

Let Them Decide When They Get Older?

by Sebastian R Fama

I have heard parents say: "I am not going to force my kids to go to church. When they grow up, they can decide for themselves." Is this showing respect for one's children as some would say? Or, is it a case of a parent shirking his or her responsibilities? I have never heard a parent say: "I am not going to force my kids to look both ways before crossing the street. When they grow up, they can decide for themselves." And that is because everyone recognizes that such a course is irresponsible and can result in tragedy.

One of a parent's primary responsibilities is to teach a child how to take care of themselves. Survival is certainly a part of that. But why would we limit that to physical safety? If God and eternity are realities, and they are, then we would be duty bound to communicate that reality from the first moment of a child's existence. Failing to do so can also result in a fatality, only this time an eternal one.

All of us have an inbuilt longing for God. Left on their own, children may respond to this need by gravitating to a false religion. Worse than that, if they think there is no God, they may become comfortable leading a life of evil. After all, if there is no just God to account to, why not take advantage of others? Another problem stems from the fact that a child's core beliefs are usually set by age seven. That is why Scripture tells us to: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Of course, all of this must be done properly. Children should be taught about God from the cradle and in a loving manner. As the catechism tells us: "Parents are the primary teachers" (CCC 2223). If you are going to teach the faith you must know it. Children ask questions and they deserve answers. Telling them they just need to have faith is not good enough. Our faith is not a faith without reason. Christianity is a faith of history and evidence. Those who live it produce good fruit.

Children are far more likely to embrace the faith if they understand why it is relevant. Be the person you want your kids to be. Practice what you preach. Hypocrisy will not do. If the faith is not important to you, why should it be important to them? When you live and present the faith in a genuine manner, it increases the chances that your children will choose to go to Church when they get older.