



Please Pray That

- Parents will help their children to seek the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.
- Families will support each other in carrying their crosses and following the difficult path of discipleship.
- Families will foster an attitude of gratitude and contentment to combat the materialism of our culture.
- Families will walk through Advent together to prepare their hearts for the coming of Christ.
- Families will joyfully work to put God at the center of all they do.
- Parents will encourage their children to seek God's will for their lives.
- Families will support those who struggle to carry their crosses with compassionate love.

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Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me

As we approach Christmas our thoughts are drawn to the comfortable sights and sounds of the holiday. As followers of Jesus, we remember the “reason for the season” by reflecting on Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. Another thing that Christmas should remind us of, however, is that the manger that the baby Jesus was born in led to the cross that our savior would die on. So even though it’s not Lent or Easter, this is a great time for Christians to reflect on Jesus’ command to carry our own cross and follow Him. As Catholic parents, this is an important theme to discuss with our children, especially when we talk about any moral or social issue. How is Jesus calling us to take up our cross and follow Him?

There’s an old Christian story that my mind keeps coming back to. It’s the story of a man in the midst of some suffering who prays, “Oh, Lord, this cross is just too big and heavy for me to bear! I can’t carry it anymore. Please take this cross from me and give me another.” The Lord answers his prayer in a vision. The man finds himself standing in a room full of crosses. He hears the Lord say, “I have answered your prayer. I have taken your cross from you. You may choose any cross in its place.” As the man explores the room of crosses, he finds that each one is larger and heavier than the last. He searches the entire room until he finally finds the smallest cross in the room, close to the door where he started his search. “There! I’ll take that one! It’s the smallest and lightest cross here!” Jesus responds, “But, my dear son. That’s the cross you came here to give up!”



The Burden of the Cross

Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:38 that we must take up our cross and follow Him. The cross Jesus asks us to bear includes our suffering, our tendency to sin, and our disordered human nature. Jesus calls us to strive against the effects of Original Sin in our lives. Taking up our cross is not easy. It is an act of loving sacrifice for God. But we do not do it alone. When we follow Christ, He walks with us and works in us to transform our hearts. By cooperating with grace and striving against our fallen human nature we grow in holiness and become more like Him.

However, like the man in the story, we want to be relieved of the burden of our cross. One way we seek this relief is by embracing a philosophy called modernism; a belief that we are free to believe what we want because truth evolves or changes. We think we are free to create our own reality. At first glance, modernism seems compassionate because it eliminates the burden of guilt and shame that sometimes comes with trying to adhere to “traditional truth claims” like the moral law. But, is it really possible to escape this burden by

redefining ourselves? Or are we, like the man in the story, looking in vain for a lighter cross only to find our new cross an even greater burden?

The Greater Burden

Influenced by modernism, we have been encouraging young people to define themselves in every area of their lives. Instead of asking them what they think God is calling them to be, we ask them what they want to be when they grow up. We tell them that they have limitless potential, that they can be whatever they set their mind on being. But the truth is that the expectation to define themselves puts a great burden on a young person. “How do I define myself from scratch? If I have limitless potential to be whatever I want to be, how do I choose? What if I choose wrong and squander my potential?” The modern concept of **creating** one’s identity rather than **finding** it through a process of self-discovery has actually made the adolescent “identity crisis” worse. In fact, some psychologists are now warning against putting our children under what they call “the burden of potential” (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/growing-friendships/201111/lifting-the-burden-potential>).

But doesn’t modernism at least get rid of that old “Catholic guilt” that has plagued us for so many generations? The truth is, someone who suffers from a disordered heart - maybe with the desires of one or more of the Seven Capital Sins (pride, greed, lust, sloth, gluttony, envy, or anger) or maybe with more specific disorders such as gender confusion or same-sex attraction or narcissism - may indeed find temporary relief by redefining themselves and their “personal reality” in a way that makes these desires acceptable. However, they don’t find long-term relief. For example, couples who divorce in order to relieve marital strife on the whole report less happiness years later than couples who stay together and work through the trials. Children who go through sex reassignment surgery tend not to find peace and, in fact, are in greater danger of suicidal tendencies after their surgery.

My Yoke is Easy and My Burden is Light

Jesus took on human nature in order to show us the way to the fulfillment of God’s love. In the Beatitudes, He taught us to reject our sinful nature and to embrace His very virtues. Even though Jesus’ path takes us through the “way of suffering,” it ends in beatitude - true fulfillment of God’s goodness. Jesus’ call to strive against our disordered, fallen humanity and to strive for holiness may seem like an impossibly high expectation. But soon after Jesus tells us to take up our cross in Matthew 10, He has these words for us:

“Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

The burden of following our culture is to sacrifice our ultimate fulfillment for the sake of an immediate sense of freedom. The burden of following Christ is to endure immediate suffering for the sake of lasting glory.

Which Cross Do We Ask Them to Bear?

Find time during Advent and Christmas to talk with your son or daughter about Christ’s command to pick up our cross. As you do, here are some talking points to discuss:

- Being tempted to sin and sinning are not the same thing. Why is this?
- Striving to do what is right and good in the face of these tendencies and temptations is part of the cross Jesus asks us to carry. How do we do what is right when we are tempted?
- We are all disordered in some way due to original sin. We are all sinners. How should we treat people who are struggling to overcome a temptation?
- In addition to Jesus’ support of grace, He also calls us to support each other in our struggle to carry our cross. What can we do to help someone who is struggling?
- God’s will for us is always to discover the truth about who we are and who He created us to be. His ultimate goal for us is holiness. What did Jesus show us about self-sacrifice and the path to holiness?

This article tells about just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies that will help you become the best parent you can be. And for the best systematic approach to parenting, consider purchasing the [Teaching the Way of Love](#) program, which can be found at the same website.

This article series is brought to you by Alice Heinzen and Jeff Arrowood, authors of the [Teaching the Way of Love](#) home study series for parents. Find out more at www.twl4parents.com/teaching-the-way-of-love.

