



Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents,
especially those
with small children.

In the light of faith and by virtue of hope, the Christian family too, shares in communion with the Church, in the experience of the earthly pilgrimage towards the full revelation and manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

~Familiaris Consortio #65



Parenting is a journey – not a destination. The journey begins when the child is conceived or becomes a member of your family through adoption. And the journey ends with the death of either the parent or the child. The length of time between the start and the finish is never known. What is known is that the passage will be filled with joy and trials.

Every Christian parent knows that the final destination of the parenting journey is eternal life with God in heaven. And each Christian parent also understands that the pathway to heaven is as unique as the child. We know this because the Catholic Church teaches that each person is an individual; no two persons are ever the same. The talents and virtues given by God vary in each person. It is this diversity that promises a distinctive journey for each child.

It may help to think of parenting as walking through changing environments. With one child, the course may be easy and fun. With the next, the route may be challenging and frightening. With the next, you may find yourself lost and uncertain. Thankfully, with adequate preparation, parents can successfully navigate any of these situations and surroundings.

Planning for the lifelong journey with each child requires certain understandings. First, there is the recognition that children are made in the image and likeness of God. This means that they bear the dignity of their creator. God gave them an immortal soul that will never die. He gifted them with intelligence and reason so that they can see that the world was created to be ordered rather than chaotic. And, God gave them a free will so that they can freely choose what is right, good, true and beautiful.

Secondly, there is the understanding that children bear the effects of Original Sin. This means children will make choices that take them away from God's love and parental approval. Sin darkens their intelligence and reason and weakens their will to choose goodness. While their baptism delivers them from Original Sin, it does not save them from its effect. Children will always have an inclination to sin. They will struggle to make Godly decisions and avoid evil. Gratefully, the grace and mercy that is made present by Christ's death and resurrection can save children from their wrongdoings and heal the damage caused by sin.

Finally, children are not owed to their parents but rather given through the procreative action of God. They are the supreme gift given to parents within marriage. Children are persons to love, never things to be used. They are to be nurtured and formed through the loving actions of their parents.

Parents are encouraged to remember that God wants to be included in the parenting journey. He wants to walk in front to lead, at one's side for support and at one's back to catch those who stumble and fall. The important point to remember is that God knows the pathway that will direct the earthly passage to end with Him in heaven.

There are three constants and one important concept left to learn in this segment. The information that will be shared in the DVD will complete the Embrace Parenthood journey and lead to a deeper understanding of what it means to be the first and best educator for your children. Let's take a closer look at ways to faithfully guide your children through life.

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From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

The three constants of each parenting journey are;

A child is a _____ from God.

Children are human beings not human _____.

Children want to enter into _____ with their parents.

_____ includes:

Being _____.

Do _____ than what is expected.

Maintaining a _____ heart.

Practical ways to grow in honor include:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

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Continue the Discussion

Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.

1. How does the principle of honor make the parenting journey easier?
2. What rituals (greeting, talking, eating, community, bonding) did your family have when you were growing up? Which of these do you want to share with your children?
3. What choices can be made to increase the time you spend together as a family?
4. What is it about your family that matters most?
5. Look forward to your parenting journey. What is your greatest concern as you continue to parent? What is your greatest hope?

Make a Plan

Embedding honor into family life makes parenting easier. Integrating honor into your home requires two steps. First, assess what level of honor you already demonstrate in your family and formulate a plan to increase its presence. Secondly, develop ways to turn your family routines into family rituals.

Honor Assessment

In order to assess the level of honor in your home, read through the questions in the table that follows. Select the response that best reflects what you currently do. When this is finished, select three of these behaviors that you will commit to work on over the next month.

How often do you...	Never	Sometimes	Most of the time	All of the time
Step in to help without being asked?				
Assist a family member without complaining?				
Say "please" when asking for something?				
Say "thank you" after receiving something?				
Say "you are welcome" after giving something?				
Look a person in the eyes when they talk to you?				
Wait for the right time to ask for something?				
Recognize a family member for doing something right?				
Discontinue using any electronic device when talking with a family member?				
Show up on time for family commitments (like a meal or picking up someone from an activity)?				
Pay compliments to family members?				

The three behaviors that I choose to develop over the next month are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Rituals

Rituals are ways to increase your family's honor. In the table that follows, read the examples provided in the left column. Then, think of one ritual that you might try in each category. Remember that a ritual is a behavior that is repeated, shared and has positive emotional meaning. Here are some suggestions to help you come up with your own ideas.

- When children leave for school, you bless them on the forehead and say, "I love you."
- Set aside five minutes each day for each of your children to cuddle and just talk.
- Identify one meal a week as the family discussion meal. Each child can raise one topic to discuss.
- As a family, shop for and donate food each month to the local food pantry.
- After picking up toys, the child gets a "high five" and a hug from you.
- When a child has completed the nightly personal hygiene of brushing teeth and washing face and hands, you share a favorite bedtime story.

Categories	Rituals for My Family
Greeting Ways you wake up in the morning, share good-byes as family members leave for school or work, and welcome each other home at the end of the day.	
Talking Conversations that are uninterrupted, non-logistical and non-problem solving with the intent to build a connection.	
Eating Ways that you share meals together – either on a daily basis or around special holidays.	
Community Activities where the family gives and receives support in their larger world.	
Bonding Activities where the family spends time together in recreating and relaxing.	

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