

How the Christian Life Begins in Us

by St. Theophan the Recluse

The Christian life begins with the presence of zeal and the strength to remain in communion with God, which is made possible through the Mystery of Baptism.

Scripture: Matthew 7:21, Mark 9:49, Luke 12:49, Romans 6:4, Romans 9:6, Romans 12:11, 1 Corinthians 9:24, 2 Corinthians 5:15, Philippians 3:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:19

Topics: "Christian Living", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

St. Theophan the Recluse preaches about the importance of recognizing the beginning of the Christian life and the zeal required to live in communion with God. He emphasizes that true Christian life is marked by active zeal, self-sacrifice, and a hatred of sin. The sermon delves into the significance of Baptism as the initiation of a new life in Christ, highlighting the transformation and rebirth it brings to individuals. St. Theophan also discusses the role of parents and sponsors in nurturing the grace-given life in children through Christian upbringing, emphasizing the influence of faith, piety, and the Church's sacraments in shaping a child's spiritual journey.

Transcript

We must make clear for ourselves when and how the Christian life truly begins in order to see whether we have within ourselves the beginning of this life. If we do not have it, we must learn how to begin it, in so far as this depends upon us.

It is not yet a decisive sign of true life in Christ if one calls himself a Christian and belongs to the Church of Christ. Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 7:21). And they are not all Israel, which are of Israel (Rom. 9:6). One can be counted as a Christian and not be a Christian. This everyone knows.

I. Christian Life Begins with Ardor of Zeal.

There is a moment, and a very noticeable moment, which is sharply marked out in the course of our life, when a person begins to live in a Christian way. This is the moment when there began to be present in him the distinctive characteristics of Christian life. Christian life is zeal and the strength to remain in communion with God by means of an active fulfillment of His holy will, according to our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the help of the grace of God, to the glory of His most holy name.

The essence of Christian life consists in communion with God, in Christ Jesus our Lord -- in a communion with God which in the beginning is usually hidden not only from others, but also from oneself. The testimony of this life that is visible or can be felt within us is the ardor of active zeal to please God alone in a Christian manner, with total self-sacrifice and hatred of everything which is opposed to this. And so, when this ardor of zeal begins, Christian life has its beginning. The person in whom this ardor is constantly active is one who is living in a Christian way. Here we will have to stop and pay more attention to this distinctive characteristic.

I am come to send fire on the earth, the Saviour said, and what will I, if it be already kindled! (Lk. 12:49). He is speaking here of Christian life, and He says this because the visible witness of it is the zeal for the pleasing of God which is in the heart by the Spirit of God. This is like fire because, just as fire devours the material which it takes hold of, so also does zeal for the life in Christ devour the soul which receives it. And just as during the time of a fire the flame takes hold of the whole building, so also the fire of zeal, once it is received, embraces and fills the whole being of a man.

In another place the Lord says, For every one shall be salted with fire (Mk. 9:49). This also is an indication of the fire of the spirit which in its zeal penetrates our whole being. Just as salt, penetrating decomposable matter, preserves it from decomposition, so also the spirit of zeal, penetrating our whole being, banishes the sin which corrupts our nature both in soul and body; it banishes it even from the least of the places where it has settled in us, and thus it saves us from moral vice and corruption.

The Apostle Paul commands, Quench not the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19), to be not slothful in business; fervent in spirit (Rom. 12:11). He commands this to all Christians so that we might remember that the fervor of the spirit, or unslothful striving, is an inseparable attribute of Christian life. In another place he speaks of himself thus: Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14). And to others he says, So run, that ye may obtain (1 Cor. 9:24). This means that in Christian life the result of the fervor of zeal is a certain quickness and liveliness of spirit, with which people undertake God-pleasing works, trampling upon oneself and willingly offering as a sacrifice to God every kind of labor, without sparing oneself.

Having a firm basis in such an understanding, one may easily conclude that a cold fulfillment of the rules of the Church, just like routine in business, which is established by our calculating mind, or like correct and dignified behavior and honesty in conduct, is not a decisive indicator that the true Christian life is present in us. All this is good, but as long as it does not bear in itself the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, it has no value at all before God. Such things would then be like soulless statues. Good clocks also work correctly; but who will say that there is life in them? It is the same thing here. Often thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead in reality (Apoc. 3:1).

These good orders in one's conduct more than anything else can lead one into deception. Its true significance depends upon one's inward disposition, where it is possible that there are significant deviations from real righteousness in one's righteous deeds. Thus, while refraining outwardly from sinful deeds, one may have an attraction for them or a delight from them in one's heart; so also, doing righteous deeds outwardly, one's heart may not be in them. Only true zeal both wishes to do good in all fullness and purity, and persecutes sin in its smallest forms. It seeks the good as its daily bread, and with sin it fights as with a mortal enemy.

An enemy hates an enemy not only personally, but he hates also relatives and friends of this enemy, and even his belongings, his favorite color, and in general anything that might remind one of him. So also, true zeal to please God persecutes sin in its smallest reminders or marks, for it is zealous for perfect purity. If this is not present, how much impurity can hide in the heart!

2. The Fire of Zeal.

What success can one expect when there is no enthusiastic zeal for a Christian pleasing of God? If there is something that involves no labor, one is ready to do it; but as soon as one is required to do a little extra labor, or some kind of self-sacrifice, immediately one refuses, because one is unable to accomplish it oneself. For then there will be nothing to rely on that can move one to good deeds: self-pity will undermine all the foundations. And if any other motive besides the one mentioned becomes involved, it will make the good deed into a bad deed.

The spies under Moses were afraid because they spared themselves. The martyrs willingly went to death because they were kindled by an inward fire. A true zealot does not do only what is according to the law, but also what has been advised and every good suggestion that has been secretly imprinted on the soul; he does not only what has been given, but he is also an acquirer of good things; he is entirely concerned with the one good thing which is solid, true, and eternal.

Saint John Chrysostom says that everywhere we must have fervor and much fire of the soul, prepared to be armed against death itself. For otherwise it is impossible to receive the kingdom.

The work of piety and communion with God is a work of much labor and much pain, especially in the beginning. Where can we find the power to undertake all these labors? With the help of God's grace, we can find it in heartfelt zeal.

A merchant, a soldier, a judge, or a scholar has work which is full of cares and difficulties. How do they sustain themselves in the midst of their labors? By enthusiasm and love for their work. One cannot sustain oneself by anything else on the path of piety. Without this we will be serving God in a state of sluggishness, boredom, and lack of interest. An animal like the sloth also moves, but with difficulty, while for the swift gazelle or the nimble squirrel movement and getting about are a delight. Zealous pleasing of God is the path to God which is full of consolation and gives wings to the spirit. Without it one can ruin everything.

One must do everything for the glory of God in defiance of the sin which dwells in us. Without this we will do everything only out of habit, because it seems "proper," because this is the way it has always been done, or the way others do it. We must do all we can, otherwise we will do some things and neglect others, and this without any contrition or even knowledge of what we have omitted. One must do everything with heedfulness and care, as our chief task; otherwise we will do everything just as it comes.

And so, it is clear that without zeal a Christian is a poor Christian. He is drowsy, feeble, lifeless, neither hot nor cold -- and this kind of life is not life at all. Knowing this, let us strive to manifest ourselves as true zealots of good deeds, so that we might truly be pleasing to God, having neither stain nor spot, nor any of these things.

Therefore, a true witness of Christian life is the fire of active zeal for the pleasing of God. Now the question arises, how is this fire ignited? Who produces it? Such zeal is produced by the action of grace. However, it

does not occur without the participation of our free will. Christian life is not natural life. This should be the way it begins or is first aroused: as in a seed, growth is aroused when moisture and warmth penetrate to the sprout which is hidden within, and through these the all-restoring power of life comes. So also in us, the divine life is aroused when the Spirit of God penetrates into the heart and places there the beginning of life according to the Spirit, and cleanses and gathers into one the darkened and broken features of the image of God. A desire and free seeking are aroused (by an action from without); then grace descends (through the Mysteries) and, uniting with our freedom, produces a mighty zeal. But let no one think that he himself can give birth to such a power of life; one must pray for this and be ready to receive it. The fire of zeal with power -- this is the grace of the Lord. The Spirit of God, descending into the heart, begins to act in it with a zeal that is both devouring and all-active.

To some the thought arises: should there be this action of grace? Can we ourselves really not do good deeds? After all, we have done this or that good deed, and, if we live longer, we will do some more. Perhaps it is a rare person who does not ask this question. Others say that of ourselves we can do nothing good. But here the question is not only of separate good deeds, but of giving rebirth to our whole life, to a new life, to life in its entirety -- to such a life as can lead one to salvation.

As a matter of fact, it is not difficult to do something which is even quite good, as the pagans also did. But let someone intentionally define a course for himself of a continuous doing of good, and define the order of it according to what is indicated in the word of God -- and this not for one month or for a year, but for one's whole life -- and place as a rule to remain in this order unwaveringly; and then, when he remains faithful to this, let him boast of his own power. But without this it is better to close one's mouth. How many cases there have been in the past and in the present of a self-trusting beginning and building of a Christian life! And they have all ended and continue to end in nothing. A man builds a little in his new order of life -- and then throws it away. How can it be otherwise? There is no strength. It is characteristic only of the eternal power of God to support us unchanging in our disposition in the midst of the unceasing waves of temporal changes. Therefore one must be filled abundantly with this power; one must ask for and receive it in order -- and it will raise us up and draw us out of the great agitation of temporal life.

3. In the Face of Temptation.

Let us turn now to experience and see when it is that such thoughts of self-satisfaction come. When a man is in a calm condition, when nothing is disturbing him, nothing is deceiving him or leading him into sin -- then he is ready for every kind of holy and pure life. But as soon as the movement of a passion or a temptation comes, where are all the promises? Does a man not often say to himself as he leads an unrestrained life, "Now I will no longer do this"? But once the passions again become hungry, a new impulse arises, and again he finds himself in sins.

It is all well and good to reflect on the bearing of offenses when everything is going according to our will and not against our self-love. In fact, here it would be rather strange to have a feeling of offense or anger such as others might give themselves over to. But just find yourself in the opposite condition, and then a single glance -- not even a word -- will make you beside yourself! Thus you may well dream, trusting in yourself, about leading a Christian life without any help from above -- as long as your soul is calm. But when the evil that lies in the depths of the heart is roused up like dust by the wind, then in your own experience you will find the condemnation of your own presumption. When thought after thought, desire after desire -- one worse than the other -- begin to disturb the soul, then everyone forgets about himself and involuntarily cries out with the prophet: The waters are come in unto my soul. I am stuck fast in the

mire of the deep (Ps. 68:1-2). O Lord, save now; O Lord, send now prosperity (Ps. 117:25).

Often it happens in this way: someone dreams of remaining in the good, trusting in himself. But a face or a thing comes to the imagination, desire is born, passion is aroused: a man is attracted and falls. After this one need only look at oneself and say: How bad that was! But then an opportunity for distraction comes, and again he is ready to forget himself.

Again, someone has offended you, a battle begins, there are reproaches and judgment. Some unjust but convenient way of looking at it presents itself to your mind, and you seize it. You belittle one, spread the tale to others, confuse someone else -- and all this after you were boasting of the possibility of leading a holy life by yourself, without special help from above. Where was your strength then? The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak (Mt. 26:41). You see good and do evil: When I would do good, evil is present with me (Rom. 7:21). We are in captivity. Redeem us, O Lord!

One of the first tricks of the enemy against us is the idea of trusting in oneself: that is, if not renouncing, then at least not feeling the need for the help of grace. The enemy as it were says: "Do not go to the light where they wish to give you some kind of new powers. You are good just the way you are!" And a man gives himself over to repose. But in the meantime the enemy is throwing a rock (some kind of unpleasantness) at one; others he is leading into a slippery place (the deception of the passions); for yet others he is strewing with flowers a closed noose (deceptively good conditions). Without looking around, a man strives to go further and further, and does not guess that he is falling down lower and lower until finally he goes to the very depths of evil, to the threshold of hell itself. Should one not in such a case cry out to him as to the first Adam: "Man, where are you? Where have you gone?" This very cry is the action of grace, which compels a sinner for the first time to look about himself.

Therefore, if you desire to begin to live in a Christian way, seek grace. The minute grace descends and joins itself to your will is the minute when the Christian life is born in you -- powerful, firm, and greatly fruitful.

Where can one obtain and how can one receive the grace which gives the beginning of life? The acquisition of grace and the sanctification by its means of our nature is performed in the Mysteries. Here we offer of God's action, or present to God our own worthless nature; and He, by His action, transforms it. It was pleasing to God, in order to strike down our proud mind, to hide His power at the very beginning of true life beneath the covering of simple materiality. How this happens we do not understand, but the experience of all Christianity testifies that it does not happen otherwise.

How Christian Life Begins in the Mystery of Baptism.

The Mysteries which primarily refer to the beginning of the Christian life are Baptism and repentance. Therefore, the rules concerning the beginning of life in a true Christian way are set forth first under the heading of baptism, and then under repentance.

Baptism is the first Mystery (Sacrament) in Christianity; it makes a Christian man worthy to be vouchsafed the gifts of grace through other Mysteries also. Without it one cannot enter into the Christian world and become a member of the Church. The Pre-eternal Wisdom has made a house for Himself upon earth, and the door leading into this house is the Mystery of Baptism. By this door not only do people enter into the house of God, but at this door also they are clothed in a garment worthy of it; they receive a new name and a sign which is impressed upon the whole being of the one being baptized, by means of which, later,

both heavenly and earthly beings recognize and distinguish them.

4. A New Creature in Christ through Holy Baptism.

If any one be in Christ, he is a new creature, teaches the Apostle (II Cor. 15:17). This new creature a Christian becomes in baptism. From the font a man comes out not at all the way he went in. As light is to darkness, as life is to death, so is a baptized man opposed to one who is unbaptized. Conceived in iniquities and born in sins, a man before baptism bears in himself all the poison of sin, with all the weight of its consequences. He is in a condition of God's disfavor; he is by nature a child of wrath. He is ruined, disordered in himself with relation to his parts and powers, which are directed primarily towards the multiplication of sin. He is in subjection to the influence of satan, who acts in him with power by reason of the sin which dwells in him. As a result of all this, after death he is unfailingly the child of hell, where he must be tormented together with its prince and his helpers and servants.

Baptism delivers us from all these evils. It takes away the curse by the power of the Cross of Christ and returns the blessing. Those who are baptized are the children of God, as the Lord Himself has given them the right to be: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the baptized person already by virtue of his baptism. He is taken away from the dominion of satan, who now loses authority over him and the power to act arbitrarily in him. By entrance into the Church -- the house of refuge -- satan is denied access to the newly baptized one. He finds himself here as in a safe enclosure.

All these are spiritually outward privileges and gifts. But what happens inwardly? The healing of the affliction and injury of sin. The power of grace penetrates within and restores here the divine order in all its beauty. It treats the disorder in the structure and relationship of the powers and parts, as well as changing the chief orientation from oneself to God -- to pleasing God and increasing one's good deeds.

Therefore, Baptism is a rebirth or a new birth which puts a man in a renewed condition. The Apostle Paul compares all the baptized with the resurrected Saviour, giving us to understand that they also have the same bright nature in their renewal as was possessed by the human nature of the Lord Jesus through His resurrection in glory (Romans 6:4). And that the orientation of activity in a baptized person is changed may be seen in the words of the same Apostle, who says in another place that they already should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again (II Cor. 5:15). For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God (Rom. 6:10). We are buried with Him by baptism into death (Rom. 6:4); and: Our old man is crucified with Him, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Rom. 6:6). And so, the whole activity of a man by the power of Baptism is turned away from oneself and sin, and towards God and righteousness.

Remarkable are the words of the Apostle: That henceforth we should not serve sin, as well as his other words: Sin shall not have dominion over you (Rom. 6:14). This gives us to understand that the power which, in our disordered, fallen nature, draws us towards sin, is not entirely exterminated in Baptism, but is only placed in a condition in which it has no power over us, no dominion over us, and we do not serve it. But it is still in us, it lives and acts, only not as a lord. The primacy from now on belongs to the grace of God and to the soul that consciously gives itself over to it.

Saint Diadochos, explaining the power of Baptism, says that before Baptism sin dwells in the heart and grace acts from outside, but after Baptism, grace settles in the heart and sin attracts us from outside. It is banished from the heart as an enemy from a fortress, and it settles outside, in the parts of the body, from

where it acts by means of attacks in a fragmented state. This is why there is a constant tempter, a seducer, but no longer a master: he disturbs and alarms, but does not command. And so, the new life is born in Baptism!

Here our attention will be directed to how the Christian life begins through Baptism in those who were baptized as children -- just how this occurs. For here the beginning of Christian life is put in order in a special way which comes from the relationship of grace to freedom.

You already know that grace descends upon free desire and searching, and that only by the mutual cooperation of these two is there begun the new grace-given life which is in accordance both with grace and with the nature of the free person. The Lord gives grace freely. But He asks that a man seek it and receive it with desire, dedicating himself entirely to God. The fulfillment of this condition in repentance and in the Baptism of adults is clear; but how is it fulfilled in the Baptism of infants? An infant does not have the use of reason and freedom; consequently, he cannot fulfill the condition for the beginning of Christian life on his own part -- that is, the desire to dedicate himself to God. Nevertheless, this condition must absolutely be fulfilled. The particular way in which (Christian) life begins in the case of the Baptism of infants depends on the means of fulfilling this condition.

5. Baptism for Infants.

Grace descends upon the soul of an infant and produces in it exactly the same result as if its freedom had participated in this, but only on the condition that in the future the infant, who was not then aware of himself and did not act personally, when he comes to awareness, will himself willingly dedicate himself to God, will receive out of his own desire the grace which has shown its activity in him, will be glad that it exists, will give thanks that this was done for him, and will confess that if, at the moment of his Baptism, understanding and freedom had been given to him, he would not have acted otherwise than he did act and would not have wished otherwise. For the sake of this future free dedication of himself to God and the coming together of freedom and grace, divine grace gives everything to the infant and even without him it produces everything in him that is natural for it to produce, with the promise that the essential desire and dedicating of himself to God will be performed without fail. This is the promise which the sponsors give when they declare to God before the Church that this infant, when he comes to awareness, will show precisely that use of freedom which is demanded for grace, taking upon themselves the obligation in very fact to bring to this state the infant for whom they are sponsors.

And thus through Baptism the seed of life in Christ is placed in the infant and exists in him; but it is as though it did not exist: it acts as an educating power in him. Spiritual life, conceived by the grace of Baptism in the infant, becomes the property of the man and is manifest in its complete form in accordance not only with grace, but also with the character of the rational creature, from the time when he, coming to awareness, by his own free will dedicates himself to God and appropriates to himself the power of grace in himself by receiving it with desire, joy, and gratitude. Up to this time, also, the true Christian life is active in him, but it is as if without his knowledge; it acts in him, but it is as if it is not yet his own. But from the minute of his awareness and choosing, it becomes his own, not by grace only but also by freedom.

Because of this more or less prolonged interval between Baptism and the dedication of oneself to God, the beginning of Christian moral life through the grace of Baptism in infants is broadened, so to speak, into an indefinite period of time, during which the infant matures and is formed into a Christian in the Holy Church in the midst of other Christians, as previously he had been formed bodily in the womb of his mother.

Stop, O reader, a little longer on this idea. It will be very necessary to us to define how parents, sponsors, and educators should behave with regard to the baptized infant who is entrusted to them by the Holy Church and the Lord.

It goes without saying that after the Baptism of the infant a very important matter stands before the parents and the sponsors: how to lead the baptized one so that when he comes to awareness he might recognize the grace-given powers within himself and accept them with a joyful desire, together with the obligations and way of life which they demand. This places one face to face with the question of Christian upbringing, or the upbringing which is in accordance with the demands of the grace of Baptism, and has as its aim the preservation of this grace.

So that it might be clear how one must act with regard to a baptized infant with these aims in mind, one must recall the above-mentioned idea that grace overshadows the heart and dwells in it when there is in the heart a turning away from sin and a turning towards God. If this attitude is manifested in act, there are further given all the other gifts of grace and all the characteristics of one who is dwelling in grace: the favor of God, the co-inheritance with Christ, the dwelling outside the sphere of Satan, out of the danger of being condemned to hell. But as soon as this attitude of mind and heart decreases or is lost, immediately sin again begins to possess the heart, and through sin the bonds of Satan are laid upon one and the favor of God and the co-inheritance with Christ are taken away. Grace in an infant weakens and stifles sin, but sin can again come to life and grow if it is given food and freedom.

And so, the whole attention of those who have the obligation of preserving whole the Christian child who has been received from the font should be directed to not allowing sin in any way to take possession of him again, to crushing sin and making it powerless by every means, and to arousing and strengthening the child's orientation towards God. One must act in such a way that this attitude in the growing Christian will grow by itself, even though under the guidance of someone else, and that he will more and more become accustomed to prevail over sin and conquer it for the sake of pleasing God, and will grow accustomed to exercise his powers of spirit and body in such a way that they will work not for sin but for the service of God.

That this is possible is evident from the fact that the one who has been born and baptized is entirely a seed of the future, or a field filled with seeds. The new attitude poured into him by the grace of Baptism is not only something thought or imagined, but is something actual, that is, it is also a seed of life. If in general every seed is developed according to its kind, then the seed of the grace-given life in the baptized one also can be developed. If there is placed in him the seed of a turning towards God which overcomes sin, then it likewise can be developed and nurtured as other seeds are. But one must use effective means for this, or, in other words, define a consistent means of acting upon the baptized infant.

6. Christian Upbringing.

The aim towards which everything in this process should be directed is this: that this new man, when he comes to awareness, might recognize himself not only as a rational and free man, but at the same time as a person who has entered into an obligation with the Lord, with Whom his eternal lot is joined inseparably; and that he might not only acknowledge himself to be such, but might also find himself capable of acting according to this obligation and might see that his pre-eminent attraction is to this.

The question arises, how can this be attained? How should one act with regard to a baptized child so that when he comes to age he might not desire anything else than to be a true Christian? In other words, how

does one raise him in a Christian way?

To answer this we will not undertake to examine everything in detail. We will limit ourselves to a general survey of the whole topic of Christian upbringing, having in mind to show how, in every circumstance, to support and strengthen the good side in children, and how to make powerless and crush what is bad.

Here, first of all, our attention should be directed to the infant in the cradle, before any kind of capabilities have awakened in him. The child is alive; consequently one can influence his life. Here we should think of the influence of the Holy Mysteries, and with them the whole churchly way of life, and at the same time the faith and piety of the parents. All this together constitutes a saving atmosphere around the infant. By all of this the life of grace which has been conceived in the infant is instilled mystically.

The frequent communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ (one should add, as frequently as possible) joins His new member to the Lord in the most lively and active way through His most pure Body and Blood. It sanctifies him, gives him peace within himself, and makes him inaccessible to the dark powers. People who follow this advice notice that on the day when a child is given Communion, he is immersed in a deep calm without the powerful movements of all his natural needs, even those which are most powerfully felt in children. Sometimes the child is filled with joy and a playfulness of spirit in which he is ready to embrace everyone as his own. Often Holy Communion is accompanied also by miracles. Saint Andrew of Crete in his childhood did not speak for a long time, but when his grieved parents turned to prayer and the reception of grace, during the time of Communion the Lord by His grace loosed the bonds of his tongue, which afterwards gave the Church to drink of torrents of eloquence and wisdom. One doctor, from his own observation, testifies that for the most part when there are illnesses in children, the children should be taken to Holy Communion, and very rarely does he have need to use later any kind of medical help.

A great influence is exercised on the child by frequently taking him to church, by having him kiss the Holy Cross, the Gospel, the icons, and by covering him with the veils. Likewise, at home frequently placing him under the icons, frequently signing him with the sign of the Cross, sprinkling him with holy water, the burning of incense, making the sign of the Cross over his cradle, his food, and everything connected with him, the blessing of a priest, the bringing into the house of icons from church -- the service of molebens -- and in general everything from the church, in a wondrous way warms and nourishes the life of grace in the child and is always the most safe and impenetrable protection against the attacks of the invisible dark powers who everywhere are ready to penetrate into the developing soul so as to infect it by their activity.

Behind this visible protection there is an invisible one: the guardian angel placed by the Lord to protect the child from the very minute of his Baptism. He watches over him and by his presence invisibly influences him, and when necessary inspires the parents to know what they should for a child who is in danger.

But all these strong protections and these powerful and active inspirations can be dissolved and made fruitless by unbelief, carelessness, impiety, and the bad life of the parents. This is because the means mentioned here are either not used, or are used not in the proper way; here the inward influence of the parents on the child is especially important. It is true that the Lord is merciful to the innocent; but there is a tie which we cannot understand between the souls of the parents and the soul of the child, and we cannot define the extent of the influence of the former on the latter. At the same time, when the parents exert a bad influence, to some extent the mercy and condescension of God are still given to the child. But it sometimes happens that this divine aid ceases, and then the causes which have been prepared bring forth their fruit. Therefore, the spirit of faith and piety of the parents should be regarded as the most

powerful means for the preservation, upbringing and strengthening of the life of grace in children.

7. The Influence of the Parents upon the Child.

The spirit of the infant has, as it were, no movement as yet in the first days, months, and even years. It is impossible to communicate anything for him to assimilate by the usual means of communication, but one may influence him in another way.

There is a certain special way of communication between souls through the heart. One spirit influences another by means of the feelings. The ease of exerting such an influence upon the soul of an infant is in direct proportion to the fullness and depth of the parents' feeling for the child. The father and mother as it were disappear into the child and put their whole soul into his welfare. And if their spirit is penetrated with piety, it cannot be that in some way this will not influence the soul of the child.

The best outward conductor in this respect is the eyes. Whereas in the other senses the soul remains hidden, the eyes open their gaze to others. This is the meeting place of one soul with another. Let the openings be used for the passage of holy feelings from the souls of the mother and father to the soul of the child. Their souls cannot help but anoint the soul of the child with this holy oil.

It is necessary that in the gaze of the parents there should be not only love, which is so natural, but also the faith that in their arms there is something more than a simple child. The parents must have the hope that He Who gave them this treasure under their watch as a vessel of grace might furnish them also with sufficient means to preserve him. And finally, there should be ceaseless prayer performed in the spirit, aroused by hope according to faith.

When in this way the parents protect the cradle of their child with this spirit of sincere piety, and when at the same time, on the one hand the guardian angel, and on the other the Holy Mysteries and all of Church life, act upon him from without and from within -- by this there is formed around the newly begun life a spiritual atmosphere akin to it which will pour into it its own character, just as blood, the principle of animal life, derives many of its characteristics from the surrounding atmosphere. It is said that a newly made vessel will preserve for a long time, perhaps permanently, the odor of whatever was poured into it at that time. This can also be said about the atmosphere surrounding children. It penetrates in a grace-giving and saving way into the forms of life just being established in the child and places its seal upon him. Here also there is a protection that cannot be penetrated by the influence of evil spirits.

Having begun in such a way from the cradle, one must continue it later, and during the whole time of upbringing: in childhood, in adolescence, and in young manhood. The Church, its life, and the Holy Mysteries are like a tabernacle (tent) for the children, and they should be under it without leaving it. Examples indicate how saving and fruitful this is (such as the life of the Prophet Samuel; the life of Saint Theodore Sykeote (April 22), and others). These alone can even replace all the means of upbringing, as indeed has been done in many cases successfully. The ancient method of upbringing consisted primarily in precisely this.

When a child's powers begin to awaken, one after another, parents and those who are raising children should double their attention. For when, under the influence of the means which have been indicated, the longing for God will grow and increase in them and draw the powers of the child after it, at this same time the sin which dwells in them also does not sleep, but strives to take possession of these same powers. The inevitable consequence of this is inward warfare. Since children are incapable of conducting it

themselves, their place is understandably taken by the parents. But since this warfare must be conducted through the powers of the children, the parents must strictly watch over the first beginnings of their awakening, so that from the first minute they may give these powers a direction in harmony with the chief aim towards which they must be directed.

Thus begins the warfare of the parents with the sin that dwells in the child. Although this sin is deprived of points of support, still it acts, and so as to find a good resting place for itself it tries to take possession of the powers of the body and soul. One must not allow it to do this, but must, as it were, uproot these powers from the hand of sin and give them over to God.

But so that this might be done with a good foundation and with a rational knowledge of the reliability of the means that have been chosen, one must make clear for oneself what it is that sin desires, what nourishes it, and precisely how it takes possession of us. The fundamental things which arouse and draw one towards sin are: arbitrariness of mind (or curiosity) in the mental faculty, self-will in the faculty of will, and pleasures in the faculty of feeling.

Therefore one must so conduct and direct the developing powers of the soul and body so as not to give them over into captivity to enjoyments of the flesh, to curiosity, to self-will and self-centered pleasures -- for this would be a sinful captivity -- but on the contrary, one must train the child how to separate himself from them and master them, and thus as much as possible to render them powerless and harmless. This is the chief thing in the beginning. The whole of the upbringing can later be brought into harmony with this beginning. Let us look again, with this aim, at the chief activities of the body, soul, and spirit.

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