

A Home Altar

Every home should have an altar by the time the child is three years old. A grocery box, low enough for little ones, may be used. Let the little one take care of it, with the help of the mother, or of an older child. Have on it a little statue of the Blessed Mother and two vases or glasses for flowers.

The value of such a little shrine is nowadays often overlooked. In some homes a niche can be found and used for this purpose. The effect of an altar in the home is beautifully described in a book, *The Education of Catholic Girls*, by Mother Janet Erskine Stuart, who says: "An altar or a nursery shrine gives a tone of joy and heavenliness that go down into the soul and take root there to grow into something lasting and beautiful. There are flowers to be brought, and lights, and small processions, and evening recollection with quietness of devotion, with the realisation of the 'great cloud of witnesses' who are around to make play safe and holy, and there is through it all the gracious call to things higher, to be strong, to be unselfish, to be self-controlled, to be worthy of these protectors and friends in heaven."

Mother Stuart's mention of the "cloud of witnesses" reminds us that at an early age the child should be told about the angels and saints that are with us in spirit when we pray.

'A vocation comes from the heart of God, but goes through the heart of the mother.'

Saint Pius X



'An altar or a nursery shrine gives a tone of joy and heavenliness that go down into the soul and take root there to grow into something lasting and beautiful'

THE IMMACULATA



Father talks on Honouring our Husbands

'Her husband is honourable in the gates, when he sitteth among the senators of the land. She made fine linen, and sold it, and delivered a girdle to the Chanaanite.'

What does it mean, that her husband is honourable?

Let us look at the example of St Monica; her husband was known to be the most brutal and violent in the town, and yet he never laid a finger on her, because she never pushed his buttons. We all have buttons that people know how to push, women are brilliant at pushing those buttons! But St Monica never did, she dealt with him in a beautiful way. She knew that her husband was cheating. In the end, she won his heart and he obtained the grace of a conversion.

On one occasion, when her son St Augustine wanted to make fun of his father, his mother slapped him and told him to mind his own business. She didn't want him to lower his respect for his father. Even though both were pagans, she wanted him to have a great love for his father. This spirit is going to have a great impact later on, when he becomes a priest and a Catholic, he's going to love God the Father. He's going to see the concept of what fatherhood is; authority, respect and obedience even if his earthly father didn't necessarily portray those qualities.

Regarding the defects in your spouse, do not think about yourself, don't think about the effect it has on yourself, if you are feeling angry and resentful. Think about the psychological damage you're going to do to the children, in lowering in their eyes the esteem they should have for fatherhood if you expose those faults. Not necessarily only for their father, but for fatherhood, for a male figure. We, as Catholics, worship a Father, 'Our Father who art in heaven.' If their vision of fatherhood is gone, demeaned, then their vision of the faith is going to be gone and demeaned in the long run. This is what 'her husband shall be honourable in the gates' means.

As priests what other people say always comes back to us. In a way, we are hurt by it. This is normal, like you as a mother, if your son goes about saying things about you, of course you're hurt. Of course your husband is going to be wounded, and it might not come back directly, it might come indirectly, by the reaction or the cold attitude towards the father. He's wounded by this, even if he's a pagan, he's still wounded. We all love to be loved, the same with your spouse so don't lower the estimation of him in the eyes of the children. One author said "even though he's rubbish, he's my rubbish". You've got to build him up, and have a nice way.

The important thing here is not to think of our own pride being wounded, we have got to think about our children, their future, what is a father for them, what is the family.

This is the problem with all the divorces today, the children are the ones who suffer. The greater number of people who are in prison today had no fathers in the home. People only care about themselves and their feelings, it is about me, I'm hurt, I'm offended, my rights, I'm sensitive, but we must put on a brave face for the children. The good Catholic women who have gone before us suffered a lot from their husbands, the better women they were, the more they suffered. Often when you are good people will take advantage of you, even your own husband. These women suffered, they put on a brave face and they remained in their marriage til the end for the sake of their children, their family and their faith.

Your children are going to grow up one day if you worry about what spouse they are going to marry give them a good image in the home. If they have been given a good image when they go to look for a spouse they automatically have a standard to go by but if they've been given rubbish then when they pick up a rubbish spouse don't blame them. You've already taken from them the beautiful image they should have, you have removed the façade, in a sense we should not remove the façade, we should keep the façade, for their sake.

A lot of things you do as parents, as mothers, you do not so much for yourselves but for the sake of others; your spouse and your children, you put on a brave face, you bite your tongue, sometimes you want to cry, sometimes you are angry. Yes, you will go through tough times with your spouse but you also normally go through good times. There are good times and bad times. Don't only look at and emphasise the bad, you have a duty to correct what needs to be corrected, don't get me wrong, but you must be positive with your children and so the same applies to your spouse.

With time men tend to mellow out, with age, with constancy, with perseverance and with you constantly showing encouragement and love, the heart of even the worst man cannot but be moved. We see this with St Monica, even the worst man could not find a fault with her as a person, even with her religious baggage, as we might say. Yes we might love Our Lord and they might hold religion against us but we must always make sure that as people we are not bitter and twisted because of the cross, because of the defects of our spouse.

You form your husband, just like you form your children, of course the good thing is you also form each other and help each other, this is what it is about. You have a gift that God has given you to form, to help with time, do not make the mistake of saying I am going to change him over night, it is going to take a lifetime and then it is only by God's grace.

Spiritual Direction for Mothers

How to Keep Your Temper

So anger is your worst fault? It's certainly difficult to keep your temper when you are on your feet all day, when the never-ending and always-beginning tasks crowd out that little bit of serenity you need for controlling yourself. Then the noise of the children gets you down and their unreasoning demands. You storm and punish them for disobedience and they merely find other naughty and senseless things to do. Some days you actually feel angry all the time, just waiting till someone provokes you! Control of anger is probably the most difficult virtue mothers have to practise. At the same time it is right here that they determine the spirit of peace, love and harmony that reigns in the home. Here is the secret of controlling and influencing children. Through this virtue they can draw nearer to God.

But... How? Here are five ways:

(1) Doctors say that many mothers are overworked. If you can afford it, don't be too proud to get some domestic help, even if only for a few hours a week. If your means do not run to outside help, help yourself. Plan. Don't work yourself into permanent irritability just because you never seem to finish. Perhaps you waste energy doing things that are not really necessary? (Do towels, pyjamas and children's underwear have to be ironed?) Divide your day into what is humanly and reasonably possible, and let the rest go. The house won't fall down.

(2) While the older children are at school and the younger ones have their afternoon nap, couldn't you spare yourself a half-hour too? A short after-dinner siesta drives the threshold of fatigue back to where you are barely conscious of it. Anger has only half a chance if you are not tired.

(3) Convince yourself that bursts of anger will do no good. Screeching, swearing and raging are unladylike-and sinful. Reprove or punish the children if they are naughty, but keep calm about it. Otherwise they think: "She punishes us-BECAUSE SHE IS WILD."

(4) When you notice yourself smouldering, or you feel a sudden wave of anger sweep over you, say to yourself quickly: "Steady!" Shut your lips tight, and don't say a word! You may have to rush to the tap and have a drink of water or go outside and look at the sky, but whatever you do, don't say anything! If

there are two of you involved, let the other person win the argument for the time being. Wait till you cool down before you speak or act. This is the great secret for controlling anger. Anger leaps and crackles with the fuel of words.

(5) While you are trying to keep silent, think about Our Lord on the way to Calvary. He was pushed and pulled and jeered at when fatigued to the point of exhaustion. To say the very least it was irritating. Breathe a silent prayer to His Sacred Heart.

These five means will break down any habit of anger no matter how fierce, will make you a person fit to live with, and will give God a chance to pour grace into your heart. You'll actually become sweet-tempered!

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Prayer of St Teresa of Avila

Let nothing disturb you,
Let nothing frighten you,
All things are passing away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things
Whoever has God
lacks nothing;
God alone suffices.

**‘When you
notice
yourself
smouldering,
shut your lips
tight or go
outside but
whatever you
do, don't say
a word!’**

A Mother's Gift By Esther McLenehan

A Mother's gift to her child is always chosen with loving care. Guided by the affection of her heart, she knows better than anyone else exactly what her child needs most. Even when the gift does not seem at first what the child desires, time will prove that none other could ever bring the same satisfaction and happiness.

One of the greatest gifts ever bestowed by a mother is known to Catholics as the rosary. And perhaps in a special way it was planned for the comfort and pleasure of mothers by one who understood perfectly all their difficulties and joys; who knew that mothers who were her children, would need in their daily lives the help that could be gained only through devotion to the rosary.

This precious gift was not designed for the mothers of any one nation. It is big enough and rich enough to be shared by mothers of every country in the world. Throughout the centuries until today all lengths, sizes, shapes and colours of beads slip daily through work-roughened fingers, through well-manicured ones; through white hands, brown hands, yellow hands, red hands, ebony hands, sooty hands; all of them loving hands, hands busy counting the same prayers to the same Mother, for a variety of benefits.

Mothers, young, middle-aged, old; mothers rich and mothers poor; mothers surrounded with healthy children, mothers separated by illness or other misfortune from their loved ones; all realise, if they are wise, how much they need their beads. Like no other gift planned for the well-being of creatures, this one can be used anywhere, at any hour of the day or night.

The rosary is not something that must be handled in its entirety, all at the same time. Parts of it can be used at odd moments when extra help is needed, when there is some problem that cannot be postponed until the orthodox praying hour, when there is a time-lag between one duty and the next.

There are mothers who carry a rosary in their apron pocket; while they perform their household chores they can snatch occasional minutes to say a few Hail Marys, to pray for a vocation or some other blessing for their children.

There are mothers, nervous of dangerous roads, who find this gift invaluable when teenagers are driving to parties at night. There are mothers with a rosary in their coat pocket, who, while waiting for a tram or bus, manage to finger their beads. In the waiting rooms of

hospitals or doctors' surgeries you can find anxious mothers soothing troubled minds with portions of this gift.

There are mothers, too old to help their families in material ways, who pass their days saying rosary after rosary for children and grandchildren, even for great-grandchildren.

That is the wonder of Our Lady's gift. There is absolutely no angle of human bewilderment, unhappiness or misfortune that it cannot soften, comfort and illumine with hope. With this gift for company no one can ever be really alone or entirely deserted: it brings the understanding Donor so very close.

The more one thinks about it, the more one appreciates that it seems designed especially to fit in with the experiences of the average mother's life. So many of the thoughts associated with its mysteries mean much to a mother, because they deal with things she well understands. They cover every stage and crisis in life, from life's beginning to death, then beyond to eternal reward.

It would be interesting to discover how many million individual beads have been handled by affectionate fingers since rosaries were first introduced. It would be fine to learn how many times mothers' rosaries stretched out, length by length, could be wound round the world.

It would probably take years to calculate how many tears rosaries have dried; how much courage they have given; how many vocations they have inspired; the number of conversions they have caused; the weight of crosses they have lifted; the number of erring souls they have brought back to God.

These rosaries are proof that Our Lady's gift is appreciated. They are the loving acceptance of a true Mother's gift. May those who know it not come to an understanding of it, because it is intended for everyone and still need it.



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