

Monday Adoration: October 2, 2006  
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## Catechesis in the Church (6)

### Family Catechesis: Bringing up children in the Faith

#### **Preamble**

I began the series *Catechesis in the Church* at our Monday Adoration on May 29, 2006. I am glad to continue with the series at our Adoration today. Catechesis, as the deepening and education in the faith, has been an indispensable aspect of the life of the Church. The faith which we received at our baptism must be nurtured to maturity. Catechesis is that gradual but effective process of strengthening, renewing, and deepening of the faith of Catholics, so that they become active members of the Church, by witnessing zealously to Christ both in the Church and in the world. Catechesis begins in the family and, since the family is the *Domestic Church*, it provides children with their first education in the faith and morals. Undoubtedly, the *onus* rests on parents and guardians to help their children in the process of strengthening and deepening their faith.

#### **The *Shema* (Hear) Prayer**

- **“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 these 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 away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6: 4-10).**

The call to “hear” is the command to love God alone. Over a period of time, the *shema* prayer became the principal confession of faith of the Jewish people; it became their creed. The people of Israel must not look to other gods. The Lord their God is a jealous God. The *shema* prayer is a profession of faith in the one God, the foundation of Jewish monotheism. Because of the importance of the *shema*, the devout Jew wore phylacteries, that is, little leather boxes which contained the *shema* prayer, in their forehead and wrists. The *shema* was also contained in a cylinder box which the Jews attached to the doorpost of their houses to remind them of this great commandment of God. Every Jewish service begins with the *shema* prayer. It is the first text in the Bible that every Jewish child memorized. The Jewish people obeyed the text to the letter.

Apart from the total and undivided love of God, which is the heart of the *shema* prayer, what also stands out is the command **to teach the commandment to their children**. They must nurture and help their children to hold on to the *shema* faith. The intent of this passage is clear: parents have the responsibility of handing down their faith, religious beliefs, and values to their children. The family is the first and primary place to nurture children in the faith and pass religious and moral values to them. The family is the first school for the religious education of children.

When Jesus was asked by a scribe what is the greatest commandment, he answered by quoting a part (Deut 6:5) of the *shema* prayer (Mt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34) about loving God

with “all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Mt 22:37). Jesus told them that the love of God is the greatest commandment followed by the love of neighbour.

### **Religious Upbringing of Children**

One way of ensuring the religious upbringing of children is for the family to become a truly *Domestic Church*. The *Domestic Church* is a place where all members live in love of each other. It is a place to cultivate a school of love. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They have to bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule” (CCC #2223). Similarly, parents or guardians should be glowing example to their children: “Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children” (CCC # 2223). Parents have the responsibility to teach their children how to pray since “the Christian family is the first place for education in prayer” (CCC #2685).

### **The Challenge of Parents and Guardians**

Undoubtedly, there is a great challenge today for parents and guardians to transmit the faith, Christian values and morals, to their children. Parents must do this primarily by example and then by word. Parents should not surrender the religious upbringing of their children to catechists and leave the moral formation of their children solely to school teachers. Oftentimes, parents abdicate their responsibility to transmit the faith and Christian values to their children because they are busy pursuing wealth and other material things. Parents must complement the religious education that their children receive from the Church. One of the ways parents can transmit religious education and values to their children is to begin by taking an inventory of their own religious and moral values. Parents should ask themselves: What are my priorities? What do I value most in life? How is my faith integrated with my way of life? How seriously do I practice my faith? The answers to these questions will help parents to work on themselves to grow in the spiritual and moral life, and then transmit them to their children first, by their way of life and then, by instruction. For example, the best way to teach our children the importance of prayer is for them to see us pray regularly.

Furthermore, parents and guardians must make their home a conducive place for transmitting the faith to their children through a regular and sustained family prayer pattern, open discussion of moral issues, acquainting their children with the Bible so that they can have love for sacred scripture, teaching children the value of sacrifice and service of others, teaching them in kindness and generosity, teaching them in giving and not only in receiving, and reaching out to the poor and the less privileged in society, etc.

Most parents have problem with their children when they leave home for school: secondary and university education. What do parents need to do to address this problem? Our collective reflection and sharing today will be helpful to all of us. *Thank you for listening and God bless you.*