HOLINESS IN THE FAMILY

Sincerity and lies

by Brother François-Marie O.P.

"Lord! Who will dwell in your tabernacle? Who will rest on your holy mountain [Heaven]? *He who speaks the truth in his heart and has not deceived in his words*" (Ps 14).

IT IS OF THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE, if we want to lead to Heaven the children whom the good Lord has entrusted to us, to take care to educate them, from their earliest years, in the practice of the virtues that make them good, that is to say, similar to God who is infinite Goodness.

 We will begin these talks with the virtue of truthfulness or sincerity, which goes hand in hand with the flight from the opposite vice: lying.

# Sincerity

## The Truth

 God created us in his image. He gave us the word to imitate him.

 Just as God has an eternal word, the Word, which is the true expression of the eternal wisdom of the Father and therefore the absolute Truth, so we have our Word, which must be the true expression of our thought. When we do this, we are truly imitators and children of God.

 Truth is what is. Every word must be the expression of what is, that is, of the truth.

 We may be insincere in our dealings with God: in our self-examination, in confession, in prayer, in our inner conversation with him, but we will not be able to deceive him, for God knows everything. We will be the main victims of this lie.

 The same is not true of our neighbor. He can be deceived, and both justice and charity require that we be true to him, so that he will not be deceived either by our words or by our actions.

## The benefits of sincerity

 The sincerity of the children does honor to the parents and greatly facilitates the work of education. We have a good example of this good habit in the children of the Barbedette family, whose eldest child was 12 years old at the time of the apparitions in Pontmain on January 17, 1871.

 Knowing that her children were not in the habit of lying, Mrs. Barbedette asked them to describe what they saw, then after some time, disconcerted by the fact that she saw nothing, but not questioning their word, she sent for the sister teacher to verify, then the priest.

 These parents, very Christian, had succeeded in giving their children the habit of sincerity. It allowed the inhabitants of the village, all grouped behind their parish priest, to believe in the reality of the apparition, to react promptly to the expectation of the Virgin Mary, that is, to pray. The result was to stop the advance of the German army.

## How to develop sincerity in children?

There are three ways:

### a) Give the example:

* **By never deceiving children.** We set the stage for lying every time we promise things - rewards or punishments - and then fail to keep our word, because we have spoken too quickly, impatiently or thoughtlessly.
 If these failures are repeated frequently, children learn that words can be different from actions.
* **By setting an example of truth, especially where it costs.** This doesn't have to be in words, but in actions. Children who see a parent scratch a car while parking and leave without saying anything will probably not learn a good lesson from it; likewise if, at the entrance to a museum, they hear him lie about the age of one of them in order to benefit from the reduced rate.
 In this area*small* and seemingly insignificant mistakes can have serious consequences on a child's conscience, and he or she will conclude that lying is allowed whenever it is useful. He will immediately make applications, the seriousness of which he alone will judge, and the parents will know nothing about it, or too late.

### b) Inspire a deep esteem for sincerity

* By praising this virtue often, and by making it admired when good examples allow it.
* By blaming the lie.
* By stating loud and clear that we will be proud to have children who practice this virtue.

 Be concerned with truth to the point of detail. When your children tell their "adventures", help them to tell things accurately down to the smallest detail, correcting their exaggerations or confusions.

#### c) Encourage the sincerity of children.

 **By faith.** Jesus is the Truth. He knows all, he sees all. If you love the truth, you will be a friend of Jesus. If you lie, you become a friend of the devil who is the father of lies.

 **By discretion.**

 One should never make fun of the scruples and ingenuity of children, nor make them known to others. The child who sees his confidences betrayed will close his heart definitively.

 In a delicate matter, avoid questions that show our doubt or ignorance too clearly. Still not very virtuous, because of his age, the child who understands that he can lie with impunity will easily give in to temptation.

 What to do then? As much as possible, get information from other sources, by doing a little investigation. When you have enough information to know what happened, you can help the child practice truthfulness. If the evidence is not specific enough and the mistake is not serious, it is better to look the other way than to destroy trust.

 **By the remission of the punishment.**

 The child must see the difference in treatment between an admitted and an unconfessed fault. If he is to be punished, he must not be given the impression that the cause of his grief is his sincerity, for he will never again confide in anyone.

 However, if the offence requires it, it must be repaired, but with kindness, so that he feels appeased and even happy to have told the truth. It is sometimes possible not to punish at all, but this should be the exception.

## The lie

### The eighth commandment: "You shall not lie".

 God's commandments are based on God's nature and on our own. They tend to make us a living image of our Creator, making us good, virtuous and, ultimately, happy.

 God being the supreme Truth, nothing is more contrary to Him than lying; this is why He absolutely forbids it by the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not lie", in order to prevent man from insulting his Creator. Indeed, every lie being the negation of a truth, tends to deny God, the supreme Truth. That is why no one must lie.

 This is the *negative*  part of the commandment which, like all the others, also has a *positive* part, commanding us to *tell the truth.* An effective education should not be limited to prohibitions, but should emphasize what is ordered for the good of the child: this is why we began this talk by talking about the virtue of truthfulness.

### Lying in general

 St. Augustine aptly defines lying by saying that it consists in *speaking against one's own thought in order to deceive*.

 Therefore, two conditions are necessary for a lie to exist:

* expressing things *one does not think* - whether they are true or false. Saying something that is false but believed to be true is not a lie, but a mistake. On the other hand, one can lie by saying something that is materially true, but which one believes to be false.
* *intend to deceive*. Fabulous or romantic stories, ironic jokes expressed by antiphrasis or obvious exaggeration are not lies as long as they do not aim to deceive.

Lying has a triple evil:

* It harms the *liar*, who degrades himself by taking away something of his likeness to God. The liar makes himself guilty, both before God and before his own conscience. Lying can lead to blindness and damnation.

 He who gets used to telling small lies as a child, whatever the reason, will tell bigger ones as an adult: he will lie in his commitments, in his business, etc.

* The liar *deprives his neighbor of* the truth. He makes him take the false for the true, which can lead to great damage and great faults.
* The liar *offends God* in the person of his Word who said: "I am the Truth" and honors, in his place, Satan the father of lies.

### The lie in society today

 In the 18th century, one of the "great ancestors" of our republican and anti-Christian society, the ill-fated Voltaire wrote :

Lying is a vice only when it does harm; it is a very great virtue when it does good. So be more virtuous than ever. You must lie like a devil, not timidly, not for a time, but boldly and always. Lie, my friends, lie, I will return it to you on occasion. [Letter to Thiériot, October 21, 1736].

 The motto had many followers, in politics, in economics, in education, in the press, in morality.

 In the 20th century, Marxism used lying as a battle tactic and made it a "virtue," extolled in its "catechism" for its militants. In the 21th century, we are told that we have entered the "post-truth" era, that is, no objective truth is admitted anymore. The official discourse is constructed according to the ideology of the time, according to 'the objectives to be achieved, whether they be military, educational, political or scientific. One must see in this perspective the insistence on the Darwinist theory of evolution, on global warming due to CO₂, on the health crisis, etc.

### Lying in children today

 The child is naturally sincere; he speaks as he thinks and spontaneously corrects what seems to him to be contrary to the truth. Mental restriction, dissimulation, deceit, hypocrisy are not usually the work of the child. This tendency to truth, which is fundamental, is however wounded by original sin and can be wounded even more by the environment and education.

 All educators know that most children lie by the time they are old enough to be reasonable. Of course, it is usually not in serious matters, but children who never or almost never lie are very rare.

 It seems that this ailment has become more common than it used to be. This means that even in the best families, something has been missed in early childhood education. We reported above the example of the Barbedette children in Pontmain in 1871. Let us cite here two other examples:

* Lucia of Fatima in 1917. She never lied, even when her mother beat her to force her to say she had not seen the Blessed Virgin.
* That of Jacqueline Aubry, the little visionary of Ile-Bouchard in 1947. Her parents rarely practiced, there was no family prayer, however her mother could testify that her daughter had never lied, that is why she believed her when she told the vision of the Holy Virgin.

### What to do when you see that the child is lying?

 If it is the first time, we must mark our surprise, our sorrow with gravity.

 If the child reoffends, he should be kept in disgrace by limiting relations with him to what is strictly necessary. Examples from the Scriptures should be used to show the severity of God's punishment for lying, such as the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

### What are the main reasons children lie?

* *Fear*: this is the most common. The child has done something wrong, for example, broken an object, not learned a lesson or cannot do an assignment; fearing to be scolded or punished, he/she chooses the easy way out that seems to solve the problem, by telling a lie, or even by cheating in class if it is an assignment.
* *The point is* that the child would rather go out and play than complete a task or service. If asked the question, "Have you finished? In games, children cheat because they want to win.
* *Vanity*: to show off, he magnifies what is to his advantage, he diminishes or denies what would make him look bad.

 We see that the child lies because his virtue is weak.

 Certainly, he has the *infused*  virtues that accompany sanctifying grace, but he does not sufficiently possess the acquired virtues, which are formed by the *repetition of* virtuous acts. He reacts "naturally", in most cases. He lacks humility, courage, generosity, love of justice, and therefore frankness, sincerity and loyalty.

### Three remedies for lying children

1. It is necessary to inculcate, from the earliest age, the love of truth, explaining to children that Jesus is the Truth itself, and that, in order to be a friend of Jesus, one must always tell the truth. Jesus, being God, sees all and knows all, we cannot hide anything from him. If one does not tell the truth, one is a friend of the devil. Moreover, it is cowardly to lie.
2. If you discover that something wrong has been done, do not ask your child questions in an angry, threatening tone, but encourage him to tell the truth and assure him that a frank confession will earn him forgiveness. If your child is loyal, do not *punish* him or her, but encourage him or her to *make amends* (these are two different things). This will eliminate lying out of fear. The child accepts the consequences of his misdeeds very well because he has a sense of justice, and generally there is no malice in most of his faults. He will gladly make amends, for example by doing a favor.
3. Point out to the child how much peace his or her soul feels when he or she has told the truth. Some time ago, in a school, a small group of children had damaged the bottom of a plasterboard wall, already damaged by humidity, by a few kicks. The next day, after the prayer, the director asked that the culprits come forward, assuring that they would not be punished, but would have to repair the damage by doing some services. The perpetrators of this degradation promptly denounced themselves, and diligently carried out the requested repairs. Of course, the parents had to bear some of the costs. But each child became aware of the consequences of his or her own stupidity, either by accompanying the father to repair the damaged wall, or by contributing to the costs with his or her piggy bank, or by rendering compensatory services at home.