

Bringing Up Children – The Salesian Way

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In today's world it is not easy to bring up a child well groomed in moral and Christian virtues. It is challenging both for parents and children to be a good Catholic parent and a good Catholic son or daughter. On one hand, fierce competitions pull us down while on the other hand the media and changing value systems of our society prove detrimental to our growth as good Christians. In this background, how do we bring up children?

It is even more challenging to educate and guide our teenagers. The struggles within good Catholic families are only multiplying day by day. There is no easy way out, but we can learn a few things from the Salesian spirituality which has its focus on the young. The apostle of youth, St. John Bosco had from his own lived experience enumerated a few practical ways of helping the young to come close to God. He learnt his educative system from his mother, Mamma Margaret who taught him to be kind but firm.

St. John Bosco's educative system has been practiced for 150 years in all Salesian institutions. So far, it has been quite effective and till today the Salesians use this simple and practical system based on Reason, Religion and Loving Kindness. A few traits of this educative system may help both parents and children.

The Word in the Ear

A parent's occasional word in the ear is almost an echo of God's word. St. John Bosco often gave advice to his boys that was always timely. In the playground, study hall, at recreation, St. John Bosco would say to one boy or another, 'Shall I tell you something'. And placing his hand over the boy's head and stooping to the boy's ear would whisper a word or two. Don Bosco's 'word in the ear' took only a moment but like a fiery dart it pierced the heart. Sometimes, it was an advice, an observation, an encouragement or even a reprimand. St. John Bosco seldom scolded harshly, much less publicly. Nearly all his boys trusted him and relied fully on him. The 'word in the ear' can be effective in trustful relationships between parent and child.

Availability

Today in families, there is a greater need for availability, both on part of parents and children. The hectic metro life denies this basic necessity of being available to each other. In spite of heavy schedules and overburdening work load, St. John Bosco also found time to receive with

fatherly affection those who sought a private talk with him. Often due to his heavy work load he hardly slept for four hours. His boys went to him willingly and open-heartedly because he never showed surprise or impatience or passed hasty judgments but was calm and composed. There is a need to squeeze out a little time at least on weekends so that family members can listen, interact and be available to each other. Thus good family spirit is cultivated.

Assistance

St. John Bosco believed in assistance which is 24x7. Even today every Salesian believes in being present and animating the youngsters in whatever they do. St. John Bosco believed that it would be naïve to think that youngsters are immune to human weaknesses. There is a great need for an animating presence of a parent accompanying the child in his or her study, work, recreation etc. The parents do not have to study or play but they know what is going around and are able to guide, help and assist their child. This assistance is like that of a guardian angel.

Frequenting the Sacraments

St. John Bosco endlessly gave importance to three things – the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Devotion to Our Lady. Again and again he insisted on these things from his boys. He also cultivated in the boys a love for the Church and the Holy Father. There is no doubt that parents are the first Catechists who lay the foundations of faith. Depending on that foundation their son or daughter will build their faith through Church Catechesis at later stages of their life.

(Article written by Cl. Leon Cruz Ratinam SDB, for the The Examiner, 9 January 2010, as the Salesians of Don Bosco celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the founding of their congregation and also the feast of St. John Bosco)

Previously published articles by Leon C. Ratinam are:

1. The Examiner, "*The Apostle of Youth*", 31st January 2009 (Vol 160, No 05), Page 8.
2. The Examiner, "*The Impossible made Possible*", 21st March, 2009 (Vol 160, No 12), Page 16.
3. The Examiner, "*Inventory of a Trekker*", 4th April, 2009 (Vol 160, No 14), Page 18.
4. The Examiner, "*Take Up and Read!*", 8th August, 2009 (Vol 160, No 32), Page 18.
5. The Examiner, "*Mary – Model Catechist*", 5th September, 2009 (Vol 160, No 36), Page 7.

See: <http://www.leonsdb.blogspot.com/>