

Raising Our Children In The Church

Objective:

If we have raised our children as our parents raised us, why are they so different? How can we impart the importance of our faith to our children? While it feels like a modern problem, it has been a challenge for parents throughout history. The Bible is a story of human mistakes and how God makes great things out of them. We will share the story of Saint Monica, whose own son (Saint Augustine) fell far off the path, but through his mother's dogged determination, found his way back to Christ. We cannot give our children our faith, but we can give them the tools to build their own faith.

Song Suggestion: Christ Be Our Light

Bible & Catechism Readings:

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7

Hear, O Israel!* The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.

Catechism 2223

Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery – the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones." Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them:

He who loves his son will not spare the rod...He who disciplines his son will profit by him

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

Saint: Saint Monica

Vignette: Saint Monica's Story

The circumstances of St. Monica's life could have made her a nagging wife, a bitter daughter-in-law, and a despairing parent, yet she did not give way to any of these temptations. Although she was a Christian, her parents gave her in marriage to a pagan, Patricius, who lived in her hometown of Tagaste in North Africa. Patricius had some redeeming features, but he had a violent temper and was licentious. Monica also had to bear with a cantankerous mother-in-law who lived in her home. Patricius criticized his wife because of her charity and piety, but always respected her. Monica's prayers and example finally won her husband and mother-in-law to Christianity. Her husband died in 371, one year after his baptism.

Monica had at least three children who survived infancy. The oldest, Augustine, is the most famous. At the time of his father's death, Augustine was 17 and a rhetoric student in Carthage. Monica was

distressed to learn that her son had accepted the Manichean heresy—"all flesh is evil"—and was living an immoral life. For a while, she refused to let him eat or sleep in her house. Then one night she had a vision that assured her Augustine would return to the faith. From that time on, she stayed close to her son, praying and fasting for him. In fact she often stayed much closer than Augustine wanted.

When he was 29, Augustine decided to go to Rome to teach rhetoric. Monica was determined to go along. One night he told his mother that he was going to the dock to say goodbye to a friend. Instead he set sail for Rome. Monica was heartbroken when she learned of Augustine's trick, but she still followed him. She arrived in Rome only to find that he had left for Milan. Although travel was difficult, Monica pursued him to Milan.

In Milan, Augustine came under the influence of the bishop, St. Ambrose, who also became Monica's spiritual director. She accepted his advice in everything and had the humility to give up some practices that had become second nature to her. Monica became a leader of the devout women in Milan as she had been in Tagaste.

She continued her prayers for Augustine during his years of instruction. At Easter 387, St. Ambrose baptized Augustine and several of his friends. Soon after, his party left for Africa. Although no one else was aware of it, Monica knew her life was near the end. She told Augustine, "Son, nothing in this world now affords me delight. I do not know what there is now left for me to do or why I am still here, all my hopes in this world being now fulfilled." She became ill shortly after and suffered severely for nine days before her death.

Almost all we know about St. Monica is in the writings of St. Augustine, especially his Confessions.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

What has been successful and unsuccessful in keeping your kids engaged with the Church?

What resources or people do you go to when your kids have questions?

Should we pressure our kids (particularly those out of the house) to regularly attend mass or should we give them the freedom to find their own way back?

What do you wish you would have done differently in raising your children Catholic?

Reflection:

Keeping Our Kids Catholic: The Indispensable Minimum

<https://catholicexchange.com/on-keeping-our-kids-catholic-the-indispensable-minimum>

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