

The Christian Home.

Part 1B. Prayer and a Catholic Atmosphere.

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Irreligious Atmosphere.

IN our day, irreligion may be said to pervade the very air we breathe. Just as our lungs inhale the germs of disease, and our bodies are coated with minute particles of dust, whenever we go abroad in a crowded city, so our souls, our memory and imagination, are exposed to an atmosphere tainted with irreligion whenever we go abroad into the world. To counteract the evil effects of a day's exposure to the smoke and dust of the city, we wash the stains from our bodies when we return home, we restore our lost vitality by partaking of wholesome food; and we fill our lungs with air free from the impurities that vitiate the atmosphere in factories and the busy marts of trade.

We must pursue a like course if we wish to render our souls immune from the contagion of irreligion. We must cleanse our souls from the dust of earthy and irreligious impressions that we acquire from contact with the wicked world. We must move about in a pure atmosphere from which all taint of irreligion is excluded. We must strengthen the Faith within us by nourishing our souls with wholesome mental food. To drop the metaphor, we must offset the irreligion that we daily encounter abroad, by prayer, by a Catholic atmosphere, and by good reading in the home.

Point 1. Daily Prayer.

The simplest, the easiest, the most ordinary, and still, for the individual, the most important exercise of the virtue of religion is prayer.

Hence, if religion is to occupy that place in the home, which we have seen it deserves, the members of the family must be faithful to the time-honored custom of daily prayer. No matter how old-fashioned and childish it may seem to some to insist on morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals, and family prayers at certain seasons, it is these very things that establish religion firmly in the home, bring down Heaven's blessing, and give the home its true consecration. Show me a family where all the members are regular in saying their daily prayers, and I will show you a home where religion flourishes and peace and contentment reign. Show me a home where prayer is habitually neglected, and I will show you a family whose religion, if any still exist, is merely a matter of form.

Natural Place for Prayer.

How, indeed, could it be otherwise? We have the duty of saving our immortal souls not only at the moment of death but all through life; and that duty necessarily implies keeping ourselves in the state of sanctifying grace. No one will remain long in the state of grace, if he is careless about his daily

prayers; and few will pray daily, if they do not pray at home, because the home is the most convenient as it is the most natural place for one's regular daily prayer. What could be more natural for a man who believes that God is his Creator and Sovereign Lord, his greatest benefactor and best friend; who believes that we are in this world solely to do God's holy will and thus merit an eternal reward; what could be more natural, I ask, than for such a one to remember and to acknowledge this fact the first thing on awaking in the morning; to turn his first thoughts to God by blessing himself and making the good intention, and then to kneel down to pay his homage to his Creator, to thank Him for His endless favors, to renew his fealty to Him, and to implore His blessing? And what more natural as well as more wise and fitting than for him to do the like in the evening before he commits himself to the night's sleep from which he never knows whether he will awaken?

It is not necessary to devote a great deal of time to one's morning and evening prayer. For the ordinary layman five minutes will usually suffice; and, if necessary, one can say a really devout morning or evening prayer, embracing all the essentials, in two or three minutes. The important thing is to be regular about it; to have a regular formula or number of prayers to say; to say them at a regular time, and in a certain regular manner. If you like to use a book, you will do well to do so. The use of a book helps to fix the habit of praying. But such is in nowise necessary. Only have some definite prayers to say as the minimum and say that minimum well.

How Much Must One Pray?

But what should be the minimum for a good morning or evening prayer? That depends on various circumstances — one's age, one's leisure, one's needs, and also on the extent to which one makes use of the other means of grace — the Mass and Holy Communion. It is plain that not all have the time for the same amount of prayer in the morning. Some find it more convenient to say only a short prayer in the morning but a long prayer at night. Others are accustomed to say the greater part of their prayers in church during the day. A certain doctor of my acquaintance has the very praiseworthy habit of praying for about a quarter of an hour in church on his way home every evening. Nor do all need the same amount of prayer. Persons exposed to greater temptations, or subject to evil habits, as well as persons bound to a more perfect life must pray more than persons not thus circumstanced. But all must pray enough to enable them to live habitually in the state of sanctifying grace. So much is certain: if one falls into mortal sin, the reason is to be sought in the insufficiency of one's prayers or in the infrequency of one's reception of the sacraments. While it is impossible, therefore, to determine just what prayers each one should say in the morning or in the evening or even each day, it seems to me that our daily prayers should always include the acts of Faith, Hope, Charity, contrition and thanksgiving, the Apostles' Creed, and several Our Fathers and Hail Marys.

Pray on Your Knees!

In regard to the manner of praying, it is best to say your morning prayer after you are dressed; your evening prayer before undressing, and both on your knees. This last point is of great importance.

In the first place, the act of kneeling is itself equivalent to a prayer, being an act of adoration, and it is unquestionably the most becoming posture in which to address ourselves to our Creator. Then the practice of kneeling to say our prayers has the good effect of reminding us of that duty. If we want to say our prayers only while dressing or undressing or when in bed, the chances are that in many cases they will be said poorly or be altogether forgotten. And lastly, the habit of kneeling at our morning and evening prayers will have a most edifying effect on others in the household. Even

though each one prays in the privacy of his room, it will be generally known in the family that one is accustomed to pray on bended knees, and that knowledge will be of inestimable value in mutually encouraging one another never to abandon the practice. When brothers occupy the same room, or sisters share the same apartment, the practice is of still greater importance for their mutual edification. Yet most important of all is that parents who are still able to kneel, do so and thus give a good example to their children.

The Parents' Example.

Setting a good example in this matter of prayer is a part of the religious education, which parents owe to their children. And what a beneficial influence it will have upon the children all through life, if the parents not only teach them from their tenderest years to pray but also pray with them; and even when they are grown up, let them always be aware of the fact that their parents, too, prostrate themselves morning and evening on their knees in order to pay homage to their God.

Nothing will impress more deeply on the child that prayer is not merely a child's duty but a duty for life; that religion is something not only for the church but for the home as well; that there is nothing about praying or kneeling for anyone to be ashamed of; but rather that it would be a cause of shame for any Christian, be he old or young, to be obliged to admit that he did not daily lift his hands and his heart to God in prayer.

How well do I remember the splendid example that my own father gave in this respect. Every evening without fail he would kneel, entirely free of any support, before a Crucifix in the living room, and with devoutly folded hands, and body as upright as a mountain pine perform his evening devotions.

Point 2. Grace at Meals.

But it is not enough that each and every member of the family have the habit of saying his morning and evening prayers. Where religion flourishes in the home as it should, if the family is truly to deserve the name Christian, there must be found also the age-old Christian custom of saying grace before and after meals. This venerable custom is the inevitable consequence of a Christian outlook on life. If we believe that God is the author and sustainer of life, that "every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17) then surely we should be mindful of our indebtedness to our Heavenly Father at least as often as we partake of the food by which our mortal life is sustained. Our blessed Savior expressly teaches us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread"; and what time could be more fitting for the fulfillment of that duty than the hour of our daily meals?

A Profession of Faith.

There is, however, yet another important aspect to the practice of saying grace in the home. To pray in the presence of others is a profession of one's Faith; and for that reason alone, if for no other, the practice should be fostered. You simply cannot make your religion a strictly interior affair, just as little as you can make it exclusively a church affair. If you sow good seed in a fertile soil and take care that it receives the necessary warmth and moisture, the seed will not long remain hidden but will sprout forth and give unmistakable evidence of the living principle within. It is exactly the same with religion. The man that really has deep religious convictions will also show them exteriorly at the opportune time and place. Only those Christians whose Faith is not deeply rooted or who have been misled by the unchristian fashion of the day will say: "I believe in praying

without attracting notice. There is no use making a show every time a person wants to pray.” Indeed not; and it is to be presumed that thousands of Catholics pray frequently, even in company, without others being aware of it. I am willing, too, to pardon them if they offer that excuse for not praying openly in public eating houses, but not when there is a question of meal prayers in the privacy of one’s own home.

But someone might say: “I don’t see the value of such a profession of Faith in the home. Everyone at home knows my religious convictions; so why need I manifest them by blessing myself or saying grace at table?”

One might argue with just as much logic: “I don’t see the need of showing the members of my family that I love them. They know that I love them, and that love is an affair of the heart. So why should I give token of my love by my looks, manner, words, or actions?”

Just as the person who shows little love for the members of his household really has little love for them; so he, too, who cares not to manifest his religion to them very likely has precious little religion left in his heart. Interior virtues must needs be exercised by exterior acts; otherwise, they will wither away and finally perish altogether.

Prayer Necessary for Salvation.

It is quite true that there is no positive law commanding us to pray before and after meals. Neither is there such a law requiring us to say our morning and evening prayers. But nothing is more certain than that we are obliged to pray, and that, for adults, prayer is an indispensable means of salvation. And since a more fitting time for prayer can scarcely be found than the hour of rising, the hour of retiring, and the meal hours, it is much to be feared that those who do not pray at these times do not pray at all, or at least not enough to satisfy the obligation of prayer. It will doubtless be found that usually those that are most conscientious about saying these customary prayers are also the ones that pray most at other times and make the most frequent use of the Mass and the sacraments.

Let me beg the reader, therefore, not to dismiss the question of saying grace as a trifling matter. A drop of rain is also a small matter; yet every rain, the heaviest as well as the lightest, is made up of drops. In particular, as a means of making religion flourish in the home, the value of prayer at meals can hardly be overestimated. To say grace before and after every meal means to worship God, to profess your Faith, and to edify your neighbor six times a day, 180 times a month, and more than two thousand times a year. Small as the single prayers may be, and insignificant as may seem their effect, the total sum will amount to a great deal and is sure to bring down a shower of blessings.

Point 3. Family Prayer.

“Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). By these words our blessed Savior clearly ascribes a special power and a special blessing to prayers said jointly with others; and we may be sure that if this is true of any group of persons gathered together in His name, it is doubly true of the Christian family, which is knit together not only by the strongest ties of mutual love but also by the consecration of a sacrament. All the good effects that flow from prayers said by the individual, will accrue in still greater abundance from family prayer. In their pastoral letter to all American Catholics some years ago (1920) our Bishops expressed themselves on this point as follows: “We heartily commend the beautiful practice of family prayer. . . . The presence of Jesus will surely be a source of blessing to the home where parents and children unite to offer up prayer in common. The spirit of piety, which

this custom develops, will sanctify the bonds of family love and ward off the dangers, which often bring sorrow and shame. We appeal in this matter with special earnestness to young fathers and mothers, who have it in their power to mould the hearts of their children and train them betimes in the habit of prayer.”

Example of Tobias (Tobit).

It is to young parents, too, nay, to newly married couples, that I would appeal not to await the appearance of children, but to begin to pray in common from the very outset of their wedded life. While everything is new and family traditions are only in the making, it will be an easy matter for them to establish the custom of family prayer; whereas early neglect may allow a contrary custom to get so firmly rooted that it will be hard to break. Would that all newly married couples would follow the beautiful example of the younger Tobias (Tobit) and his wife Sara. “We are the children of saints,” he said, “and must not be joined together like heathens that know not God” (Tobit 8:5). Accordingly, they did not wait until the wedding festivities and their honeymoon were over before thinking of praying in common but the very first night after their marriage “prayed earnestly, both together, that health might be given them” and that God would bless their union.

Family Worship a Duty.

To anyone that gives the matter serious thought the neglect of family prayer in a Christian family must seem well-nigh impossible. It is to be supposed, namely, that the head of a Christian family esteems the Faith as his greatest treasure, as worth more to himself and to every member of his household than any amount of earthly goods. It is further to be presumed that, valuing his faith as he does, he will be most solicitous about preserving it so as to insure its blessings for himself and his family. On such a supposition, is it possible that he will relegate all prayer to the privacy of each one’s room and never have the family pray aloud in common? Just as little as he would have each member of the family take his meals alone and never do any work or have any recreation in common. As long as the family circle, family meals, family picnics remain in the families of civilized communities, so long will also family prayer be fostered in every truly Christian home. For, even apart from the value of family prayer as a means of securing the blessings of religion, it will ever be incumbent on the family as a specific duty. The family is a perfect natural society, a distinct entity in itself; and as such, it owes God an act of common worship. It is not enough that the single members of the family practice their religion; the family itself as a society must pay its homage to the Creator and Lord of the family; and this is done by family prayer.

Saying Grace Aloud.

How often this duty will be performed, will depend on each family’s devotion, and more particularly on the religious zeal of the parents. In families where different members rise at different hours, it is usually unpractical, if not impossible, to recite the morning prayer in common; but the evening prayer could easily be a family prayer, especially in young families; and this practice is most heartily to be recommended. There is no valid excuse anywhere, however, for not saying grace at meals aloud together; and I hope that no father or mother who reads this will fail to introduce the practice, if it does not yet exist in their families. The prayer most suited for this purpose is without doubt the “Our Father,” to which may be appropriately added the “Hail Mary” and, before meals, “Bless us, O Lord, et cetera” and after meals, “We thank You, O Lord, et cetera.” To recite these three prayers aloud, slowly and distinctly, and to make the sign of the cross before and after, requires no more than one minute of time. Surely, no Christian can be so niggardly with God as to

say that that is too much; or to contend that to devote a minute to prayer before and after each meal would be to convert the home into a monastery. Yet I pronounce no anathema against the family that is content with less. Where appetites are especially keen, the chances are that the saying of a short prayer is more likely to become regular than the saying of a long one. And hence, as a compromise, I would suggest that the afore-mentioned prayers be said in common at least before and after the principal meal, and that a part of them be said at the other meals.

Seasonal Devotions.

In addition to daily family prayers, there should be also seasonal prayers in common in all Christian families, especially during the months of May (Mary's month) and October (the month of the Rosary) and during the holy seasons of Advent and Lent. There are, it is true, special devotions in church at these seasons, two or three times a week; but a good Catholic should not be content with these. If the family is to share the blessings of religion to the full, the changes of the ecclesiastical year, which are so striking a feature of the services in church, should be reflected also in the home. Very suitable for these seasonal devotions in the home are the approved litanies of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Name, the Blessed Virgin, and Saint Joseph, and above all the rosary. The rosary, with its joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries, is appropriate for every season; is made up of the best of all prayers; can be lengthened or shortened according to pleasure; is easily recited by even a small child, and is enriched with numerous indulgences. Consisting, too, as it does of a number of different prayers linked together by the consideration of a certain mystery for the purpose of praising God, the rosary is a fitting symbol of the Christian family, whose members are united by the bonds of blood and religion; who share joys, sorrows, and glories in common; and who work together for a common end — their temporal and eternal welfare and happiness.

Overcoming Bashfulness.

I realize that in families where the custom does not exist, a certain bashfulness in regard to spiritual matters will have to be overcome in order to make a start; but once the ice is broken and a beginning made, it will be easy to develop the practice. Women and girls are usually less backward than men and boys in these matters; and as in so many other worthy causes, so here, too, let them take the initiative. They know how to coax the men folk in order to attain their own personal aims. Let them employ the same knowledge for the benefit of the entire family. God will most certainly reward them richly if they establish in the family this pious practice of saying the rosary; for to them will go the credit of enriching their home with those spiritual roses that fill it with the fragrance of Heaven's blessing.

The Golden Mean.

It is hardly necessary to remind parents that even in fostering so praiseworthy a practice as family prayer, they should not attempt too much. As in all things, so here, too, one must observe the golden mean. Children cannot be expected to devote as much time to prayer as their elders do, or should do. They naturally take more to play than to prayer; and if they are indiscreetly obliged to take part in interminable prayers, there is danger of creating in them a distaste for prayer. Such a method defeats its own end. The object in accustoming children to say their prayers regularly from the time they begin to talk, is to develop in them a love of prayer and a realization of the need of it. This can be done while their hearts are still pliable by teaching them very short prayers as early as possible, and by gradually making them understand that when they pray they are speaking to the good God,

from whom all blessings flow; to their loving Jesus, who came upon earth that they might come to Heaven; and to the Mother of Jesus or to their Guardian Angel and the Saints.

Making Prayer Spontaneous.

This background of religious truth and Gospel story is of the greatest importance in teaching the young to love prayer and to feel the need of it; and it should not be hard for any mother who has a little piety herself to instill into her children such an appreciation of God's greatness, goodness and power that prayer will come natural to them as the spontaneous utterance of their grateful and confiding hearts. Or would it really be so hard, even before the infants are able to speak, to make the sign of the cross over them and to say a brief morning and evening prayer aloud in their stead, thus accustoming them to the sound of the words, so that "the good God" or "Jesus" or "Mary" might be the first word their innocent lips would utter?

Would it not be easy to show them pictures of Jesus and tell them stories of Jesus, as their understanding develops — stories of His childhood, of Bethlehem, the stable, Mary and Joseph, the singing angels and the adoring shepherds — stories of His public life — how He loved children, how the crowds followed Him, how He went about doing good? Remember, mothers, that your little ones' sanctified souls are hungry for knowledge of God and holy things. So tell them how much God loves them; that it is God who made all the good and beautiful things they see — the fruits and flowers, the trees and bushes and grass, the birds and the fishes, the soft-furred kitten and the friendly dog. Tell them, too, how poor Jesus was; that He became poor for love of us. Speak to them of Jesus in the Tabernacle, and awaken in them a desire to visit Him. In this way, not by threatening or scolding but by gently leading and by instilling knowledge, which will of itself yield motives for prayer, you will surely implant deep in them for life, if not a love, at least a strong feeling of the appropriateness of daily prayer.

Mothers of Future Saints.

But to pursue such a course, some may say, would be to try to make a saint out of every child. Well, is that such an awful possibility to contemplate? Somewhere in the world to-day are the mothers of the saints of to-morrow; and not of the saints only but of the criminals also; of the great as well as the lowly, the heroes and the outcasts, the successes and the failures. You know not what latent possibilities are in your child. Of one thing only are you sure, that one day he will be numbered either among the elect or the reprobate.

What his eternal lot will be, will depend largely upon his practice or his neglect of prayer. Have a care, mother dear, lest his neglect of it be laid to your charge.

Jacob's Ladder.

When Jacob, the son of Isaac, fled from the anger of his brother, Esau, into the land of Haran, he pursued his journey until after sunset; and then, weary and footsore, he laid himself down to sleep, resting his head on a stone. While he slept, God appeared to him in a wondrous vision. He saw a ladder that reached from earth to Heaven, and on it angels of God ascending and descending. And the Lord himself, leaning on the top of the ladder, spoke to him saying: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. . . . In you and your seed, all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed. And I will be your keeper whithersoever you go, and will bring you back into this land: neither will I leave you, till I shall have accomplished all that I have said."

Upon awaking, Jacob trembled and exclaimed full of awe: "Indeed, the Lord is in this place. . . . This is no other than the house of God and the gate of Heaven" (Genesis 29).

The ladder, which Jacob beheld in his dream, with angels ascending and descending, is an appropriate symbol of the prayers that ascend to Heaven from the Christian home and bring down God's blessing on its inmates. Would to God that such a ladder would rise to Heaven from the home of every family in the land! If you would have God's angels bear His special blessing to your homes, Christian parents; if you wish the Lord to be your keeper and to abide in your home; if you would be led back to your true home, the land of your Heavenly Father; — then let your prayers ascend to Heaven like a cloud of precious incense morning, noon, and night, and God will look down upon your home with special favor. In very truth may it then be said of your home what Jacob said of the place of his vision: "Indeed, the Lord is in this place." During life, it will be a house of God, and at the end of life the gate to Heaven.

CHAPTER 3. Catholic Atmosphere in the Home.

"In order to obtain perfect education, it is of the utmost importance to see that all those conditions which surround the child during the period of his formation, in other words, the combination of circumstances which we call enthronement, correspond exactly to the end proposed. The first natural and necessary element in this environment, as regards education, is the family, and this precisely because so ordained by the Creator Himself."

Pius XI in "Christian Education of Youth."

Point 1. Need of Healthy Atmosphere.

To enjoy the great boon of good health, it is not enough for one to be cleanly in one's person, to partake of sufficient wholesome food and drink, and to take a proper amount of exercise. Many a child in the crowded districts of our great centers of industry has plenty of good food and exercise and has been taught by a loving mother to cultivate the habit of personal cleanliness, and yet is far from enjoying good health. Living in the shadow of huge buildings, breathing in constantly the smoke and dust of near-by factories that becloud and bedim the small portion of sunlight that it receives, instead of attaining the full vigor and sprightliness of the normal child, it must languish and pale like a flower in a sterile soil. But take this child from these unpropitious surroundings and place it in the country far from the dusty city; let it bask in a glory of sunshine and drink deep draughts of pure country air; and the bloom that will redden its cheeks, the sparkle that will light up its eyes, and the lilt that will appear in its gait will proclaim the beneficial effects of such a change. The one thing that was wanting to the child was a healthy atmosphere; and such an atmosphere we must all have in order to remain in a state of perfect health.

Now what is true of the body and natural life is equally true of the soul and the religious life. If the vitality of a Catholic's Faith is not to be gradually weakened by the contagion of irreligion that infests practically our entire public life, he must be able to spend the greater part of his private life in a place where the moral atmosphere is not only not tainted but is positively religious; and this he will be able to do only if he have a morally healthy and religiously bracing atmosphere in his own home.

Atmosphere of the Home.

The reader will readily understand that in homes where family prayer is regularly practiced, much has already been done to create a religious atmosphere; for by the atmosphere of the home I mean,

broadly speaking, the aggregate of external influences in the home, affecting the spirituality of the members of the family, and, in a narrower sense, the sum-total of sensible objects in the home capable of exerting a favorable or unfavorable influence upon the religious or moral life of its inmates. Just as we are variously affected as regards our bodies by the material atmosphere in which we live, — by its heat and cold, by the gases and germs and minute particles of dust that it holds: so, too, are our souls affected by the sensible objects around us; and the aggregate of such objects is accordingly quite appropriately called moral atmosphere.

Effect of Environment.

That the moral atmosphere or environment, as it may also be styled, exerts a strong influence upon a man's habits and the formation of his character, no one that has the slightest knowledge of human nature will presume to deny. It is a principle of sound philosophy that there is no conception in the mind which is not preceded by a perception of one of the five senses; and since it is the mind and will that govern our rational actions, it follows that our sense-perceptions, notably those of seeing and hearing, must have a powerful influence upon our actions. Absolutely speaking, of course, a person may shake off this influence; but the important thing to be noted is that the influence is there and is felt even though it be withstood; and since we must be guided by what ordinarily happens and not by what is theoretically possible, parents and other responsible persons should see to it that the moral atmosphere in their home is such as will exert a wholesome influence on all in the household.

It is true, the influence exerted by environment produces its effects slowly and perhaps imperceptibly; but it may not for that reason be belittled or ignored, any more than the slowly but constantly dripping water which little by little hollows the stone.

A Worldly Atmosphere.

To state in the first place what the moral atmosphere of the home should not be, if it is to meet the requirements of a truly Christian home, I would say that it should not be worldly. Worldliness is diametrically opposed to religion. The spirit of the Catholic religion is the spirit of the Gospel, and the name for that spirit is un-worldliness. The whole purpose of the Catholic religion is to turn our thoughts, our hopes, our aspirations and our efforts away from this world to the other world; and we are good Catholics only in so far as we realize this end. Christ tells us plainly: "You cannot serve two masters." We cannot serve God and the world. Yet one of the two we must serve. Hence, we are obliged to choose either the one or the other. If we choose to serve God, if we want to rule our life according to the precepts of the Gospel, then we must banish worldliness from our homes. If we fail to banish worldliness even from our homes, which we are free to fashion to suit our own tastes and to meet our own wants, then we plainly show that the world still has a place in our hearts.

Extravagant Furnishings.

But how does this worldliness manifest itself in the home? When may the atmosphere of the home be said to have a worldly character? First of all, when its dominant note is luxury or extravagance. If the Christian's attitude towards wealth must square with those two statements of Our Lord: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," and "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23), then it is plainly an evidence of worldliness, or opposition to the spirit of Christianity, if wealth obtrudes itself in the home from every nook and corner. I do not say that a rich Catholic may not have a splendid home, furnished in a manner suited to his station in life. But

there should be no boldly conspicuous display of wealth, evidencing an inordinate love of worldly magnificence and a disposition to glory in it. That would show a worldly spirit.

But it is not only the rich who may sin by extravagance. Families of the middle class are just as often guilty.

The homes of such families betray a very decided spirit of worldliness when they are quite evidently furnished more richly than the owners' modest means can afford. We are in conscience bound to make a discreet use of our earthly goods and to make our expenditures in proportion to our means. The endeavor to match the splendor of one's own home with that of the homes of one's more well-to-do acquaintances proceeds from pride and leads to other unchristian practices besides the misapplication of one's earthly goods. In order to be able to earn more money to spend on luxuries, some young wives persist in retaining the gainful positions, which they had before marriage, and for the sake of this filthy lucre sinfully postpone the task of rearing a family. That is the worst kind of worldliness — the kind that weighs duty and worldly goods in the balance and deliberately chooses the latter. Beware of it, my dear young couples. Beware! (See the quotation below.)

Extravagance in Dress.

What has been said of excessive expenditures for the furnishing and decorating of one's home, is equally true of extravagance in ornamenting one's person. The home may be given a worldly touch by the unduly rich or extremely stylish apparel of the persons that dwell in it. One is certainly allowed to dress well and becomingly within the limits of one's means and according to the requirements of one's station in life; but in no station in life is there an excuse for extravagance. There may be no injustice to anyone if a woman buys all the exquisite gowns, rare jewels, and costly footwear and headgear that she can possibly pay for; but neither is there any charity in it or Christian moderation; and justice is not the only virtue that must regulate the use we make of our worldly goods. We are bound also by the law of moderation and of charity; and it is sinful to waste money for the extravagant decoration of one's person or one's home when there are thousands of deserving poor who have not even the necessary food, clothing, and shelter.

Pope Pius XI on Mothers Who Work Away from Home.

"Mothers will above all devote their work to the home and the things connected with it. Intolerable and to be opposed with all our strength is the abuse whereby mothers of families, because of the insufficiency of the father's salary, are forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the domestic walls, to the neglect of their own proper cares and duties, particularly the education of their children."

Encyclical "Quadragesimo Anno," on the Social Order.

Note Well — If His Holiness condemns the abuse whereby mothers are forced to work away from their homes, what must he think of those mothers, who, without any compulsion whatever, entirely of their own accord, pursue gainful occupations outside the domestic walls?

Keeping a Family Budget.

The best way for parents to avoid excessive or ill-advised expenditures is to keep a family budget. Let them make a careful study of their resources and a classified list of their needs; for example, housing, food, clothing, running expenses, improvement, and savings. Then let them fix a certain

percentage of their income for each of these items of expense, and hold their disbursements strictly within the budget allowance, unless real necessity or charity require otherwise. It is hardly necessary to remark that also such expenses as church, school and club dues, charity and amusements must be figured in the budget, and that according to the aforesaid classification these, together with all outlays for reading material, could be put under the heading 'improvement'; that is, mental, moral, or physical. Keeping a home and family is just as much a business as running a store; so why should it not be kept on a business basis? Many couples have had their eyes opened by keeping an itemized account of disbursements. They found that they had been extravagant without realizing it. But if keeping tab on one's expenses teaches economy, it should be done in every Christian home; for economy, super-naturalized, is nothing but the Christian virtue of moderation.

A Touch of Paganism.

Another indication of worldliness in the home is the unchristian and sometimes even pagan character of the objects with which it is equipped. Let us enter such a home. What do we see? At our very entrance, perhaps, a painting of Apollo dancing with thin-clad muses on the lawn; there a lamp or candelabrum supported by the nude figure of Cupid; in a corner, perhaps, a statue of Venus of Milo; on the library table various gay-colored magazines displaying bathing girls or notorious "movie" actresses on the front covers; on the mantle a snow-white bust of Pallas or some other mythological deity; and here and there as we wander through the various apartments, sundry other ornaments and articles of a like character. Will any Catholic maintain that such objects are appropriate in a Christian home? Yet there are Catholic homes, and not a few of them, in which such ornaments are quite common. In some cases, their presence is due to mere thoughtlessness or sheer worldly-mindedness, and no conscience is made of it. In others, however, a sense of guilt is manifested by the care with which such objects are removed when a visit of the pastor or some other clergyman is expected.

Regard for Modesty.

To be in thorough accord with its profession of Christianity, the home of a Catholic family should be free from all things of this kind. The home is not an art museum; and statues of pagan deities that may be tolerated in museums are out of place in a Christian home. And so, too, are all images not in conformity with Christian modesty. It will not be enough to limit them to a small representation. Neither will it suffice to confine them to one place, say the reception room, in order that there at least you may show your broadmindedness to the non-Catholics who enter your home. No, a Catholic home should contain nothing that proclaims sympathy with the spirit of the world. One picture, one statue, one ornament may mar the character of an entire room and thwart the good effect that other images are calculated to produce. Away, then, Catholic fathers and mothers, with all worldliness from your homes! You are exposed enough to its contagion when you go abroad. At least be quit of it when you enter the sanctuary of your own home.

An Insidious Propaganda.

If pictures and statues of persons insufficiently clad give an air of worldliness to the home, what must be the effect of such lack of modesty in the living inmates? There is an insidious propaganda abroad in our day to tear down the conventions that Christian civilization has established as safeguards of the virtue of purity. Despite the specious reasons advanced in its defense; for example, that one should become familiar with the nude in order not to be affected by it, the plain

purpose of this propaganda is to substitute a pagan code for our Christian code of morality. This purpose is the more evident since some of the more outspoken adherents of the movement have declared that the Ten Commandments are antiquated and that there is no longer such a thing as sin. In view of this threat of paganism, the duty of Catholics is clear. Neither in the home nor elsewhere may there be any letting down of the bars of decency and Christian propriety. And mothers should so train their children from childhood on that they will never presume to appear in the presence of others without being modestly covered. Those girls who make no conscience of exposing themselves in the presence of their sisters, will gradually come to make nothing of wearing insufficient clothing in public. And when modesty is thrown to the winds, purity will not be slow to follow.

Point 2. A Catholic Atmosphere.

Worldliness, then, must be banished from the Christian home, if the latter is to fulfill its mission of helping the individual Catholic to resist the enticements of the world. Yet when we have purified our homes of worldliness, our task is not yet completed. We must provide also a distinctly Catholic atmosphere. There are Catholic homes, or I should say rather, there are homes of Catholics, that do not contain the slightest evidence of the religion of those that dwell in them. You may see there pictures of beautiful birds and horses and dogs; of landscapes and castles; of distinguished authors, musicians and statesmen; but you will look in vain for any religious token of a distinctly Catholic character.

The occupants of such homes justify this want by saying that they do not believe in parading their religion before the world. I agree that ordinarily we need not parade our religion before the world; but are we doing that when we give it scope within the sacred precincts of our own homes? The Catholic who fails to avail himself of the external aids to religion provided by religious objects in the home shows that religion is not a dominant factor in his life.

Portraits of Your Friends.

By all means, therefore, let there be some distinctly Catholic images in your home, if you wish to enjoy the advantages of a healthy Catholic atmosphere. Far from being singular or obtrusive, nothing could be more natural or more appropriate. If you hang portraits of your relatives and friends and of eminent men and women on the walls of your home, should you not do as much for the best of all your friends and the greatest of all illustrious men and women — Our Blessed Lord and the saints? There is no valid reason why these latter should be restricted to the bedrooms or to some obscure corners. It is true, the home is not a church; and if one has a special place at home for prayer, a little shrine to which one can withdraw for undisturbed communion with God, it is quite proper that it be in a somewhat secluded spot. Neither is the home a church goods store; and it may be no impiety, therefore, if some one expresses his dislike of a home so crowded with religious pictures that they seem to be on display for sale.

Allowance must be made in this matter for individual tastes. Some delight in a profusion of ornamentation, while others are for using it very sparingly. But whether your taste favors much or little decoration in the home, see to it that the religious element is not stinted.

The Chief Symbol of Your Faith.

Foremost among the religious articles that should have a place of honor in every Catholic home is the Crucifix, the image of our crucified Savior. The Cross is the principal emblem of the Catholic

religion; it is the symbol of our Faith, the source of our hope, the incentive to our love, the sign of our redemption, the pledge of our salvation. A beautiful and also moderately large Crucifix should be one of the finest and most cherished ornaments in the home. But there should be at least a small yet properly fashioned Crucifix also in each one of the bedrooms. It is deplorable that so many Catholics are satisfied with any kind of Crucifix, no matter how poorly it is made. They can afford to have large and expensive portraits of their parents and children, but balk at spending a few dollars for a worthy image of their crucified Savior. Let them remember that just as their taste is betrayed by the other objects, so the depth of their Faith is indicated by the quality of the religious images with which their home is equipped.

Image of the Sacred Heart.

Other images that should be seen in every Catholic home are a picture of the Holy Family and of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Pope Leo XIII prescribed that all Christian families should be consecrated to the Holy Family; and Our Lord revealed to Saint Margaret Mary that He would bless all houses where an image of His Sacred Heart would be exposed and honored. The choice of other pictures must be left to each one's individual taste and devotion, always, however, in entire accord with the teaching of our holy religion and the spirit of Holy Mother Church. A picture of the Child Jesus or of the Guardian Angel would be very appropriate for the children's apartments; and one of the Blessed Virgin and of Saint Joseph in the rooms of the larger girls and boys respectively. In each bedroom, at least, there should be a vase with holy water, which should be religiously used on rising and before retiring. And in a becoming place, one should preserve some blessed palm branches and at least two blessed candles, the latter in suitable candlesticks.

Unedifying Pictures.

While, as I have said, the selection of the different images must be left to each one's own taste, one quality must be insisted on as indispensable: the images must be such as will edify. If they are not of a nature to edify, then they cannot possibly produce the effect that they are employed to produce; namely, a wholesome Catholic atmosphere.

The requirement that the pictures be edifying may seem to be rather vague and indefinite; but it furnishes a working rule that will answer all practical purposes.

The main thing is to eliminate all images that are not edifying; and such one may call all those that represent Our Lord or the saints in a manner unworthy of them; that is to say, in an attitude or attire or in circumstances in which they themselves would certainly not wish to be pictured or seen. If no one would feel himself honored to find a caricature or other unworthy representation of himself on the wall of your home, how can you expect by means of similar pictures to please Our Lord and the saints?

Untrue to History.

It is no excuse to say that a certain picture is true to history, that it merely represents an actual fact in the life of the saint. That an immoral pagan judge subjected a saint to indignities does not justify us in repeating the indecency on canvas. But many representations lack even this flimsy excuse, as they are positively untrue to history. In the Gospel story of the birth of our Savior, for example, we are told that the Virgin Mother wrapped the Babe in swaddling clothes; yet we find pictures inscribed "The Nativity" in which the Divine Child is not only not wrapped in swaddling clothes but not clad at all. The same is true of the Christ Child on many Madonnas. No one will maintain

that such a representation is true to history. Neither is it true to the highest standard of Catholic art; and least of all is it true to that reverent delicacy of treatment due to the august person of the Child Divine.

I realize quite well that strict insistence on this rule will debar many a picture from the Catholic home. Be it so. There are hundreds of other sacred pictures to choose from, — pictures that are in every way satisfactory, in point of art no less than in point of propriety. Let such only adorn your walls, and the sight of them will be to you a source not only of edification in your daily life but of consolation and encouragement in days of sorrow and distress; and a daily reminder that if you but imitate the example of the saints whom they represent, you too will one day share their happiness.

Good Example.

In the foregoing pages, I have dwelt only on the visible objects that give character to the home — on what I have called its moral atmosphere in the narrow sense. It will be remembered, however, that I defined the home atmosphere also in a broader sense; namely, as the aggregate of external influences in the home affecting the spiritual life of the inmates. In this broader sense, the words and deeds of the inmates also contribute essentially to the moral atmosphere, and if the latter is to be thoroughly Catholic, the general tone of conversation and conduct in the home must reflect a Catholic mentality.

The Holy Father emphasizes this point in the following passage of His Encyclical on the Christian Education of Youth: “That education, as a rule, will be more effective and lasting which is received in a well-ordered and well-disciplined Christian family; and the more efficacious in proportion to the clear and constant good example set first by the parents and then by the other members of the household.”

The Catholic Mind.

One cannot, it is true, in view of human frailty, expect that the members of even the better Catholic families will never be guilty of wrong-doing of any kind. But what can be expected is that when wrong-doing does occur, it will be found to be out of keeping with the surroundings. In other words, should deviations from Catholic standards sometimes occur in practice, there should at least be no deviation from Catholic principles in theory. Should the conversation, for example, turn on such subjects as Sunday observance, frequent Communion, mixed marriages, cremation, forbidden societies and books, attendance of Catholics at non-Catholic schools, the relations between Church and State and the like, the attitude of the Church will be accepted without question. The accepted stand of every member of the family will be the same as that of the Church; and if in any instance any member should mistakenly espouse a contrary opinion, he will at once recede from it when assured that it is not in accord with the teaching of Holy Mother Church. This is what is meant by the Latin phrase “*sentire cum ecclesia*,” “to be of one mind with the Church,” to have the Catholic mentality or the Catholic mind.

In homes where such a mentality prevails nothing will be found that antagonizes the Church. No songs will be heard that offend against Christian virtue; no literature will be tolerated that openly or insidiously undermines Catholic morals; and no radio programs will be listened to that disseminate false doctrines of a religious or moral character.

Homes of the Early Christians.

Would to God there were more Catholic homes of this kind scattered up and down our beloved land, homes that are in every sense Catholic and veritable strongholds of Christianity! Some will no doubt aver that it is an idle dream to expect an increase in the number of such homes amid the adverse conditions of our age. But are the conditions of our age any worse than were the conditions of pagan Rome? The moral atmosphere of Rome at the dawn of Christianity was so corrupt that vice was not only tolerated but even enthroned as a god in certain forms of religious worship. Yet, despite the universal corruption without, so pure, so holy and so heavenly an atmosphere pervaded the homes of the Christians that it not only kept their minds untainted and their hearts unsullied, but, by its own superior power expanding and radiating from those homes, gradually purified even the public atmosphere and in the end brought about the conversion of the entire Roman people.

Who shall say that what was accomplished in those days is impossible of accomplishment now? It would require perhaps a miracle of grace; but the days of miracles are not over. Catholic families, however, need not look so far ahead nor to such far reaching results for inducements to preserve a Catholic atmosphere in their homes. Such an atmosphere will offer them full and immediate compensation for the pains required to maintain it. It will keep their religion pure and undefiled and keep them unspotted of this world.
