

ONE AND ONLY TEACHER

Talk of Chiara Lubich at the Congress Family-Education, Castel Gandolfo, May 2, 1987

I would like to begin by greeting all of you, especially those who have come from the farthest corners of the world.

The congress called by our New Families Movement is beginning today. The theme of the congress is, "The family and education." My brief talk this morning is meant to be simply an introduction to such an important theme.

This congress will examine the theme in-depth from different points of view. I would like to lay a foundation for all that will be said. If this is foundation for all that will be said, if this foundation is put into life, I believe that everything will acquire more value and true value.

Speaking of education, we logically find ourselves before two subjects: the educator, the teacher, who must teach, who must educate, and the disciple or pupil who must be educated.

With regard to the educator or teacher, there is a phrase from the Gospel that makes us think and which can shed light on the education that should be imparted in the family.

The sentence is: "You have only one teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters." (Mt. 23:8) Jesus recognizes one teacher alone, He Himself. This does not mean that He denies the presence of authority. This must be interpreted, however, not as dominion or power, but as service. This is because in service, which is love, it is not only the human person. In this way, Christ continues to be the first Teacher.

If Jesus is the Teacher, it follows that one of the duties of Christian parents involves looking at Him in order to learn how to educate.

What type of educator was Jesus? Several important characteristics emerge from Jesus the Teacher.

First of all, He gives example. He Himself incarnates His doctrine. He does not impose burdens before carrying them Himself: "Woe to you," he says, "you lay impossible burdens on people but will not lift a finger to lighten them!" (Luke 11:46) Jesus puts into practice what He asks of others.

Looking at Him, we can deduce that the first way to educate, and this applies to parents as well, is not so much instructing or correcting, but living, with total commitment, one's own life as a Christian. Parents themselves must put into practice what they ask of their children. Do they ask for sincerity, commitment, loyalty, obedience, and charity towards others, chastity. Patience and forgiveness? Children should find these qualities, first of all, in their parents. Children should always be able to find in their mothers and fathers indisputable models to which they can relate.

Another characteristic of the way Jesus educated involves intervening with concrete assistance as He did when He calmed the storm on the lake. (Cf. Luke 8:24)

On a natural level, parents do everything they possibly can for their children. They will be able to do even more; above all, they will be able to do everything even better, if they elevate their natural love to include a supernatural love; that is if they love with God's charity, with the charity of one who takes the initiative in loving, without expecting anything in return. This is a love that never leaves others indifferent.

Moreover, Jesus has confidence in the people He teaches, as we can conclude from His words to the adulteress: "Go," he says, "and don't sin anymore." (John 8:11) He believes that it is possible for this woman to begin a life that is morally correct.

The words of parents must always be words charged with hope, positive words which express all their confidence in the new beginning of their children.

Jesus leaves each person free and responsible to make his or her own decisions, as He did when He met the rich young man. (Cf. Mt. 19:16) We must never impose our own ideas, but offer them as expressions of love. First and foremost, children are sons and daughters of God, not our Alone. They should not be treated, therefore, as our possessions, but as persons who have been entrusted to us.

Jesus does not hesitate to correct, with decision and force when necessary. He says to Peter, who wanted to prevent Him from facing His passion: Get behind me, Satan! The way you think is not God's way but man's" (Mt. 16:23)

Correction is also necessary. It is an integral part of education: "He who lives his son is diligent to discipline him." (Proverbs 13:24) as is written in the sacred book of Proverbs. As father and teacher, God's education of the Hebrews, whom He formed Himself, involved instruction and correction.

Woe to us if we do not discipline! We should be responsible for such an omission! This passage from the Prophet Ezekiel is particularly striking: "If you do not warn this wicked man to renounce his ways, then he shall die for his sin, but I will hold you responsible for his death." (Ezekiel 33:8) Correction is therefore the duty of parents. Admonishment, given with peace, calm and detachment, increase the sense of responsibility on the part of the children who will always remember it.

In the stupendous parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus shows us the father's mercy and therefore, His mercy towards those who repent and return to what is good.

Parents must treat their children as God treats us. The mercy of a father and mother in a family must reach the point of truly knowing how to forget, how to "cover over everything" (1 Cor. 13:7) with God's charity. Repeated reminders of a negative past are not in line with Jesus way of thinking. This explains why they are not accepted.

Jesus teaches in the synagogue, on the mountain, along the roads of Galilee and Judea, in the temple of Jerusalem. Likewise, any place can be useful to parents for teaching.

Jesus' way of expressing Himself is new, although He keeps to the customs of His time. He speaks a language that is alive, filled with images, concrete, brief and precise. He avoids any kind of long-windedness. He often condenses into one phrase all that He has to say on a particular subject.

This is what should be done in the family. Our young people do not accept the so-called long sermons. A few words are enough, offered by a true, pure and selfless love. Jesus also uses dialogue, alternating questions and answers. He uses maxims, and, with the Scribes and Pharisees, discussion.

The dialogue between parents and sons or daughters, whether they are children or adults, must never be interrupted. It must always be open, serene and constructive, as between friends.

In many families, there are sons or daughters who turn away, despite the witness given by their parents who have tried to live according to the Gospel. At times, they also drift from the faith. The relationship with these sons and daughters must never be broken no matter which pathway they follow, even if they follow ideologies which are distant from God; even if they follow the pathway of drugs or of experiences which are radically in contrast with the moral teaching they had received in the family.

Particularly in the West, we are immersed in a secularized in which important traditional values have faded away, and new ones emerged: there is a strong awareness of personal freedom for example, excitement over scientific and technological progress and the overcoming of cultural and national barriers, a different understanding of the role of women in today's society, and so on.

Parents must be able to discern. While communicating with their children, they must be mindful of the profound changes that have taken place in the context in which their children are living.

They need to know how to interpret the "sign of the times" which can be found in some of the new demands expressed by their children.

While educating people, Jesus is not afraid to overturn the traditional scale of values, as when He announces the beatitudes. (Cf. Mt. 5:2) He calls "happy," in fact, those who do not appear to be so. He represents a pathway which is difficult to take, and which is in opposition to what the world offers.

We too must have the courage to state what is truly of value. We must not deceive ourselves, thinking that by presenting a watered-down Christianity and a fictitious Christ, our proposals will be more readily accepted.

God makes Himself heard in the hearts of our children. They react in a positive way only to the truth, when this is presented to them with a language that is accessible and acceptable; that is when it is expressed by parents, who before teaching have made the effort to understand and to share profoundly in the true demands of the new generations.

The Gospel depicts Jesus speaking "as one who has authority." (Mt. 7:29) Parents – trusting in the grace that they have as parents – must never neglect their responsibility as educators. Deep down in their hearts, children require this of them. It is for this very reason that children are often capable of judging their parents ruthlessly if they have been silent about the truth.

Jesus educates by passing on to His disciples "His" typical teaching: "This is my commandment: that you love one another, as I have loved you," Jesus presents Himself as the "Master" of such love.

This much is the teaching, par excellence, which parents give to their children, because it is the synthesis of the Gospel. Parents must imitate Jesus so well in putting it into practice, that they can repeat this commandment to their children as their own: My children love one another as I have loved you.

Thus, we must imitate Jesus. We must imitate Him as Teacher. We must imitate Jesus, or better still, we must allow Him to live in us. Yes, by far, the best way would be if Jesus Himself were to take our place. If He lives in us, our efforts as educators will be beyond reproach. If He becomes the educator in our families, we will carry out our responsibility perfectly.

Jesus must live in us. He must take our place. How can this come about? The Gospel gives us the answer. We were still at the beginning of our new way of life when the Lord urged us to turn it into a divine adventure in which He would be present in us. Then, little by little, implanting in our minds the various ideas that give rise to the spirituality of unity, the Spirit explained to us how this could become a reality.

Now all those who follow this pathway know how they should act so that Jesus may be in them. We must live the “new self,” not the “old self.” We must love in a supernatural way, being -outside- of ourselves,” as we say, always, overcoming any obstacle that might turn up, by loving Jesus crucified and forsaken.

We should not live for ourselves. We must live for the others, “making ourselves one” with them in everything except sin. All these expressions tell us how Jesus can take His place within us. Jesus was already present in our soul through grace. Now He is more fully present because we correspond to this grace. Yes, by living in this way, Jesus is in us, Jesus the Teacher.

But Jesus must also live in the midst of our families. This is the presence of Jesus that comes about in unity, wherever two or more are united in His name. (Cf. Mt. 18:20) Jesus between husband and wife; between mother and son; between father and daughter; between mother and grandfather or aunt... if Jesus is present among two or more members of our family, His influence as Teacher and Educator will be greater.

How can we guarantee this precious presence of His in our midst? We know the answer: by nourishing it everyday, by rebuilding unity whenever it has been shattered, and by keeping ourselves open to one another, indeed, by going out of ourselves towards the other members of our family. I say, going out of ourselves towards the others, because in a family, the first neighbors to love are the members of one's own family.

In fact, whether we are adherents, or volunteers or married focalari of the Movement, we know that the task that the charism of unity urges us to fulfill is that of making this basic cell of society become a focolare. This is our specific, characteristic vocation. We will not reach sanctity unless we aim at this goal.

Precisely because we have put aside everything, at least spiritually, in order to follow Jesus (“If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple.”) we now hear Him repeating to us these words: You do not love me if you do not love your family, first of all. Thus, whether we are alone or whether others in our family live the Ideal, Jesus, the Teacher, will be present there.

The children who grow up in these families will be a new generation. Together with the life and nourishment they receive from their parents, and with all the affection and assistance that this first social cell offers, they will also be imbued with many of Jesus' ideas – Jesus evangelical ideas.

Consequently, they will grow up reasoning as He reasons. They will learn to see humanity as the great family of God's children. They will no longer believe in the Gospel. No relationship will attract them more than that based on Jesus' new commandment. These children will be new.

Thus the divine life received in baptism will be strengthened. Parents will put into action the graces that the sacrament of matrimony has placed at their disposal for the good of their children. Parents will collaborate with God in developing and rearing His children.

To educate, to transform the children and the entire family! To make of the family a small church, a dynamic reality open to the society around it and to its needs, orienting the children to look beyond themselves towards its realization.

To understand what we should do, let us look at how the Spirit urged the entire Work of Mary to act, to make all become one.

In our Movement, we have welcomed persons of other religions and non-believers. We love these persons as we love ourselves. We joyfully accept the commitments that they spontaneously take as integral parts of our large family. We share with them all the spiritual and material patrimony of the Opera. We are the Work of Mary because they too are present. Without their presence, we would lose our identity.

It must be like this in our families as well. We not only with human love, but also with supernatural love must welcome whoever is a little distant from this or from any other Christian ideal, whoever has other ideas or another faith.

We must treasure and appreciate whatever they give to the family, however small this may be. We must know how to highlight the good ideas they have. We should make them participate, as much as possible, in the spiritual and material riches of the family.

In short, we should do all we can to love this son or daughter or these sons and daughters, so that although they have not yet received the light of faith, they return this love in some way, and the family becomes an expression of the Work of Mary.

Moreover, to make the family a small cell of the Work of Mary or a small church, which is synonymous, means to imitate the family of Nazareth, that family which lived with Jesus in the midst in the most concrete and divine way.

In order to compose this masterpiece, the members of the family of Nazareth loved one another in a supernatural way, which means out of love for God and not for them. Mary, who was the true mother of Jesus and true wife of Joseph, loved both of them not for herself, but for God. Joseph did not love Mary for himself. He loved her for God, and he love the child Jesus for God, even though he was His foster father.

Yes, we must love for God. Our love is truly purified of human attachments of our spirit is always turned towards Jesus Forsaken.

My dear friends, I could continue to demonstrate how all the elements of our spirituality are very suitable for guiding the life of the family. But you know this. Yes, with out ideal, we can have the Teacher in our home.

Today, let us renew the proposal, which makes His presence possible there. On this foundation, everything will be meaningful – all that is offered to you by science and by experience in the pedagogical field will also acquire value.

May Our Lady give us many united families we will have, besides all the rest, powerful means for spreading the Kingdom of God in the world.

And by reaching out to other families and to all humanity the family will become ever more beautiful, more united and more holy.

And isn't this what God expects from people?