

Christian Family – Part 4 Family and Faith

**Fr. Jacob Nadian
St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church**

The words of St. Paul to his disciple Timothy were very strange, when he told him:

✠ "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also" (**2 Timothy 1:5**)

Is faith inherited? The very genuine faith in the heart of Timothy the son, was the very same faith as that living in the heart of his mother Eunice and in his grandmother Lois. The faith that a family passes on to its children is a sacred inheritance.

Faith cannot be transferred from one generation to another mechanically, but the effect of transmitting it and of Christian training in the home cannot be denied.

This is the most important function of the Christian family: transmitting faith. We could have our children a fortune - that is okay, but the danger lies in our failure to pass on to our children the faith we inherited from our holy fathers.

✠ "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (**Matthew 16:26**)

That is why St. Paul confirmed the role of parents in the salvation of their children:

✠ "Nevertheless she (the mother) will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness, with, self-control" (**1 Timothy 2:15**)

So the outworking of the mother's salvation is conditioned by the way she brings up her children. That is why St. Monica cried bitterly when her son Augustine went off the rails, feeling her great responsibility towards God for her son. Her concern deserved St. Ambrose's encouragement:

✠ "Trust my daughter... the son of all of those tears shall never be perished!"

Now, what are the channels through which our children will be given faith?

1. A Life of Adoration

Standing to pray in front of an icon, depicting the Lord Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary holding the Lord, makes an impossible to remove impression on the child's mind. For our first experience of such a vigil is associated with baptism - now new birth by the church.

✠ "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22: 6)

2. Christian Education

St. Paul said:

✠ "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (**Romans 10:17**)

Here we should always remember the role of the parents and grandparents when they tell their grandchildren stories from the Bible, starting from the beginning of the creation, the

flood, Babel, Moses and going on to the birth of the Lord Jesus in the flesh, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven and the establishment of His church.

It is also worth mentioning that many parents have experienced the effectiveness of the Bible when they started to tell their children some of its stories. It is a glorious blessing to every age-group, as the Bible is the best school and the best law.

Also, parents should give more attention to the regular attendance of their children at Sunday school, at services and partaking of Communion. All these build up a store of faith and education for succeeding generations.

3. The Family Peace

✠ "There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked" (**Isaiah 48:22**)

This is true: when the husband and wife who are away from the Lord and each of them is either self-centered or even worse sin-centered, they never live in peace. On the other hand, the husband and wife who are close to the Lord, who believe that He is with them in all their problems and guides their family wisely, they live in true peace.

That peace - the fruit of their faith - is noticed and appreciated by their children. It is a vital channel through which the family can know the Spirit of the Lord Christ, His mind and His forbearance.

4. Dealing With Difficulties

There is no doubt that the Christian family which has real faith can easily pass it on to its children, through the way it handles various situations. As it is a loving family that bears genuine love for everybody, children notice and absorb that spirit. It is a wise family, because it handles its problems quietly and avoids getting itself into fights or quarrels that are not from the Spirit of God. It is a serving family, since it serves everybody happily, in the joy of giving. It also follows all the principles of the Lord Jesus Christ of Whom Isaiah prophesied,

✠ "He will not quarrel nor cry out, nor will any one hear His voice in the streets"
(**Matthew 12:19**)

Such a family models itself on the commandments, love and mind of the Lord. What ruins the children more than to see their parents fall out with others, whether family members or not? How great is the responsibility the parents must bear for bringing up their children in the lord!

5. The Family Library

It is perfectly okay for the family library to include daily newspapers, magazines and general publications suitable for children and young people, but it is also important that parents organize a small library suitable for their children according to their ages. You can find many constructive Christian publications, whether stories from the Bible, or lives of saints, or explanations of the liturgical services, or other suitable books for young people.

Reading edifies the wandering mind, said one of the saints. That is why we have to concentrate on the role of books in the children's lives, especially since TV and other audio-visual aids have weakened people's ability to read, as most people just sit passively in front

of the box, accepting whatever comes on. Some programs are good, but most of the others would have negative results.

The family library should also include the Bible and books to help young people interpret it. These books can re-activate young people's minds and recharge them with spiritual ideas, giving no chance for evil ones to get a grip.

6. Educational Trips

Such as visiting monasteries, or exchanging visits with churches in or outside your area. All this is education that children and young people can absorb as they meet with monks who have given up the world, with priests who can give insight into the mind of the Lord Christ and the works of the Spirit, or with brothers and sisters that are following the same path as they are - the path of eternal life.

This is how a young person can grow spiritually in a relationship with God, psychologically at ease in a social group, intellectually increasing in knowledge and physically building up the body through training and sports.

Those are some of the channels that the family can use to pass on the faith to its children - to increase the number of those who are to dwell in the eternal kingdom and are free from condemnation on the last day.