

## New Religious Education Program in the Fall for Public School Students - Part 2

Last week I mentioned our deep desire to begin a new form of catechesis for our children in the fall. It is called “Family Catechesis”. I used the following quote from the Book of Deuteronomy to point out the parent’s role in raising their children in the faith.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7. “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. **Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.**”

Parents, catechists, and Church leaders have an obligation to pass the faith on to our children as well as to their parents and other adults. One of the ways this is done is during Mass. For example, after the biblical readings at Mass the priest or deacon “breaks open” the Word of God to help people savor the **truth** about God and His unconditional love for them. This was manifested to us in His Son Jesus Christ, whose suffering and death revealed the immensity of a love that says, “I will die for you, that you may enjoy My love for all eternity. I want you to want to be with Me forever. It is your choice. I give you the freedom to choose whether or not to follow Me.”

We have a choice and we need to be guided in making right choices and reminded of the need to do so, and so do our children. The Israelites, after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, were ready to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Moses spoke to them, “broke open the Word to them” about God’s faithfulness and love for His people Israel, and how many of them were lost because they refused to obey Him and chose evil. And, Moses said to them: “I set before you today life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, obeying His voice, and holding fast to Him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the Lord swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.” (Deuteronomy 13:19-20)

God has chosen each one of us. “It was not you who chose Me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (John 15:16) Our response in faith (trusting in what He has revealed to us) will draw us closer to Him and make us desire to worship Him, pray to Him, and to share what God has done in our lives.

Parents, your children are God’s gift to you. Children are more likely to put into practice the faith they see lived out day-to-day at home. There is a receptivity and vulnerability to good formation which only happens in the early years of children’s development, and only in the family. A recent CARA report says that most children decide whether or not they will follow the faith of their parents between the ages of 8 and 12 years old.

A family catechesis program helps families to embrace this time and use it to form their children well. A careful reading through the documents of the Catholic Church quickly reveals the Church's great expectations for the family. “The right and duty of parents to give education is essential ... original and primary ... and it is irreplaceable and incapable of being entirely delegated to others.” [Familiaris Consortio, 36]. Christ and His Church call parents to be “the first and foremost educators of their children” [Gravissimum Educationis, 3]. Family catechesis aids families in becoming the domestic churches they are called to be. [Lumen Gentium]

In his encyclical *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) Pope Francis dedicates a large section to parents and the family and its role in society as a source of hope and faith.

**Passing on the Faith** Raising children calls for an orderly process of handing on the Faith. This is made difficult by current lifestyles, work schedules and the complexity of today’s world ... Even so, the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the Faith, to pray and to serve our neighbor ... Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek Him and sense their need for Him ... (n. 287). Children need symbols, actions and stories. Since adolescents usually have issues with authority and rules, it is best to encourage their own experience of faith and to provide them with

attractive testimonies that win them over by their sheer beauty ... It is essential that children see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important. Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon (n. 288).

In all families the Good News needs to resound, in good times and in bad, as a source of light along the way. All of us should be able to say, thanks to the experience of our life in the family: “We come to believe in the love that God has for us.” (1 John 4:16)

The family catechesis program we plan to implement in the fall will help parents in their role as Christian parents. We will be there to help you through monthly gatherings for children and parents.

Fr. Bob