

(English translation)

Castel Gandolfo, 2 May 1987

Jesus the Educator

Dear friends,

I would like to begin by greeting all of you, especially those who have come from a distance. I know that you are from all the continents.

The congress announced by our New Families Movement is beginning today. The topic will be, "The family and education." My brief talk this morning is meant to be simply an introduction to such an important topic. ...

Speaking of education, we logically find ourselves before two subjects: the educator, the teacher who must teach, who must educate and the disciple, who must be educated.

With regard to the educator or teacher there is a phrase of the Gospel which makes us think and which can shed light also on the education which should be imparted to the family. The sentence is: "You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers" (Mt 23:8).

For Jesus there is only one teacher and this is he himself.

This does not mean that he denies the authority of parents. He is saying that this role should be carried out as a service and not as a means to dominate or exert power. Because in serving, which is the same as loving, it is not only the human being who acts; rather it is Christ, and therefore Christ is truly the first teacher.

If Jesus is the Teacher, the Christian parents have the duty to look to him in order to learn how to educate.

What kind of teacher was Jesus?

There are several important characteristics that come to mind when looking at Jesus in his role as Teacher.

First of all, Jesus teaches by example; he incarnates his doctrine in his very person. He does not impose burdens on others that he has not carried first: "Woe to you," he says, "for you load people with burdens hard to bear, but do not lift a finger to ease them!" (Luke 11:46). Jesus puts into practice what he then asks of others.

With Jesus as our model we realize that the first method in educating, also for parents, should not simply be setting out to instruct or correct, but to live out one's Christianity radically. Parents must first put into practice themselves what they ask of their children. Do they ask for sincerity, commitment, loyalty, obedience, charity towards others, chastity, patience, forgiveness?

Then their children should be able to find all these qualities first of all in them. Mothers and fathers must be indisputable models that their children can always refer to.

Another characteristic of Jesus' way of educating is that he concretely comes to the aid of his friends as, for example, when he calmed the storm on the lake (cf. Luke 8:24).

Parents, who already by nature do all they can for their children, could do much more, and above all much better, if they engrafted supernatural love onto their human love, if they loved with the love that comes from God, a love that takes the initiative, without expecting anything in return. This kind of love never leaves people indifferent.

Jesus puts faith in those he teaches. It is evident in his words to the woman taken in adultery: "Go..." he says, "and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:11). He believes that it is possible for that woman to begin a morally upright life.

The words of parents should always give encouragement, be positive and full of hope. Their words ought to express all their confidence in their children's ability to start all over again.

Jesus leaves us free to take responsibility and make decisions. We see this in his encounter with the rich young man (cf. Mt 19:16).

We must never impose our ideas, but rather offer them with love, as an expression of love.

Children are first of all sons and daughters of God and not ours. Therefore, they should not be treated as our possessions, but as people who have been entrusted to our care.

When necessary, Jesus does not hesitate to rebuke with firmness and strength. To Peter, who wanted to stop him from facing his passion, he says: "Get behind me, Satan! ... You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things" (Mt 16:23).

Yes, discipline is also necessary. It is an integral part of education. In fact, in the book of Proverbs (13:24) it is written: "Those who love their children are diligent to discipline them." God, father and teacher, formed the Jewish people and educated them using instruction and discipline.

Woe to those who do not exert discipline! What an omission they will be responsible for!

A statement made by the prophet Ezekiel is quite strong in this regard: "If ... you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand" (Ez 33:8).

Therefore, it is the parents' duty to discipline their children. If admonishment is given with peace, calm, and detachment it will make an impression upon the children's sense of responsibility and they will remember it.

In the marvellous parable of the prodigal son, Jesus shows us the Father's mercy - and therefore also his - toward those who repent and return to doing good.

Parents should treat their children as God treats us.

In a family, the mercy shown by the mother and father must reach the point of knowing how to forget and to "bear all things" (1 Cor 13:7), in conformity with God's love.

Reiterated comments about past mistakes are not in line with Jesus' teaching. We can understand, therefore, why they are not accepted.

Jesus teaches in the synagogues, on the mountaintop, along the streets of Galilee and of Judea, in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Therefore, any place is appropriate for parents to teach their children.

Jesus' way of expressing himself, even though using the style of his times, is new: he speaks in a way that is alive, imaginative, concrete, to the point, precise. He avoids being loquacious and often states in a single sentence all that needs to be said on a topic.

The family must do the same. Young people do not want to hear long "sermons." It is enough to say a few words inspired by a true, pure and disinterested love.

Jesus also makes use of dialogue, alternating questions and answers; he uses proverbs and, with the scribes and Pharisees, he argues.

The dialogue between parents and children of all ages must never be interrupted. It should be open, peaceful and constructive, as among friends.

It often happens that, despite having grown up in a family where the parents give witness to a life lived according to the gospel, one or another of the children drift away from the family and at times even from their faith. Even in such cases we should never sever the relationship, no matter what path in life they may have chosen to take: perhaps adopting belief systems that have nothing to do with God, perhaps a life of drugs, or of experiences that are in sweeping contrast to the moral teaching they had received in the family.

The fact is that, especially in our Western world, we are immersed in a secularized society in which traditional values are no longer given the same importance they once were. At the same time, other

values are emerging, such as a greater consciousness of personal freedom, the thrill of scientific and technological progress, the overcoming of cultural and national barriers, a new understanding of the role of women in society, etc. Therefore, in order to dialogue with their children, parents need a great capacity for discernment that takes into account the new context in which their children live and that is able to recognize the “signs of the times” manifested by some of their new demands.

Jesus, in educating the people around him, does not hesitate in turning the existing value system upside down. This is evident when he announces the Beatitudes (see Mt 5:2 ff.). In fact, he calls blessed those who do not appear to be so. He presents a path that is difficult to travel and that goes against the current of the one offered by the world.

We too must have the courage to proclaim what really matters in life.

We should not fool ourselves into thinking that if we present a feeble Christianity, a Christ that does not exist, our proposals will be more readily accepted. God makes himself known in the hearts of our children. They react positively only to the truth. But it must be presented in a way that is both accessible and acceptable, presented by parents who, before teaching, have made the effort to understand and share the true needs and desires of the new generations.

The gospel shows us a Jesus who speaks “as one having authority” (Mt 7:29).

Parents need to trust in the grace they have been given as parents and should never shrink from their task as educators. Deep down this is what their children ask of them. In fact, it often happens that children will judge their parents, at times mercilessly, for not having had the courage to tell them the truth.

Jesus educates his disciples by passing on to them “his” typical teaching: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12).

By specifying that “as I have loved you,” he indicates that he is the “teacher” of this love.

It is the teaching par excellence, the gospel in a nutshell, which parents must pass on to their children.

In putting this teaching into practice, parents must imitate Jesus so well that they can repeat to their children that commandment as if it were their own: My little children, love one another as I have loved you.

Therefore, imitate Jesus.

Imitate him as teacher.

Imitate Jesus, or better still, allow him to live in us.

Yes, it would be best that he himself take his place within us.

If he lives in us, our performance as teachers will be irreproachable. If we introduce him as educator into our families, we will have carried out our mission perfectly.

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