

Parent Partnership Handbook

A Guide to Catholic Parenting

Catholic Parents Herald the Gospel

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At Baptism, when the celebrant anointed you with holy oil (chrism), he said: "As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always..." How, specifically, can parents imitate Jesus in the role of prophet so that children grow to mirror Jesus?

Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or John the Baptist were inspired messengers of God who did not speak their own agendas but delivered the messages they received from the Holy Spirit. The prophets spoke God's word and will. Because they did, they suffered death.

A frequent purpose of prophetic messages was to urge repentance from negative behaviors and a return to the practice of God's ways. Prophets warned that personal choices have consequences. Prophets also spoke of God's promises and God's love for sinners. They were agents of hope, consolation, and mercy.

Jesus, the greatest of the prophets, repeatedly declared that he said only what the Father told him to say (Jn 5:19, 6:38, 8:28, 12:49-50). Jesus *is* the Word of God.

Loving like Jesus

Parents function as prophets when they teach children how to love as Jesus loved. When a lawyer asked Jesus which of the commandments of the Old Testament was the greatest, his reply was LOVE! Jesus quoted the Hebrew Scriptures:

"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind' (Dt 6:5). This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (Lv 19:18). On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Mt 22:36-40).

The structure of the Ten Commandments reflects this twofold goal. The first three Commandments illustrate ways to show love for God. The next seven Commandments highlight expressions of love for neighbors. All ten are about relationship. They are the minimum ways, the bottom-line choices that cultivate a loving relationship with God or fellow human beings. Mature love freely exceeds minimum expectations.

Jesus told his disciples that the example of his way of life was the New Law. He said clearly: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another" (Jn

13:34-35). What did his love look like? He prayed, initiated interaction, respected differences, healed, forgave, taught, sacrificed, and even gave his life so that we might live eternally. He included all people. His love transcended race, creed, and culture. There is no limit to the ways that parents can be this prophetic voice for their children. A prophet-parent will have many opportunities to instruct a child to practice love that is patient, kind, and enduring rather than envious, boastful, arrogant or rude, irritable, resentful, and insisting on its own way (1 Cor 13:4-7).

Thinking like Jesus

To be messengers of God, we must know the Word of God. Because Jesus is the clearest reflection of God the Father, we need to know how Jesus thinks, to understand his values, and to connect them to contemporary situations. Prophet-parents teach children love for the Scripture, particularly the Gospels, and they help children to become familiar with its messages. Strategies for accomplishing this goal are limitless. Here are some starter ideas:

- Read stories from a children's Bible.
- Make a collection of favorite Gospel sentences. Display them or post them.
- Play Scripture games. Ready-made games are available in religious-goods stores.
- Encourage the children to act out the Sunday Gospel.
- Teach children how to use "Gospel ABCs" (attitudes, behaviors, consequences) to break open the Sunday Gospel. Choose a character from the Gospel. Name one attitude of the person, the behavior that surfaced, and the consequence of the character's choices. What life-message or connection exists between the Gospel character and personal life?

Prophet-parents are official messengers of the Good News. As John Paul II said: "By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are through the witness of their lives the first heralds of the Gospel for their children" (*Familiaris Consortio*, #39). Embrace your call to be prophet to your child. ▲



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