



## Children and Freedom

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### Friends with your children

The parents are the first people responsible for the education of their children, in human as well as in spiritual matters. They should be conscious of the extent of their responsibility. To fulfil it, they need prudence, understanding, a capacity to love and a concern for helping by their own good example. Imposing things by force, in an authoritarian manner, is not the right way to teach. The ideal attitude of parents lies more in becoming their children's friends – friends who will be willing to share their anxieties, who will listen to their problems, who will help them in an effective and agreeable way.

Parents should find time to spend with their children, to talk with them. They are the most important thing – more important than business or work or rest. In their conversations, parents should make an effort to listen, to pay attention, to understand, to recognize the fact that their children are sometimes partly right – or even completely right – in some of their rebellious attitudes. At the same time, they should help their children to direct their efforts and to carry out their projects properly, teaching them to consider things and to reason them out. It is not a matter of imposing a line of conduct, but rather of showing the human and supernatural motives for it. In a word, parents have to respect their children's freedom, because there is no real education without personal responsibility, and there is no responsibility without freedom.

*Christ is Passing By, 27*

Parents can, and should, be a great help to their children. They can open new horizons for them, share their experiences and make them reflect, so they do not allow themselves to be carried away by passing emotional experiences. They can offer them a realistic scale of value. Sometimes they can help with personal advice; on other occasions they should encourage their children to seek other suitable people such as a loyal and sincere friend, a learned and holy priest or an expert in career guidance.

### The great gift of freedom

Advice does not take away freedom. It gives elements on which to judge and thus enlarges the possibilities of choice and ensures that decisions are not taken on the basis of irrational factors. After hearing the opinions of others and taking everything into consideration, there comes a moment in which a choice has to be made, and then no one has the right to force a young person's freedom. Parents have to be on guard against the temptation of wanting to project themselves unduly on their children or of molding them according to their own preferences. They should respect their individual God-given inclinations and aptitudes. If their love is true, this is easy enough. Even in the extreme case, when a young person makes a decision that the parents have good reason to consider mistaken and when they think it will lead to future unhappiness, the answer lies not in force, but in understanding. Very often it consists of knowing how to stand by their child so as to help him or her overcome the difficulties and, if necessary, draw all the benefit possible from an unfortunate situation.

After giving their advice and suggestions, parents who sincerely love and seek the good of their children should step tactfully into the background so that nothing can stand in the way of the great gift of freedom that makes man capable of loving and serving God. They should remember that God himself has wanted to be loved and served with freedom and He always respects our personal decisions. Scripture tells us: 'When God created man, He made him subject to his own free choice' (*Sir 15:14*).

*Conversations*, 104

God, in his infinite and perfect justice and mercy, treats his very different children with just the same love, but differently.

That is why equality does not mean using the same measure for everybody.

*Furrow*, 601

### **Atmosphere of peace**

The family atmosphere should be one of peace between husband and wife, because peace is a necessary condition for a deep and effective education. Children should see in their parents an example of dedication, sincere love, mutual help and understanding. The small trifles of daily life should not be allowed to hide from them the reality of a love that is capable of overcoming all obstacles.

*Conversations*, 108

But you have to argue sometimes, don't you? Yes, sometimes, I agree – I'd even say it's good for you. It's a sign of your love... But very seldom! And only when you are alone! Don't let your children, or your friends, or neighbors, or family, have to watch you quarrelling like in a public square! Don't come to blows! Have a quiet word at the time, wait till the evening, and calm down. And in the evening, ...

which of the two of you will be bold enough to tell the other that they're right? Say sorry and ask each other's forgiveness, give each other a big hug, and remember the first time you hugged each other. Love each other, because your love and affection is very pleasing to God. You'll see that it just doesn't matter.

Meeting with Josemaria Escriva, São Paulo, 1 June 1974

It is better for parents to let themselves be 'fooled' once in a while, because the trust that they have shown will make the children themselves feel ashamed of having abused it – they will correct themselves. On the other hand, if they have no freedom, if they see that no one trusts them, they will always be inclined to deceive their parents.

*Conversations*, 100

The meaning of true piety should be taught first by example and then by word. False piety is a sad pseudo-spiritual caricature which generally results from a lack of doctrine and from a certain psychological defect. The logical result is that it is repellent to anyone who loves authenticity and sincerity.

I am very glad to see how Christian piety takes root among young people today, as it did forty years ago, when they see it lived sincerely in the lives of others; when they understand that prayer is speaking with God, not anonymously, but personally, as with a father or a friend, in a heart-to-heart conversation; when we try to make them hear deep in their souls the words with which Jesus Christ himself invites them to a confidential encounter: '*Vos autem dixi amicos*, I have called you friends' (*Jn 15:15*); when a strong appeal is made to their faith, so that they see that our Lord is 'the same yesterday and today and forever' (*Heb 13:8*).

It is essential for them to realise that simple, heartfelt piety also calls for the exercise of human virtues and that it cannot be reduced to a few daily or weekly pious acts. It must penetrate our entire life and give meaning to our work, rest, friendships and entertainment, to everything that we do. We are children of God all day long, even though we do set aside special moments for considering it, so that we can fill ourselves with the awareness of our divine filiation, which is the essence of true piety.

*Conversations*, 102

Children learn to place God first and foremost in their affections. They learn to see God as their Father and Mary as their Mother and they learn to pray following their parents' example. In this way one can easily see what a wonderful apostolate parents have and how it is their duty to live a fully Christian life of prayer, so they can communicate their love of God to their children, which is something more than just teaching them.

How can they go about this? They have excellent means in the few, short, daily

religious practices that have always been lived in Christian families and which I think are marvellous: grace at meals, morning and night prayers, the Holy Rosary (even though nowadays this devotion to our Lady has been criticised by some people). Customs vary from place to place, but I think that one should always encourage some acts of piety which the family can do together in a simple and natural fashion.

This is the way to ensure that God is not regarded as a stranger whom we go to see in the church once a week on Sunday. He will be seen and treated as He really is, not only in church but also at home, because our Lord has told us, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them' (*Mt 18:20*).

*Conversations*, 103