Columns
Spirituality



Parents take their children to catechism class. (Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan)



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Nowadays, we are living in an era of scientific and technical inventions that enhance the lives of human beings. As a result, human beings are now tempted by "isms" such as individualism — meaning that they just live for themselves without caring about others, and enjoy a happy life without working hard any more. Their idealism is that the good things are kept for themselves, and the bad things and disadvantages are meant for others.

They also follow the ideas of relativism, considering everything on the earth as relative (sadly enough, even God and the church) and so, material things are presently considered the most important. That is why Vietnamese — particularly Vietnamese youth — find it easy to neglect spirituality, so necessary for the spiritual life of Christians.

Perhaps understanding the implications of such an era, some parishes in Vietnam — especially parish priests, chaplains, sisters and catechists — are really very concerned and interested in educating Vietnamese children of the parish in the faith and Scripture. As St. Jerome confirmed, "ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

Traditionally in Vietnam, most parishes have a basic catechism class and a mature catechist class on weekends for children from 5 to 18. Normally, after the opening Mass of the catechism classes' academic year for the children, the vicar organizes a parents' meeting: to create a close relationship between parents and catechists as they accompany and educate children in the faith life; to help parents learn how to care for their children's spiritual life; and to encourage them regularly to remind their children to attend the catechism classes.

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The role of the catechists is really quite important in educating children in faith and humanity in the catechism class, but parents "must be the first and foremost educators of children." The catechists only assist parents in accompanying their children in this educational mission.

If grown-up children have a healthy and strong body, it is because parents know how to take care of them, making sure they drink their milk and eat food with adequate nutrients. Similarly, to nurture the spiritual life and a steadfast faith for children,

parents also need to remind them to go to Mass regularly every day, and to attend catechism classes weekly. Besides that, parents and their children should study and review catechism together at home. Thanks to helping their children study catechism, parents also have the opportunity to learn more about doctrine, because not all parents fully understand it.



A catechist teaches children about Catholic doctrine. (Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan)

Additionally, parents need to organize family prayers at home in the evenings to teach their children how to pray. When they face joys or successes in life, they are grateful to God; when faced with sadness or failure, they fully trust and offer everything to God, because "without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Parents must also be moral models for their children, be moral persons themselves, and also bring their children close to God.

When parents are reminded by catechists that their children are not attending Mass or seminary, or when the children engage in "rebellious" behavior in class or at

church, the parents should cooperate with the catechists. With them, they should seek ways to guide and encourage their children, especially to help them understand the meaning of the spiritual life — that is really necessary in the Christian life. They should also help children to love everyone around and comprehend the importance of attending Mass and studying catechism, so they will be aware of the grace that God bestows daily. More importantly, parents should remind children that, when God is with their family, they will have everything: Children will be good persons, study well, and parents will have jobs and money to send their children to school.



Parents attend a parish-organized meeting at the church. (Mary Nguyen Thi Phuong Lan)

Thus, educating their children in the faith is an important responsibility of parents. This is part of a comprehensive human education, which makes children not only just useful persons in church, society and country, but also children of God and heavenly citizens in eternal life.

I really hope that Vietnamese Catholic parents today — even if their lives are busy and that they are working hard to make a living — will take the time to care for their children's faith life, so they will grow in the love of God and realize they are under

the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. That will help them avoid the passions and temptations of the present time, and especially help them avoid social evils. Later, when they are grown up, they will love everyone as Jesus himself did — "just as I have loved you, and you also must love one another" (John 13:34).