

# Offering to *Y*our *C*hild

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## WHAT DO YOU OFFER TO YOUR CHILD??

Many believe that there is no need to talk about the care which parents- especially mothers - give to their young children. They believe that parental instincts which God has created within us lead us to love the child naturally. Such instincts are found even in birds and savage animals, therefore how much more is that applicable to human beings whom God has created in his image and likeness?!

However, parents are often concerned with aspects of health, nourishment, sleep, and the development of talents such as musical, artistic, physical sports, as well as learning. They hardly realize that the greatest developmental growth of their child takes place under the care of the Lord's Holy Spirit.

### **1- Learning his true personal worth!**

Probably the child's primary need from his parents is that they themselves recognize the worth of their child. This fact would then be relayed to the child through all the ways and care they give to him/her.

Wise parents, as well as all leaders in all fields, especially those in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, need to recognize the fact that each person is essentially unique among all mankind- this is true whatever his/her age, education, talents, and potentials may be. God does not create a person who can take the place of/ replace another person. It is just as we do not find one finger print similar to that of any other person among millions of others; and just as the eye print of each person is unique among all the other human eyes. This has led advanced countries to distinguish a person through his eye print. So God creates each fetus as a completely unique being among other unique human beings. Therefore each single being is precious in the sight of God, and the value of each is priceless! Each being has a unique mission, and no other person can fulfill that mission in spite of outstanding personality traits or talents possessed by others!

A woman came to me from one of the villages near Alexandria and requested me to grant her absolution as she planned to abort her pregnancy. She explained that she already had ten children and would not be capable of handling an eleventh conception. When I informed her that abortion is the killing and therefore the murder of a human being, she changed her mind.

A long time passed, and when I met her again I asked her how she felt towards the new child. I expected to find her rebellious and complaining. She answered: "As much as I could not tolerate the idea of having an eleventh child, and as much as I felt bitter before giving birth, yet I have to confess to you how I feel towards that child. His value lies on one scale of the balance and all the other children are on the other scale of it.

This is what we should offer to our child. There can be no comparison between him and all other beings. In God's eyes, this child is in one scale and all other beings are on the other scale of the balance and no one can take his place!

This concept needs to be presented without any spirit of haughtiness or pride. Indeed, this is how God considers each person: each person is a distinct and unique being!

It is for the sake of that unique being that Christ has died, even if that being was the only one on the face of the earth. The Lord Jesus Christ has also died for the whole world as well.

This is how Saint Augustine felt when he returned to God. He felt he was a unique being among all mankind!

Comparing a child with others, without underlining that he/she possesses singular and distinct qualities, is probably one of the most dangerous actions that destroys a child. By underlining his distinctive and unique qualities, the child gets to comprehend how much God loves him. Consequently, and from a very young age, he/she is filled with peace as he feels that God particularly cares for him.

I was greatly touched by a mother's attitude towards her child who did not take part in prayers. She took him in her embrace and said: "Did you not hear God whisper in your ear saying: 'I have missed you today?'" Such behavior would lead the young child to feel that even though the Church is filled with hundreds of worshippers, yet God would speak to him personally and say: "**Let me see your face, Let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet, And your face is lovely**", (Song of Sol.2:14).

## **2- Not an island in the middle of the sea!**

Besides knowing that God cares for him/her as a unique individual and that his value sort of places him on one side of the scale while all the rest of mankind are placed on the other side, the child needs to realize that he does not live or exist on an island in the middle of the sea. He cannot live or find happiness without his fellow human brothers.

Even though his value rests on one side of the scale, yet if the rest of mankind is not on the other side of the scale, the balance would be lost and he/she would fall off the scale and be damaged! His greatness lies in the greatness of every other human being!

It is therefore important for parents who really love their child to demonstrate how to appreciate every person in a spirit of wisdom.

## **3- In the company of the Lord Jesus Christ!**

The child needs his parents to present the Lord Jesus Christ to him/her as Someone who lives with us and with whom we live. He is not just an idea which we discuss or talk about.

Our Lord descended to our earth and became like us in order to live in our company. During this wonderful companionship, the child needs to comprehend the following:

**A-**Life is full of troubles. However, it is a beautiful journey with our Lord. He never abandons us until we enter His heavens and we come to live with His angels.

This is how parents present a simple and beautiful picture of life, the world, and temporal reality. Our Lord has died on the Cross because He has loved us. Moreover, He continues to live with us as He eagerly waits to take us with Him.

Any complaints, rebellions, or anxiety that the child might experience – even if he is still nursing- form some kind of disturbance. It creates a kind of anxiety within him even though this might not be evident immediately.

**B-** Assure the child that the glorious Lord is with him, listening closely to him even when he is in his own room. This confirms that he is never isolated or alone.

When the child goes to nursery school, he might feel that he has no friends or that he is not liked. Therefore it is necessary for parents to assure him that the Lord is his friend who accompanies and embraces him.

**C-** The child might complain and say: ‘I pray to God but He does not listen to me’! Parents need to respond and say: ‘We sometimes turn on the television and find that it is not presenting anything. This leads us to conclude that it is not broadcasting anything, whereas the real cause is that the television is not functioning properly. God does answer our prayers and the problem lies in that our ears do not listen to Him. God had spoken and young Samuel heard Him whereas Eli the priest did not hear Him.

How do we repair this malfunction that causes us not to hear? The only remedy is to love God who loves us!

**D-** The child’s sense that God is close by and yearning for him solves many problems especially if he happens to hear that another child or one of his relatives has passed away. It would enable him to accept that death does not involve any violence or cruelty, but that it is a departure to beloved and amazing God.

#### **4- Friendship with the saints**

A Greek lady was in the habit of holding the hand of her nursing baby at bedtime every night, and she would place it on the pictures of saints and then guide his hand to his mouth as in a kissing gesture. When asked why she did so, she said: ‘I want my nursing baby to gradually become the friend of the holy saints’.

When a child develops love for the saints who have passed away, he is enabled to practice love towards believers. Indeed, he would experience, in the spirit of wisdom, the sweetness of love with all human beings.

Sister Magdalene provides a beautiful dialogue with a ten-year old child, which I will report with some additions and variation:

**Child:** Why do we proclaim that the Virgin Mary is the greatest among all human beings?

- Good question! Consider how much she loved God so that He chose her to be His mother. He had decided to become a human being in order to save us through His Cross. Therefore He accepted to enter her womb and be conceived from her. She submitted to that even though she was aware that many would think badly of her and that her Son would suffer.

**Child:** Do you mean that had she refused, the Lord Jesus Christ would not have been born from her?

- Yes, He entered her womb after she had accepted. God does not force a person to accept His grace and blessings.

**Child:** Would the Lord have not been born of her had she told angel Gabriel: ‘Thank you, but I do not want that’?

-Yes, this is what I mean. God loves us and wants us to be great and saintly in His eyes. However, He never forces us!

**Child:** We therefore love the Virgin Mary because she accepted what God offered to her, and the Lord Jesus was born from her.

- Yes. And we love all the saints because they accepted the grace of God to work within them. We pray to join their ranks.

**Child:** Do they love us as we love them?

- Yes, they are in paradise. They are waiting for us to get there and they are praying that we would share with them the heavenly glories.

**Child:** So let us befriend them and ask them to pray for us. Let us join their ranks so as to be with them and all the angels.

### **5- God is the source of love!**

Children and adults often complain that nobody loves them.

A child might complain that his/her parents do not give him enough attention, and that his mother loves his brother or sister more than him, that his sister (or brother) abuses him. No one loves him, no one wishes to be his friend or have anything to do with him- not even relatives or guests..... How do parents handle such feelings whether they are true or imaginary and have no true basis?

Parents need to realize an important reality and that is that after the fall it has become hard for man to love as he should. This is a natural outcome of His isolation from God who is Love Himself!

Love is not the fruit of feelings and whose key is in the hands of man, and who can have love or hate when he wishes. Love is a divine gift which God grants to us so that we might become like Him who is Love!

When the child finds that his parents pray for those that trouble them; and ask Him to grant love to all of them as well as to themselves, he understands that the key of love is found in God's hands.

When the child hears of the wars taking place all over the world and questions why they happen, the answer comes in a practical manner: he observes that his parents stand to pray and ask God to grant true love to all mankind- even to those warring against each other. In this manner, the child's love develops as he wishes all mankind to enjoy love.

The child learns to pray God to grant him to love every person, every organization, and every nation. He also learns to pray that God promotes love in the hearts of his parents, brothers and sisters; as well as his friends, neighbors and all those he encounters.

### **What Do I Offer to My Child?**

**\*My God, what can I offer to my child?**

**He is Your child, and You have entrusted him to me as a charge.  
You consider him as the most valuable in the whole earth!  
You have willingly offered Yourself up to death  
in order to grant us a resurrected life  
You consider the Child born of the tribe of Judah as Your child,  
and as a unique human being  
Whom You have brought to the world for a unique mission.**

**\*Teach me how to watch over him responsibly**

**Grant me to the ability to bring him up and educate him  
And to find that to be a holy task which I cannot do without Your grace.  
Bringing up a child is not burdensome to me  
For it is Your work O Master of us all:  
You educate and sanctify the whole of Your creation!**

**\*Teach and train me to respect each person, so that my child would respect others.**

**Just as he is precious in Your eyes, may he see others as precious treasures!  
May I cherish each person just as I cherish my young child,  
Then he too will cherish all his brothers and sisters!**

**\*Grant me awareness of Your presence throughout my journey in life,**

**Pour Your splendor within my depths  
So that my child may sense this divine Companionship in his life too  
Thus transforming his life- in his view- as an enjoyable journey towards heaven!**

**\*Through Your Holy Spirit, grant him holy insight.**

**May he see You listening to him tenderly- listening to the hidden voice of his heart.  
May he constantly feel that he is in Your presence,**

**and that Your divine presence is permanent in his life.**

**\* May His ears be washed so that he hears Your sweet voice  
with Samuel the prophet .**

**Pour into him the spirit of love so that all his senses and emotions are sanctified.**

**May Your presence make its mark within his depths,  
and may You establish Your kingdom within him.**

**\*May You lift up his heart to the heavens**

**So that he may join the heavenly ones in their praises**

**And live in the companionship of the saints**

**May his heart be inflamed with craving for heaven!**

**To You belongs the glory O Educator and Protector of young children!<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Sister Magdalen: Conversations with Children