

# Teaching Love in a Hostile Culture

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**Q: I keep trying to do all that I can to help our children know of God's love for them. I want them to be truly "Catholic"; not merely in name, but as their deepest identity. In the face of a seemingly hostile culture, what can I do?**

A: Thank you so much for asking about this. While there are no fool-proof "strategies" for passing along the Faith to your children, there are some very powerful things that you can choose to do that will make a difference in your children's lives (and their eternities). In fact, I will name four here.

**First, teach your children how to pray.** I have a friend who lamented the fact that, as Catholics, we "have been taught how to repeat, not how to pray". I don't know if you are aware of this, but a recent study indicated that upwards of 47% of Catholics in America state that they are not absolutely certain that a personal relationship with God is ever possible.

Reflect on that for a moment. The entire basis of Catholicism is centered around the fact that God broke into this world in Jesus Christ, and that He continues to animate and engage

us through the Holy Spirit on a moment-by-moment basis. As Catholics, we have unprecedented access to the Father. And it has even been revealed that God is not some distant “power”, but that He has become our Father when we were made His children through Baptism! And yet, almost half of the Catholics in this country are not aware that we can have a personal relationship with Him. Teach your children how to pray. Teach them that God is their Father and show them how you talk to Him.

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**Second, speaking of fathers, there is something that is often entirely missed in our culture: the power of a father’s blessing.** Dads, bless your children. Did you know that, in God’s original plan for the people of Israel, every father of a family was the priest of the family? At the golden calf incident, this was obscured and in many ways lost. But in the new covenant, the father of the family is the priest of the “domestic church” (aka “the family”).

This means that there is power in a father’s blessing. This was brought home to me in a real way when I was having a conversation with a priest who is an exorcist in another diocese.

He described to me the case of a young woman who had been cursed by her father. While the exorcism was freeing her through the power of Jesus Christ, there was a bunch of “push back” because her father continued to curse his own daughter. He noted how powerful that curse was because it was her father who was doing it. After staring at him in shock that a dad would do that, a thought suddenly came to my mind. I said, “If that is the case with a father’s curse, what does that mean if a dad blesses his child in the Name of Jesus?” He looked at me and said, “You can’t imagine the power of grace that a dad’s blessing has over his children.” Fathers, pronounce the blessing of God over your children. It can be a simple sign of the Cross traced on their foreheads...or if they are far away from you, raising your hand in their direction and praying, “Bless you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” It might not be “Sacramental” in the way a priest’s blessing is, but it is part of the “primordial sacrament”

**Third, there is very little that can compete with an authentic witness to Jesus Christ and His Church.** When moms and dads give witness that they truly strive to live what we profess on Sundays, there is power. This does not mean being overly strict or demanding with one’s own children. In fact, St. John Paul testifies to the authentic witness of his own father. He wrote, “The mere fact of seeing [my father] on his knees had a decisive influence on my early years. He was so hard on himself that he had no need to be hard on his son; his example alone was sufficient to inculcate discipline and a sense of duty. He was an exceptional person.” He went on to state, “...his example was in a way my first seminary”.

For another incredible example, Saint John of the Cross cited his mother and her willingness to raise he and his brother in the Faith despite the great sacrifices she had to make in order to be Catholic. It was her example that inspired he and his brother. Many mothers have had that sanctifying effect on their children.

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**Fourth, we must not underestimate the power of prayer.** As many people know, Saint Augustine was absolutely opposed to the Catholic Faith of his mom in his early years. An incredibly bright young person, he seemed to delight in throwing his mom's faith in her face (and seemed to despise her desire to share Christ with him!). But she remained steadfast in prayer. But here is something we often overlook: she did not merely "throw up a few prayers". She begged God on behalf of both of her sons. She prayed. She fasted. She was so vigilant in her prayers that Saint Ambrose once famously told her, "As you live, it is impossible that the child of such tears should perish." A father's blessing is powerful. A mother's prayers have power as well. If you desire this conversion, be gentle with your child, but be strict with yourself. This might mean fasting for them. The spirit of this age is alive and well. It can often only be driven out of your children with prayer and fasting. Fast for your children. This might be a fasting from food. But it can be any mortification. Offer up your grief and your sufferings for your children. You can even ask God to accept whatever suffering you experience as you age and approach death for the salvation and sanctification of your children.

You may not see the fruit of these four powerful tools in your life. But you are a person who knows that there is more to this life. Do not lose heart. Never lose heart. God desires the salvation of your children even more than you do. Trust in Him.