



Teaching the Way of Love

Because humanity passes by way of the family...

February, 2014

Prayer of the Month

God our Father,
Bless my family with the grace and mercy needed to love others selflessly and to avoid all temptation to do harm. Help us to see others through the lens of love, not power.
Amen.



Seeing Others Through the Lens of Love

Thanks to Valentine's Day, February is known as the month of love. As Christians our understanding of love is much broader than the secular ideal of romantic love. We are called to love everyone, and to love them as Christ loved. While marriage and family life is a special "school of love," and there is certainly nothing wrong with romantic love, Christians understand that the family is chosen by God to teach its members how to love God with our whole heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves. As Catholic parents, our task as the primary educators of our children is to begin this lifelong education in love.

The important task of Catholic parents to teach their children to love is the reason that the issue of bullying is a major concern for us. It's probably obvious that bullying and love are opposed to each other. But if our children are being bullies, there is a problem that goes much deeper than "not getting along" with someone, something even deeper than just being "mean." Being a bully means that a child is viewing other people through the lens of power rather than through the lens of love. The lens of power asks, "What can I get out of this person?" while the lens of love asks, "What can I do to bring true goodness to this person?"

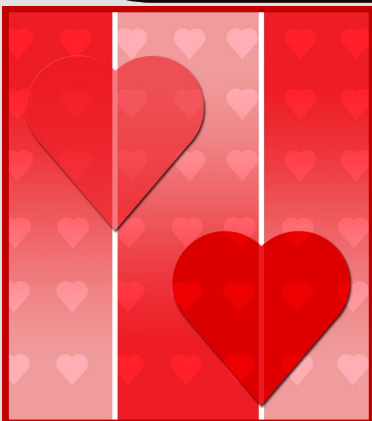
Parents have to recognize that every child has the potential to become a bully. It's common for parents to think that bullies come from broken families where neglectful parents rule their children with an iron fist. We think that there is no way a bully could come out of our family, where they are loved and cared for. But the truth is that every child - being a fallen human being - has the potential to approach others through the lens of power and selfishness, and therefore to become a bully. The picture we tend to have of a bully is the bruiser in the back alley flipping little

kids on their heads to steal their lunch money. But bullying today takes many forms, often much more subtle. One group of girls in a local school passed around a notebook where the "popular" girls wrote down everything they didn't like about the "outcast" girls in their class. Then they gave the notebook to one of the outcasts, who couldn't help but share it with everyone else named inside. The effect was devastating. The same thing often happens in the online world, where words, images and videos can all be used to cause embarrassment or scandal. The practice of hazing,

Parenting Tip of the Month

Developing your understanding of "honor" will help prevent bullying.

Visit: <http://goo.gl/5ESrYN> to learn how to teach your child about honor.



Parenting with the Heart of Christ

once reserved for college fraternities and sports clubs, has also found its way into our children's schools. Hazing is often used by children to humiliate outsiders to a group who desperately want to gain acceptance. These are acts of bullying that any child is capable of.

Parents need to make a conscious, strategic instruction in love a major part of their parenting plan. Our children need to see us modeling our own efforts to love more perfectly, and they also need instruction and guidance in forming their own hearts in love. This formation begins with a basic respect for universal human dignity. Human dignity is not dependent on one's appearance, social status, clothing choices, or any other of the superficial standards by which we are tempted to judge others. Every human being is created in the image of God, and therefore has unchanging and infinite dignity. The minimum human response to the universal dignity of every person is known as the "silver rule" - do no harm. But Jesus leads us beyond the silver rule and gives us the Golden Rule - do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Golden Rule takes us beyond the minimum requirement of love (do not harm others) to doing positive good for people. How would your child like to be treated by others? That's how she should learn to treat everyone else - including those she considers outsiders. Would your child like someone to help him pick his lunch off the floor when he drops it, or would he like to be laughed at? That's how he should learn to respond to someone else who drops his lunch in the lunchroom.

How do we teach our children to live by the silver rule and the golden rule? First we need to understand that the temptation to see others through the lens of power is strongest when your children are injured by others, or when they feel powerless in their desire to be accepted. Help your children strategize about how to cope and respond to being injured or harmed before it actually happens. Part of this strategy needs to focus on emotional discipline, especially of their anger. Teach your children how to STOP when they become overly emotional and THINK about what is going on before ACTING. This simple three step process will help them respond to injury in a way that does not become a power struggle. Learning to respond to injury in an appropriate way also means your children need a place where they can talk the injury out. That place should be with you in your home. They need to trust that you will be there and that you will listen. Let them know they can talk to you about anything. Finally when injuries cannot be fixed, children need to learn how to default humbly to God. Teach your children to pray for their enemies.

Finally, help your children to develop a proper sense of humor. A sense of humor helps by putting things into perspective. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen famously said, "Angels can fly because they take themselves so lightly." Teach your children about their own dignity and self-worth. Help them to form an accurate self-concept so they know their strengths and their weaknesses. Teach them to embrace their weaknesses and foibles - to laugh at themselves and the ridiculous situations life can sometimes place us in. Then injuries will not cut so deeply and a response of love rather than power will be much more likely. Isn't this the real message we should be sending this Valentine's Day?

Following these recommendations can help you prepare your children to really learn and develop during their time in school. But this is just a small part of good Catholic parenting. Visit www.twl4parents.com for more strategies for helping your children become the best they 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.