

Instilling the Ideal of Conjugal Love in Little Children

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What can we do to help instill the ideal of conjugal love, of true marriage love, in our children, even from the earliest ages? As has been pointed out many times over the years, the greatest gift parents can give their children in this respect is a happy marriage of their own. So we always tried to keep in mind the idea of our children as endlessly recording TV cameras. Along with other things, those cameras were recording our marriage. It's the strongest experience of what marriage is all about that children have until they get into their own.

Following this idea still further, we are told that, in heaven, children are taught by means of representatives, by tableaux. And what can be a more beautiful tableau, showing what conjugal love is all about, than a wedding? We took our kids to weddings every chance we got so that they could experience the beautiful spheres and keep the ideal ever before them. And on long rainy or snowy afternoons, for a special treat, Mommy got out the wedding album or album of mementos, and sat down on the couch with the children on either side. She then retold the story of which they never tired, of how Mommy met Daddy, how they courted and got married. It's a fairy tale in real life, and it, again, builds toward that ideal.

A second point, and a far from trivial one in an age where kids wear lipstick and date in sixth grade, is that our children will sooner or later want to do things because "everyone else does." And as parents, we may feel that we want our children to be "normal." It is useful here, however, to reflect on what "normal" means. It comes from statistics, from the normal or "bell" curve, and it simply refers to what is typical of the largest number of people. In other words, "normal" isn't necessarily good or bad—just typical. The Lord, when He was in the world, elegantly summarized the flaw in moral or spiritual thinking which is oriented toward being "normal." In the parable of the wide and narrow gates (Matthew 7:13, 14) the Lord said that the broad way "leads to destruction" and that "there are many who go in by it," as opposed to the few who find their way by the narrow path which leads to heaven. What He was saying, statistically speaking, is that it is "normal" to choose the broad, destructive path.

All too often in our culture, children see marriage being the butt of endless jokes and lust in a thousand variations being presented as the basis of relationships. These experiences, by their very quantity and repetitiveness, lose their shock value. You tell the kids it's wrong; they agree intellectually; but, after all that exposure to it, sooner or later, such behavior comes to seem, again, "normal!" As parents, we have to decide what our goal is in any given situation and then act accordingly. If our goal is to raise a potential angel, the decisions we make and the tools we use will be very different than if our goal is to raise a popular "normal" child.

Then there's the difficult problem of teaching little children about sex. We feel it's important to start teaching about this area from the very earliest ages. That way, you can be sure that the child's first impressions of it will be in the context of the conjugal ideal—a very different first impression than what they'll get from schoolyard gossip. A second reason for early instruction is

related to an old principle in the priesthood, of not preaching to active states, since when a person is in a state he or she may be less receptive to changing it. Talking to teenagers about sex is certainly a more difficult proposition, in some respects, than talking to younger children in whom the love of the sex has not yet been awakened. Furthermore, it is amazing what fascinating and meaningful discussions you can have with a 3-4 year old about how babies are made, or with a 6-7 year old about how to choose a marriage partner, or how to know you're really in love.

We discussed marriage, dating, and sex with our children before they were in the dating "state," so that they were more open to the ideals. A key point we emphasized was the idea of certain things being special and the importance of saving them for certain times to keep them special. This can be true whether it's ice cream, birthday parties, or special things our bodies do. Children relate quite readily to this. Instant gratification isn't as universally appealing as the hells would have us all believe!

Along with examples from life, the Lord's Word is, of course, a wonderful tool for teaching the ideals of marriage. Throughout the Word are stories relating to every issue of sex, marriage, and family. These provide springboards for discussions in the light of spiritual truth. Family worship is a good context for teaching about masculinity, femininity, dating and marriage. Children grow up knowing that love and marriage have spiritual causes and consequences and that they must be understood and dealt with in that dimension, not just on an external level. If these general discussions become a routine part of our children's lives early on, then later discussions, when it really matters, will have a comfortable context and a long-term perspective.

A final thought relates to the whole nature of love, both conjugal, or marriage, love and other kinds of love. Love is basically reciprocation—between the Lord and mankind, between husband and wife, between parent and child. Reciprocation means a two-way street, but as parents we often seem to fall into the idea that our relationship with our children is one-way, where we are the ones doing all the giving. After all, what do we need from them? A sentence from *Apocalypse Revealed* 996 seems, to us, to summarize the answer to this question: "It is because true conjugal love is innocence that the playfulness between a married pair is like the play of infants together." What a wonderful image of what we are all trying to build in our marriages! And where better to get a feeling for innocent playfulness than from those little children who are part of our lives?

This is one way that parents' relationship with their children is reciprocal. We really do need exposure to those innocent states created around the children by the kind of angels we hope to become. In focusing on that innocence, nurturing it in ourselves as well as in our children, we help build our own conjugal love and regeneration. Thus, by working on our own marriages and by nurturing the ideal in our children, we can better reflect—reciprocate—the Lord's love that is the purpose of all creation.

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