



Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents,
especially those
with small children.

...parents (are called) to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children.

~Familiaris Consortio #36



Charity makes it possible for us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mt 22:37). And charity allows us to love

everyone else, both our friends as well as enemies, just as God does. Clearly, charity is our earthly chance to live in goodness and love.

But what exactly is love? In order to answer this age-old question, one first has to understand that love can be divine (from God) or natural (part of man) or a combination of the two. Divine love is charity. It is the highest and greatest form of love. It demonstrates itself as a total commitment to self giving. Divine love is permanent, unconditional and eternally faithful to what is right, good, true and beautiful.

At baptism, charity is infused into the human soul making it possible for the person to live in relationship with the Holy Trinity and love God. And, because charity is part of the soul, the person has the capability of loving others like God does.

Let's take a look at natural love. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, love is the most basic human passion (CCC 1765). It causes us to desire goodness and move toward that goodness. When love moves us toward something (or someone) that is truly good it reflects divine love. And, when love moves us toward something (or someone) that is not good, it leads us away from God.

It takes a long time to overcome one's selfish nature in order to put concern for other people before one's own desires. Indeed, charity requires a lifetime of conversion for all of us, a process that children are just beginning. They need to be guided into the world

of selflessness. This guidance is much more effective when it comes from a conscious effort on the part of the parents, and when it is preceded by and enforced by the parents' own modeling of charity.

Directing human love toward God's love is no easy task because our culture has a weak and insufficient concept of love. Our society tends to think that love is little more than a feeling. The most obvious example is how the term "making love" has come to mean simply sharing sexual enjoyment. Reducing love to just a feeling robs us of the greatest joy and human fulfillment that God has planned for us.

Human love must be a mixture of body and spirit because human beings are an integration of body and spirit. Love does include feelings, but it also includes choice. Love does involve seeking what is pleasurable, but it also involves sacrificing what is pleasurable for the sake of others. When it comes to thinking about human love part of our confusion stems from the fact that the English language has only one word to describe all of the many facets of human love. Think about it – we use the same term of "love" for things like pizza, chocolate and steak as we do for loving our friends, children and spouses. It is clear to most parents that there is a world of difference between the meaning of love for things and love for human persons. How can we orient our human love towards divine charity if we do not understand the fullness of human love?

Taking the time to learn about the dimensions of love will clear any misunderstanding one might have about authentic human love. And, examining the facts of human love will likely result in a greater appreciation for God's divine love for us.

From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

Four key elements of love are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

_____ is the most basic and physical kind of love. It is closely tied to emotions.

_____ is universal love for others and includes respect for human dignity through the demonstration of manners and civility.

_____ is brotherly love or selfless love. It is a choice.

_____ is charity. It includes sacrificing for the good of another.

To set a firm foundation for your children, teach the following:

Love comes from _____.

Left to our own volition, we tend to be _____.

God's grace can _____ and _____ our love.

Continue the Discussion

Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.

1. Why is it important to teach children that love is more than a feeling?
2. What manners do you require in your home? How do manners reflect universal love for all people?
3. Healthy family life requires sacrifice. What examples can you give of loving your family selflessly?
4. How can you teach your children to love each other when it doesn't "feel" good?
5. How can God's grace help you to be a more loving parent in your family?

Make a Plan

It is very important for a parent to know how to make each child feel unconditionally loved. This is accomplished through the identification of each child's preference for giving and receiving love. There are five common patterns of love that are shared by most individuals. These five expressions of love include spending time with you, giving gifts, hearing words of affirmation, experiencing physical connection and doing acts of service.

Learning a child's preference for love takes time. Over the next three weeks, we encourage you to complete the worksheet that follows. By the end of this time, it is likely you will know how to make each of your children feel loved.

What is My Child's Favorite Expression of Love?

Week One: Observe your children this week, paying attention to how they show love to you. Each time you observe an action listed below, place a checkmark in the column that corresponds with the action. (For example: if the child brings you a flower, place a checkmark next to give gifts.) Add general observations at the bottom of the chart.

Children's Names				
Spends time with you.				
Gives you gifts.				
Gives you compliments.				
Physically shows love.				
Does acts of service.				

General observations from the week:

Week Two: During this week, show love to each child in the way he or she showed love most often to you. For example: if your child hugged you often in week one, then give them plenty of hugs this week. At the end of the week, record any changes that you noticed in your relationship with each child during the week.

Child's Name	Record any changes in your relationship with each child.
	Preferred Pattern: _____
	Preferred Pattern: _____
	Preferred Pattern: _____
	Preferred Pattern: _____

Week Three: After loving each child in his or her unique way for a few days, ask each child how much he or she is loved by you. If the child tells you they are feeling very loved by you, then it is likely that you have correctly identified his or her unique expression of love. If the child tells you they are not feeling loved, ask them what you can do to make them feel more loved. Match their answer to the closest of the five common expressions of love. After a week, ask the child again if he or she is feeling loved.

*Remember that this plan is not meant to manipulate someone into feeling loved.
Rather, it is meant to identify and strengthen one's expression and acceptance of love.*

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