

LITURGICAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Silpanus

Sekolah Tinggi Kateketik Pastoral Katolik Bina Insan Keuskupan Agung Samarinda

E-mail: silpanusdalmasius@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The Church should give special attention to children, especially those who were baptized as infants. It would be good for the Church to take advantage of the time that children are being prepared for First Communion and Confession to give them appropriate liturgical education. Moreover, children who have received their First Communion should not yet be left on their own but continue to be accorded diligent pastoral care by the local Church because at this stage and in many cases children thrive in an atmosphere that is less favorable for spiritual progress. Liturgical education and formation intended for children can be very challenging especially during these present times that parents are oftentimes not capable of providing a sustained liturgical experience and exposure to their children. Parents usually relegate to the parish and to the Catholic schools whatever amount and kind of liturgical education can possibly be given to today's children.

Alamat Korespondensi:

Jl. WR. Soepratman, No.2, Samarinda, Kalimantan Timur, 75121
Telp. (0541) 739914 | Email: jgvstpkbinainsan@gmail.com

Introduction

Liturgy is a celebration of the life of faith. Liturgical education is aimed at helping the Christian faithful understand better the faith they celebrate and make it bear fruit in their daily lives. Education is not only aimed at the maturation of the human person, as has been described. Liturgical education, in particular, also aims at helping the baptized become more and more immersed in the various forms of the visible presence of the mystery of salvation and to become more and more aware of the gift of faith which they have received, so that they learn to worship God in spirit and truth (cf., Jn 4:23), especially in and through the celebration of the Liturgy.

The Second Vatican Council therefore reminded the pastors of souls of their very serious obligation to employ every possible means so that all the faithful receive Christian education, especially those belonging to the young generation and children who are the hope of the Church. Liturgical education is intended not only for those who aspire for the priestly ministry and for the religious life but also for all the faithful. Liturgical education is not just learning the liturgical norms and getting familiar with the rites but also understanding their meaning and significance, as well as the spiritual values they contain and express. Liturgical-

sacramental catechesis is the usual form that this liturgical education takes. There is also a non-formal modality of liturgical education which consists in taking part in and experiencing the celebration and in the process progressively being formed toward Christ-likeness by one's exposure to and immersion in the various modes of Christ's presence, e.g. his Word, signs and symbols, the assembly, etc. Good celebrations foster and develop the faith while celebrations that are poorly done can undermine the faith. Thus, liturgical education involves understanding, experience, and absolute appreciation inherent in the process of Christian education, both by the religious and the laity, but especially by the priests.

Liturgical education is directed toward a deepening understanding of the seven sacraments, the sacramentals, liturgical year, liturgy, arts and culture. These have not been understood by most of the faithful. It is not surprising, therefore, that for most of the faithful, the liturgy is limited to activities and rites, and to the question of what is allowed and what is not allowed. That liturgy is a celebration of faith that is directly related to life is not yet understood by many. The faithful's understanding of the meaning of liturgical symbols and rites is still very minimal. There remains to be a lack of liturgical catechesis and education.

Liturgical Education of Children in The Old Testament Period

Children and family were central to the religious life of ancient Israel. One of the central rites of Israel's religious life, circumcision, was tied to the birth of each male child. It meant that the mark of Israel's identity, its covenant with God, was borne on the bodies of infants. In this context, children represented the ongoing survival of a culture and people; their birth helped ensure the future. In an era where the survival of children and mothers at birth was far from guaranteed, children signified a blessing from God to parents.

If children come as blessing and gifts from God to parents and hope for society, they also present parents with obligations. Parents in the Hebrew Bible often appear as teachers who instruct and transmit the faith to the next generation. One of the foundational texts of Israel's faith, both ancient and modern, is found in the Shema¹: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep this words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are way, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign of your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on gates".² Here parents relay the heart of their faith to their children. Religious instruction occurs, according to the Shema, in the home, as parents teach and pray with their children.

As parents teach, children are to respect and honor their parents. Children look up to their parents for wisdom and follow their examples. One of the Ten Commandments enshrines the importance of children's obligations to their parents: "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you".³ On the other hand, consequences for dishonoring parents are particularly severe, including execution for those who curse parents!⁴ Where teaching and honor are present, however, parents and children can flourish in covenant.⁵

In the book of Proverbs a good number of verses can be found that speak about the education of children in the family. The book contains a significant amount of parents' advice to children. The opening chapter emphasizes the authority of parents to educate their children.⁶ That authority appears to be inspired by Deuteronomy 6:6-7, which emphasizes that family fathers should teach their children, especially in religious beliefs and practices.

Children should not oppose or go against their parents. Instead, they must obey their parents unconditionally. Because education from parents aims to help children find their way of life and gain success in their lives, by obeying the teachings of parents, children develop sensitivity and quick response to their life and the environment.

According to the book of Proverbs, the purpose of education is to help children attain wisdom because to gain wisdom is to live; while failure to achieve it means death. Wisdom and education in the direction of wisdom constitute a complete human person, capable and competent in all fields, including one's relation to God. For that purpose to be achieved, education must be carried out with discipline. Therefore, parents are allowed to use an assertive way of educating children, for example, by punishment.⁷ The purpose of the punishment is for children not to go to the wrong way, as leading on the wrong way means walking to death. Education is based on tradition, including the tradition of faith, but it does not only mean the inheritance of ancestral tradition. Moreover, education conveys the life experience and faith of the ancestors who have attained wisdom; thus, possibly attaining to become an educator when someone has lived the tradition in his life.

Liturgical Education of Children in The New Testament Period

In the four Gospels, passages that explicitly present Jesus' teaching about educating the young are not found. It must be noted, however, that Jesus himself was educated in the family of Joseph and Mary in Nazareth. From childhood stories it can be surmised that he, as a child of a family, received a good education. The Holy Family lived in a typical Jewish environment. The family is described as devout and obedient to Jewish customary laws and regulations. It

is narrated that Joseph and Mary always went to Jerusalem every year to celebrate Easter.⁸

Jesus is portrayed as a child who loved and obeyed His parents. He grew up and developed in true love and faith.⁹ Before beginning His public work and ministry, for approximately thirty years, he lived hidden in the Nazareth family. He was educated by Joseph and Mary, much like other Jewish children. In thirty years' time, he grew into adulthood until He was ready to proclaim the Gospel.¹⁰

In the Jewish culture, parents educate their children first at home. The father of the family has an obligation to educate the faith of his children. First, he must teach all religious orders and laws. At the age of five, children are admitted to elementary school to learn to read the Torah.¹¹ The primary school is usually associated with the synagogue. Ten-year-old children must learn the *Mishnah* or the Oral Law. At the age of 13 for boys, 12 for girls, they must understand the whole of Yahweh's laws and carry them out. The thirteen-year-old child of a Jewish society is a son of the Law (*Torah*) or a son of The Commandments (*Bar Mitzvah*). He is considered mature, and must perform all the commandments of the Law. At earlier ages, Jewish children were taught religious rules and laws and were taught to obey them. At the age of fifteen they have to complete their knowledge. The core of the curriculum of education in the Jewish schools is the study of the Torah.¹²

In all likelihood, Jesus also got the same education as other Jewish children. In his family he must have been guided and taught the rules and religious law before becoming "the son of The Law (*Torah*)". For "the son of the Law (*Torah*)" has a duty to pray the *shema* three times a day and always go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. At the age of twelve, Jesus must have been prepared to be the "son of The Law (*Torah*)", so he was brought by his parents to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. This implies that He was educated to be a pious, devout, and obedient child to the law of religion. Most likely Jesus did not receive formal education from a renowned teacher. He might have received his education at the village synagogue school, but he learned to read and understand the contents of the Old Testament very well. It was through the family education and the village synagogue school that Jesus grew up, full of wisdom and grace of God.¹³ He grew up in an environment that teaches moral, intellectual, cultural, and religious education.

Liturgical Education of Children in Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [SC] on the Sacred Liturgy (December 4, 1963)

If the nature of the liturgy and its importance in the life of the Church are such that "no other action of the Church can equal its efficacy,"¹⁴ one can appreciate the pressing invitation of the Constitution to promote the liturgical

education of Christians. Training the faithful to understand the liturgy means enabling them to come into contact with the very heart of the Christian mystery. Hence, the statement that “the liturgy is the first and necessary source from which the faithful can imbibe the true Christian spirit.”¹⁵

That liturgy is the first source and the necessary source from which Christians can derive the spirit of their faith is to reaffirm the essential bond which exists between Christian life and the liturgy. The liturgy is not first and foremost a doctrine to be learned, but an inexhaustible source of life and light for understanding and experiencing the Christian mystery. For the Liturgy Constitution, the Church must provide all Christians with an authentic liturgical life, since the quality of their faith life demands a profound harmony between what the liturgy hands on and the reality by which they live, in accordance with the liturgical formula cited by the Constitution: “that they may hold fast in their lives to what they have received by faith.”¹⁶

The goal of the liturgical renewal movement of the first half of the twentieth century was that people might come to understand liturgical celebrations and participate actively in them. Subsequently, the Council Fathers of the Second Vatican Council demonstrated the importance and relevance of liturgical education for the people and the involvement of the people in the celebration of the liturgy not only for adults but also for children. They realized that to achieve an active understanding and engagement of the faithful, it must be preceded by a good liturgical education for pastors or priests, so that they become agents for liturgical education in their respective parishes.

Liturgical Education of Children in Declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* [GE] on Christian Education (October 28, 1965)

Gravissimum Educationis, particularly in article 3, places great emphasis on the responsibility of parents as it is they who have given life to their children and, because of this, have the gravest obligation of educating their family. This declaration states that the role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. Calling for parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellowman, a pattern for providing integrated, personal, and social education for their children was established. The document names the family as the principal school of the social virtues which are necessary to every society. It proposes the family as the most appropriate context for children to experience a well-balanced human society. Finally, it explained that it is through the family that children are gradually initiated into association with their fellowman in civil life and as members of the people of God.¹⁷

The document further declares that while the task of imparting education belongs primarily to the family, it also requires the help of society as a whole. Therefore, as outlined in this document, it is the duty of the state to ensure that all its citizens have access to an adequate education and are prepared for the proper exercise of their civic rights and duties. Accordingly, the state should safeguard the rights of children to an adequate education in schools. It should be vigilant about the ability of the teachers and the standard of teaching. It should recognize the rights of parents and their wishes regarding the education of their children.

All Christians, the document states, have a right to a Christian education which develops the maturity of the human person in view of his or her final end and the good of that society to which he or she belongs. Christian education should be particularly directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized, as they are gradually introduced to a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become more appreciative daily of the gift of faith which they have received. Through a Christian education, they should learn to adore God the Father in spirit and in truth, especially through their participation in the liturgy.¹⁸ They should be trained to live their own lives, justified and sanctified through the truth. Thus they should grow toward adulthood as members of the Body of Christ who are willing to make their contribution to the growth of the Mystical Body and who are able to contribute to the good of the society as a whole.

Liturgical Education of Children in *Familiaris Consortio [FC]* on The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, (November 22, 1981)¹⁹

Vatican II teaches that parents are the first educators of their children.²⁰ The home is the first school of children. It is a right that must be provided for. Here Pope John Paul II teaches parents that they cannot even give away entirely to another person their right to teach to another person. He tells those who would try to take away from the parents the right to teach, that they cannot do so: The sacrament of marriage gives to the educational role the dignity and vocation of being really and truly a "ministry" of the Church at the service of the building up of her members. So great and splendid is the educational ministry of Christian parents that Saint Thomas has no hesitation in comparing it with the ministry of priests: "Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God".²¹

The Pontiff himself here states that parents should help in the preparation of children for the Sacraments of Initiation.²² He makes it clear that parenthood is not truly fulfilled until parents also become teachers of their children. Parents have not only the right to teach, but it is also their duty. This should put to rest

once and for all the question of whether or not parents are qualified to teach catechism to their children; yet there are those who cling to the false idea that only an elite group can teach catechesis. Such an idea is in direct opposition to what Pope John Paul II has repeatedly said: "The ministry of evangelization carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable. It assumes the characteristics typical of family life itself, which should be interwoven with love, simplicity, practicality and daily witness (FC 53).²³

Thus the little domestic Church, like the greater Church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized: hence its duty regarding permanent education in the faith. The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. The future of evangelization depends in great part on the Church of the home of a family.

The future of humanity passes by way of the family.²⁴ The family in our society secures the well-being of generations to come. This involves the recognition of what marriage uniquely is. A recognition comes not only from faith but from reason which clearly sees that it is from the family that "citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues which are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself".²⁵ In this way it is in the family that the future of society will be decided on.

As the keystone of society, the family is the most favorable environment in which to welcome children. Society, therefore, needs young adults to say their "I do" with joy, conviction, faith and hope. They and the family that they will build are the future and hope of society. Without married people, society cannot build the future of society and the Church. The Holy Family of Nazareth is held up to them as their model in holding sacred the gift of marriage and family.

Conclusion

From the modest historical survey, it was seen that the education and formation of children in the faith and in prayer and worship, in particular, has been regarded by the faith community, that of Israel and then the Church, as an essential pastoral responsibility, if good, upright, and responsible adults are desired as living stones with which a healthy society and faith community is built. The natural love for children across all cultures makes education and formation of children a delightful task, but indeed it has its difficulties and challenges. Such difficulties and challenges vary from culture to culture, from epoch to epoch, and from one geographical area to another.

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END NOTES

¹ Shema: a liturgical prayer, prominent in Jewish history and tradition, that is recited daily at the morning and evening services and expresses the Jewish people's ardent faith in and love of God.

² Deut 6:4-9.

³ Ex 20:12.

⁴ Cf. Lev 20:9

⁵ David H. Jensen, "*Parenting*," Minneapolis 2011, 52.

⁶ See. Prov 1:8-9.

⁷ Cf. Prov 19:18.

⁸ See. Lk 2:41.

⁹ See. Luke 2:40, 51-52.

¹⁰ See. Luke 3:23.

¹¹ Cf. 2 Tim 3:15.

¹² Cf. B.J. Boland, "*Luke's commentary*", vol I, Jakarta 1977, 66; Cf. Samuel Oyin Abogurin, "The International Bible Commentary," in *Luke*, ed. William R. Farmer, Minnesota 1998, 1377.

¹³ See. Lk 2:40.

¹⁴ Cf. SC 7.

¹⁵ SC 14.

¹⁶ SC 10.

¹⁷ Cf. Michelle Willis, "*Vatican II Summary and Reflection of Vatican II Documents*", 5.

¹⁸ Cf. GE 3.

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* on The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (November 22, 1981), in http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.pdf accessed on April 10, 2018. Henceforth to be referred to as FC.

²⁰ Cf. FC n. 36,

²¹ John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio on The Role of The Christian Family in The Modern World*, n. 38.

²² Cf., FC, n. 39.

²³ FC, n. 53.

²⁴ Cf. FC, n. 86.

²⁵ Cf. FC, n. 42.