

FAITH AND REASON

The importance of teaching children how to pray: On Sunday morning, 8 January, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Pope Francis presided over Holy Mass in the Sistine Chapel, during which he administered the Sacrament of Baptism to 13 babies, the children of Vatican employees. He told parents that prayer should be the first thing they teach their children, because prayer, he said, “will be what gives them strength throughout their life”. The following is a translation of the Pope’s impromptu homily.

Dear parents, thank you for bringing your children here, for bringing them into the Church. This is a good day, because we never forget when we were baptized. It is like a birthday, because with Baptism we are reborn into Christian life. Therefore, I advise you to teach your children the date of their Baptism as a new birthday: so that every year they may remember and thank God for this grace of having become Christians. This is a task I advise you to do.

Then, let us reflect a little on the fact that these children you are bringing now are starting out on a road, but it is up to you and the godparents to help them go forward on this road. We are taught to pray as children: may they learn to pray as children, at least to do so with their hands, with gestures... May they learn prayer as children, because prayer is what gives them strength throughout their life: in good moments, to thank God, and in bad moments, to find strength. It is the first thing that you must teach: how to pray. And to pray also to Our Lady, who is the Mother, our Mother. It is said that when someone is angry with the Lord, or drifts away from him, Our Lady is always near to make way for him or her to return. It is a saying. The Lord is always close to us, but Our Lady is the mother, and the mother is always closer than the father. Why? Because that is how it is. Mothers are like that, and that is great. May they learn to be Christians.

Now they are all silent, and that is good. But perhaps someone will “give the cue”, begin. And since babies are symphonic, they will all follow suit. Let them shout, let them cry. Perhaps some will cry out of hunger: nurse them. With all freedom. The important thing is that today this celebration may be a feast day, the feast of the beginning of a beautiful Christian journey, in which you will help your children to go forward. Perhaps some are overdressed and hot; let them be comfortable; may all be comfortable. We celebrate this beginning of the journey with them. And it is up to you to help them move forward. Because I finish here, but you will continue all your life! Thank you for this decision to bring them to Baptism.

That educators may be credible witnesses: In his prayer intention for the month of January, Pope Francis prays “that educators may be credible witnesses, teaching fraternity rather than confrontation and helping especially the youngest and most vulnerable”. The video begins with images of teachers and students in schools around the world. “I would like to propose”, the Pope begins, “that educators add new content to their teaching: fraternity”. He explains that “education is an act of love that illuminates the path for us to recover a sense of fraternity, so we will not ignore those who are most vulnerable”. The video then transitions to a scene showing a group of kids playing football. When another student asks to join them, they refuse and leave. A teacher then approaches the boy and teaches him some tricks with the football. “Educators”, the Pope says, “are witnesses who not only impart their mental knowledge, but also their convictions, their commitment to life”. He notes that they are fluent in the language “of the head, that of the heart, and that of the hands, all in harmony”, and that this harmony is what brings “joy in communicating” and what leads educators to “be heeded much more attentively” and to “become community builders”. The video concludes with the boy who had been left out earning his peers’ respect thanks to his new football skills, which he would not have acquired without his teacher’s guidance.

Speaking about this month’s prayer intention, Fr Frédéric Fornos, SJ, Director of the Worldwide Prayer Network, points to education as essential to promoting fraternity. He explains that “when we look at Jesus we learn that we can only communicate and transmit to others what we ourselves live. This requires coherence in our lives between what we say and what we do”. That coherence, he adds, is a grace the Pope is inviting us to pray for.

Love your Neighbor: God put the commandment of loving our neighbor on the same footing as the first commandment. God’s love is infinite. God has prepared us for service, so he expects this from us. He has given each of us something that in one way or another will enable him to shine through us... **Mother Teresa**

The Sinner's War: There are several ways to avoid loving God: Deny that you are a sinner. Pretend that religion is for the ignorant and the superstitious, but not for the truly learned such as yourself. Insist that the whole purpose Of religion is social service. Judge religion by whether or not it is accepted by the "important" people of the world. Avoid all contemplation, self-examination and inquiry into the moral state of your soul. Take yourself very seriously..... **Bishop Fulton Sheen**

How to Approach Sacred Scripture: By the secret counsel of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures have been crafted in such a way that they are plain and simple enough for every man to find in them what he needs to understand. Yet again, they are lofty and difficult. No one is so cunning that he will not find there things far beyond his reach, things too deep to fathom. As a good holy Saint once said: the scriptures are so marvelously made that even though a mouse can wade in them, an elephant can also drown there. No matter how lowly a person may be. Will he seek his way through the Scriptures with the staff of faith in his hand... Will he hold that staff and search out his way with it... Will he have the holy, ancient teachers of the Church as his guide as well... Will he make his way with good intentions and a lowly heart... Will he use reason and refuse no good learning... Will he call on God for wisdom, grace, and help that he may keep his way and follow his good guides... Then he will never fall into danger, but he will wade through surely and well. And he will come to the end of his journey at the place for which he was searching... **St Thomas More**

A Thought For the Day

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| Sunday | If He is with me I care not where I go. |
| Monday | It is wonderful how attractive a gentle, pleasant manner is, and how much it wins hearts. |
| Tuesday | The measure of love is to love without measure. |
| Wednesday | The soul is like an uninhabited world that comes to life only when God lays His head against us. |
| Thursday | There is no sin punished more implacably by nature than the sin of resistance to change. |
| Friday | God looks at pure hearts not full hands. |
| Saturday | It is not helps, but obstacles, not facilities but difficulties that make men. |

Humility of Heart. The Church prays for humility of the human heart. She prays that man in humility, may be bound in the truth that he may be found in interior truth. That in this way he will be able to meet love, which is stronger than sin and death, stronger than any evil, and that he may be guided by the Divine Word. "Not on bread alone does man live but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. **(Mt 4:4) St. John Paul II**

An Expression of the Person: Still, man cannot be authentically free, cannot realize his own humanity, if he does not recognize and does not live the transcendence of his own being over the world and his rapport with God. To the uplifting of man belongs not only the promotion of his humanity, but also the opening of his humanity to God. Culture implies giving to man, to every man and to the community of man a human and divine dimension that springs from the depth of the spirit, from the clearness of thought and the generous disinterestedness of love. As I have previously said: where freedom does not exist, we cannot have culture. It is because of this that the true culture of people, its full humanization, cannot develop within the constraints of political or economic power, but must be helped by the one and the other by every form, of public and private initiative that conforms to true humanism, to the tradition and authentic spirit of the people. Culture that is born from freedom should then spread in a regime of freedom such as your work, your dedication, your professionalism is constantly committed to defend.

In His Will is Our Peace
Fr. William C. Mooney

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