

XI. Piety

Piety is a virtue which makes us fulfill worthily our duties toward God.

This we do when we perform them with respect and zeal; for the infinite majesty of God and His immense goodness require that we pay Him our most reverent homage, and that we show the greatest zeal in serving Him as He requires.

A teacher should possess the virtue of piety in an eminent degree, i.e., his piety should be both interior and sincere for otherwise he would be only a hypocrite; it should also be outward and exemplary because he should show exteriorly the sentiments which fill his heart.

What, indeed, is a Christian teacher charged with the education of the young? He is a man into whose hands Jesus Christ has placed a certain number of children whom He redeemed with His precious blood, for whom He gave his life; in whom He dwells as in His temple, whom He looks upon as His own members, His brothers and co-heirs; who will reign with Him and glorify God through Him for all eternity. Why has Jesus Christ entrusted these children to Him? Was it merely to make them good penmen, great mathematicians, clever calculators, learned savants? Who would dare say or even think in this way? He entrusted them to the teacher to preserve in them the precious and priceless gift of innocence which He placed in their souls at Baptism, so that they become true Christians. Such is, in fact, the end and the purpose of the education of children: all the rest is accessory.

It follows that a teacher must have the greatest care to bring up his pupils in religious sentiments; and so he will apply himself, as we have said elsewhere, to instruct them in the mysteries of faith, especially in those truths which they must by all means explicitly believe: in the Creed, in the truths of a practical nature, such as the Commandments of God and of the Church, the dispositions required for receiving the Sacraments profitably, etc.

Nor shall he fail to speak to them of the obligations contracted in Baptism; of the reconciliations which they consented to in receiving this sacrament, of the esteem they should have for the graces given to them, and of what they are bound to do to preserve these.

We shall explain to them what concerns Holy Mass, the obligation of hearing Mass on Sundays and Feasts, the precious benefits which they will derive from attending Mass daily, and the manner of doing so. He shall teach them to be assiduous in frequenting religious functions, and he shall instruct them how to behave in church.

He shall teach them how necessary prayer is, how and when one should fulfill this essential duty e.g., in the morning, at evening, and in so many other circumstances of life. He will make sure that they know the usual formulas of prayer, that they recite them well and distinctly.

He will also teach them how to make their actions meritorious by offering them to God and asking for His help to perform them well; how they should profit by the pains and sorrows of life; how to submit with resignation to the will of God in sickness and other unpleasant happenings; how to carry out the duties of their state of life; how to avoid occasions of sin; how never to a cause of scandal for others, etc.

He shall make them understand well the Christian and moral virtues: faith, hope, charity, justice, goodness, honesty, wisdom, prudence, fortitude and temperance, modesty in talk and in all their conduct, the respect and submission they owe to civil and ecclesiastical authorities, the immortality of the soul; the last ends of man; grace, sin, etc.

He will inspire them not only with solid piety with regard to God and to Our Lord, but also a special devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin, to St. Joseph, to their holy Patron, and to

their holy Guardian Angel. He should instruct them on the reasons for these devotions, and recompense those who take them most to heart. In the proper circumstances he should mention certain striking examples from the lives of the Saints and of other illustrious persons. Good examples of themselves impress the minds of the students more deeply than long discourses. Even the most careful prepared ones.

Finally, he will without ceasing impress on the pupils the duty of preferring their own salvation to anything else; by all these instructions he will form in them the qualities which make a good Christian, a good citizen, a good father of a family, a good magistrate, a good soldier, a good businessman, etc., depending on the various vocations to which each may be called by divine Providence.

But let us not forget to observe here that we must above all teach religion well to the children, and for this we need to diversify, as we mentioned above, and simplify the instructions given, depending on the students' needs. It is not enough to have them study the Catechism and make them learn it every day; we must in addition illustrate Christian doctrine for them, giving them clear explanations according to their capacity. If a teacher does this, if he provides them with an example of all the virtues, he will infallibly produce great results.

Furthermore, it should not be necessary to mention that all exercises of piety should be performed with respect, with modesty, with interior and exterior recollection. At such times one should never permit anything which might distract the children from applying themselves to what they are doing. At church one must also require that they have their prayer books in their hands, and follow in them assiduously.

Such are the principal objects about which a teacher should instruct his students. But, once again, how could he give them such an education and form them properly to a Christian life if he himself were not filled with all that he is trying to teach them? We were right, then, in saying that his piety should be outstanding. But to make it solid he must not fail to take Jesus Christ as his model, the morals of this divine Savior as the foundation and the principle of his conduct; thus he will scorn the passing goods of this world, the praises of men bereft of all substance, the pleasures of this life which are only a danger and an illusion.

A teacher would lack piety if he spoke of God in a lifeless manner, without any feeling, without being convinced of the truths of religion; by saying or letting another say the prayers with overhaste, without marking the pauses, or too loud, or without modesty, respect, or attention; by neglecting or by performing languidly and without fervor certain practices of devotion such as using holy water, making the sign of the cross, joining his hands, bowing his head, kneeling at the proper times and places, especially if he failed to do so out of human respect.

"Exercise thyself in godliness... it is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." (1. Tim. 4.8).

"Carefully study to present thyself approved by God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed." (2 Tim.4.8)