest's visit to the home as a privilege and a festive occasion. "From the age of seven," declared Father Jean-Jacques Olier, the founder of the Sulpicians, "I had such an esteem for a priest that in my simple childish mind I believed them no longer human." When asked the source of his great esteem, he said, "From my father and my mother."

"Dear child, since you love to go to church so much and since you are so good in public speaking, you ought to become a priest," suggested the father to his son, the future martyr, Blessed Jean-Gabriel Perboyre. [He was canonized in 1996.]

Often the mother has quicker insight and longer-ranged vision. The father sometimes resists the vocation of his child. Such was the case with Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Alphonsus Ligouri. The father of Saint Alphonsus refused to speak to him for a whole year.

Sometimes though, the father is the one who inspires the love for the priesthood. At the time of the confiscation of Church property in 1905 in France, a father perched his son on his shoulders to watch the pillage of the churches to incite in him a desire to become a defender of the Church later and if possible a priest.

Madame de Quelen did not hesitate to bring her son to the prison of the Carmelite priests to visit the priests interned there during the French Revolution. The son, Hyacinthe-Louis De Quelen, as Archbishop of Paris, later chose the Church of this Carmelite prison for his See.

If a child seems drawn to the priesthood show him the high motives that can lead him to embrace such a calling — the desire to imitate Our Lord and the desire to save souls.

What a reward the parents reap at their son's ordination or on the day of their death. That repays them for all the sacrifices they willingly made; repays them with interest.

THE MOTHER OF A SAINT.

MADAME DE BOISY, the mother of Saint Francis de Sales, brought many precious virtues with her to the chateau of Thorens in Savoy where her husband lived. Unassuming and kind, she considered the village households around her estate almost as part of her family; she showed

concern for their poverty and sufferings, settled their differences and exercised a control over them that was highly successful for the simple reason that she was careful not to make a show of it. Watchful to see that her servants were truly a part of the family, she encouraged them, without constraining them, to practice their faith and offered to read spiritual books to them herself after the evening meal; she invited all of them to attend the family prayer.

Unfortunately, her marriage promised to be sterile. At Annecy in a church dedicated to Our Lady under the title of one of her shrines in Picardy, Our Lady of Liesse, she begged God to give her a son, promising to "exercise all her care to make him worthy of heaven." On August 1567, Francis de Sales was born. He was so frail a child that all feared for his life.

As he grew older, the child had no greater delight than to show kindness to the unfortunate and to distribute among the poor the delicacies his mother gave him for this purpose. It is said of him that by way of thanking his mother he promised her, "When I am my own master, I will give you a beautiful red silk dress every year."

At the same time she was training her little boy to almsgiving, Madame de Sales was also educating him to love of God and to sacrifice.

Soon the hour of separation struck. The child had to leave for the school of La Roche and later for the College at Annecy. He was beloved by all, excused the faults of his comrades and one day even took a whipping in place of his cousin Gaspard de Sales. Shortly after his First Holy Communion, he told his mother that he wanted to receive the tonsure some day and that therefore she ought to have his beautiful blond curls cut now.

Francis had two brothers. To characterize them and himself, he developed a comparison between the trio and the seasoning of a salad: "Jean-Francis with his violent temper furnishes the vinegar; Louis with his wisdom the salt; and I, the good-natured chubby Francis, put in the oil because I love mildness."

Francis possessed a secret of which his mother was the confidant: He wanted to be a priest at any cost. Madame de Sales shared his dream and upheld her son in it. After six years at Jesuit schools and colleges accompanied by outstanding success, he entered the University of Padua. Here he astonished his professors with the brilliant way he defended his thesis although he was scarcely twenty-four at the time.

The father already envisioned his son as a great lawyer, then a senator, and the founder of a fine family, but Francis, enlightened by a providential experience he had one day while riding through a forest, decided not to delay his consecration to God any longer.

His father objected. The mother intervened: "Can we dispute with God over a soul He wants for His service?" Secretly she had clerical clothes made for Francis. The post of provost of the Cathedral Chapter became vacant. The father finally gave in and on June 8, 1593, Francis was ordained to the diaconate. In the opinion of his father, who missed the joy of seeing him a bishop, Francis preached too much and didn't put in enough Greek and Latin when he did preach. But Francis knew how to talk to souls as his famous missions at Chablais strikingly demonstrated. Rich and poor besieged his confessional.

On December 8, 1602, Francis, who was then thirty-five gave his first episcopal blessing to his mother, who soon put herself under his spiritual direction. One of the last joys of this noble mother was to read her son's "Introduction to Devout Life," a book which met with spectacular success.

A stroke brought the saint's mother to the point of death. The holy bishop of Annecy came hurriedly to her bedside. She recognized him, took his hand and kissed it, then putting up her arms to draw his head closer to her to kiss him, she said, "You are my father and my son!"

Francis closed her eyes at death. Broken by sorrow, he wrote to Madame (Saint) Jane Frances de Chantel, "It has pleased God to take from this world our very good and very dear mother in order to have her, as I strongly hope, at His right hand, since she was one of the sweetest and most innocent souls that could be found."

Sons are worth what their mothers are worth.

PARENTS OF SAINTS.

SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES was the first child of Madame de Boisy. Saint Paul of the Cross was the first of sixteen children. The saint in the family is not always the oldest. Saint Bernard was the third of seven. Saint Thomas Aquinas was the sixth child in the family. Saint Therese of the Child Jesus was the last of nine children. Saint Ignatius of Loyola the last of thirteen.

What glory would have been lost to the Church if the parents of these children had consulted their selfishness rather than their duty of parenthood and had left buried in the realms of nothingness these little beings destined to become saints! It brings to mind the conversation between two women, the one voluntarily sterile, the other surrounded by fine children. The first woman explained to the second that she just couldn't be tied down. The second responded with the classic argument:

"And suppose that your father and mother had reasoned like that, where would you be?"

The saints are rarely only children for two reasons: The first, that there cannot be any sanctity without a habit of renunciation and this habit is much more readily acquired in a large family where each one must forget self to think of others; where the rubbing of character against character whittles down selfishness; where the parents do not have time to overwhelm their offspring with a foolish indulgence that spoils them. The second, that God gives the grace of a holy call, by preference, where there is an integral practice of virtue, where virtue is held in honor, where the parents do not fear difficulty but trust in Divine Providence.

Saint Vincent de Paul was one of five children and Saint Vincent Ferrer, one of eight, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Blessed [now Saint] Jean-Gabriel Perboyre, Saint Bernadette were each, one of eight children. In the family of the Cure of Ars, Saint John Vianney, there were six children; in that of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, seven; in that of Saint Benedict Joseph Labre, fifteen. In the family of Saint Catherine of Siena, there were twenty-two children of the same marriage. And how many more examples we could still find!

There is a charming Breton legend that carries an equally charming lesson. One day Amel, the fisherman, and his wife Penhov, who used to bring fresh fish to the monks, had left with their child to bring in the nets. They were overtaken by the tide. The water rose higher and higher and higher. "Wife, this is our last hour; put your two feet on my shoulders; in this way you will hold out longer... and love my memory." Penhov obeyed. Amel sunk into the sand like a post driven in with a hammer. Penhov seized the child and lifting it above her said, "Put your two feet on my shoulders; in this way you will hold out longer. And love deeply the memory of your father and mother." The mother too sank beneath the water and soon, only the golden hair of the child floated on the water. An angel of God passed by. He seized the child's hair and pulled. "My, how heavy you are!"

Another blond head appeared, that of Penhov who had not let go of her boy's feet. "How heavy you both are!" Then Amel appeared for he had not let go of his wife's feet... By the child, the father and mother had been saved!

Who knows whether or not some parents will enter Paradise because an angel has seized their child by the hair! What a beautiful letter of introduction for Heaven is a child and above all a canonized child!
