

Place, Margaret
Sanctifying...
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SANCTIFYING

PREGNANCY

IN THE LIGHT
OF THE JOYFUL
MYSTERIES OF THE

HOLY ROSARY

Through the pen of St. Paul the Apostle the Holy Ghost again shows the greatness and joy of Motherhood: God gives the child to the Mother but in so doing He causes her to cooperate effectively in the unfolding of the flower whose seed He has placed within her. And this cooperation becomes a path leading to eternal salvation—

She shall be saved
Through childbearing;
If she continue in faith,
And love, and holiness with modesty.

1 Tim. 2:15. From an address
by Pope Pius XII to the Italian
Catholic Union of Midwives
on October 29, 1951.



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SANCTIFYING PREGNANCY

by

Margaret Place

THE LITURGICAL PRESS

ST. JOHN'S ABBEY

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Minnesota

The author wishes to express her appreciation for the generous advice given her by the Rev. Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., editor of *Worship*, Sister Maris Stella, C.S.J., chairman of the English Department at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minn., and Sister M. Ernestine, O.S.B., supervisor of obstetrics at Duluth's St. Mary's Hospital.

A word of thanks is due also to my husband and six children who are affording me a full and rewarding life in the vocation of motherhood.

M. P.

Nihil obstat: John Eidenschink, O.S.B., J.C.D., *Censor deputatus*. *Imprimi potest*: ✠ Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., D.D., Abbot of St. John's Abbey. *Imprimatur*: ✠ Peter W. Bartholome, D.D., Bishop of St. Cloud. June 25, 1954.

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Deadified

FOREWORD

This booklet stands in striking contrast to much that one sees in print on the subject of childbearing and motherhood in the secularized civilizations of our day. In its pages the child is not declared "unwanted." Nor are the tasks of the mother in any way played down.

To the contrary, the child is set forth for all that God meant him to be, and the role of mother is shown with all the beauty that the light of another world reflects upon her. Its pages are replete with Christian gems of thought that cannot but inspire the reader with a profound sense of the glory and dignity of motherhood as planned by God and as viewed by the Church.

A particularly happy feature of the booklet is the arrangement of its content under the five Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary. As a result there is a constant reference to the incidents in the life of the Mother of God. This cannot but encourage and console the Christian mother in her tasks. It will give both her and mothers-to-be the profound sense of respect for the high ideals of Christian motherhood that alone is becoming the true child of Mary.

Furthermore, it will prepare expectant mothers fully to appreciate the meaning of the following words which the minister of Holy Mother Church will say over her in the Blessing after Childbirth:

"Almighty, everlasting God, who by the child-bearing of the Blessed Virgin Mary, hast for Thy faithful turned the pains of child-bearing into joy,

look with kindness on this Thy servant, who comes rejoicing to Thy holy temple to give thanks to Thee, and grant that after this life she and her child may, by the merits and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, attain to the joys of everlasting life. Through Christ our Lord.”

The publication is a timely one, and deserves to be most widely circulated. Those who peruse it are certain to be influenced by it. The more widely it will be read, the more will it contribute to the building of a better and more Christian world.

Rev. Edgar Schmiedeler, O.S.B., Ph.D.
Director, Family Life Bureau, N.C.W.C.

INTRODUCTION

Much is being written in the press of today on "Motherhood." Almost every issue of the typical "woman's magazine" has at least one article on the subject.

Although these articles range from popularly scientific treatises on childbirth or prenatal care to frivolous advice on the expectant mother's wardrobe, they have for the most part one thing in common—their only concern is with the purely bodily or biological aspects of pregnancy. Rarely does one find a single hint or suggestion of the fact that, besides its purely physical character, the period of approaching motherhood is above all else a time of *spiritual awakening and maturing*.

Even our Catholic press, which wages such a relentless fight against the evils of birth control, might offer us more of a positive nature on the subject.

Perhaps it is because no one who has not herself sensed this unity with God which comes with motherhood can speak of it, yet it is natural that Christian mothers should be reluctant to reveal so sacred an experience. Today, however, when Satan's salesladies roam the country and are seconded by the newspapers, the radio, the women's magazines, even the charming woman in the next apartment—all preaching the advantages of birth control and planned parenthood—it is time we speak our hearts.

Our young women should be encouraged to think of pregnancy not as nine months of shapeless

clothes, swollen feet, in a word, a period which must be endured—but rather as nine months of very close, beautiful kinship with Almighty God. When one realizes she is to be a mother, what new meaning dawns in that oft repeated catechism question, “Where is God?” She knows that God has indeed been very close to her, that He has breathed an immortal soul into the minute particle of life she now carries beneath her heart. She cannot feel other than close to Him!

When she understands that she is sharing with God some small part of His great work of creation, then she is able to see that she, too, must accept a small part of His cross in the work of Redemption. That is done by willingly and cheerfully accepting the sacrifice, discomfort, and even suffering that her pregnancy makes necessary.

For many a girl, it may be the first time she has had to deny herself for the sake of another. Self-denial is not easy, yet it brings great compensation when accepted for love.

By meditating on the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary in the following chapters, let us seek to discover how the period of pregnancy can be sanctified by patterning it on that of the Mother of mothers—the Blessed Virgin Mary.

First Mystery

The Annunciation

YOUR VOCATION IN LIFE

The last chapters of *The Seven Storey Mountain* by Thomas Merton gives us a fascinating account of daily life in a Trappist monastery. For many weeks this book, which is an autobiographical account of a soul's search for contentment, headed the best seller lists. The world was puzzled to learn from it that these men, who through the centuries have denied themselves many legitimate pleasures, have known in fullest measure the only true happiness life can offer.

One reviewer stated that he found it more than interesting because it dealt "not with what happens to a man, but with what happens inside him — that is, inside his soul."

Perhaps this seems a far cry from our original subject. It is indeed a great distance in every sense of the word from the quiet of Gethsemani Abbey to your own fireside; but, sometimes by stepping back a little we face a problem from a new angle and thus gain a clearer perception of it.

Just as Thomas Merton discovered that God had a very definite plan for him which led him through many adventures to the peaceful life of a Trappist — so too, God has a plan for you. The fact is that your being pregnant, your raising a family, is the means God is giving you to save your soul and to

assist in the spread of His kingdom. Even at this moment He is looking with favor and love upon the child you bear within you because it is His "son" by creation and will be much more so by the grace of Baptism which is in store for him.

Motherhood is a vocation just as truly as is Thomas Merton's way of life. But like any other vocation, it requires patience, perseverance, and a willingness to serve.

Perhaps you, like many other girls, have not thought of marriage and motherhood in this serious light. Yet it must be so thought of if you are to be a happy and holy mother — and you wish to be both. Now in these months of "shadow" after the honeymoon, you will have time to think and pray and prepare yourself. You will have to exercise some self-discipline, certainly; but love will make it worth doing.

It follows, then, that when the doctor tells you "no sweets, no salt" or whatever other advice fits your particular needs, you will not assume the air of a "martyr to duty" and make life miserable for yourself and all around you; on the contrary you will have every reason to be happy! Think each day that you and God are working together on a wonderful project. Be proud of the fact that your body has become a sanctuary in which you are sheltering and nurturing an immortal soul.

Your pregnancy is a real privilege which many women have been denied. Do not feel that your reward comes only at the end, with the birth of your child; rather, it is with you constantly if you live each day as Mary lived it. Naturally you will

live in joyful anticipation, but all through the nine months, cherish each day of this very close relationship with God.

For the woman who is with child, the Rosary should take on a new and intimate meaning — for in a very small and humble way she is sharing some of Mary's experiences.

God could have chosen to send His divine Son into this world in many ways; but instead He chose to have Him begin life just as all mankind — cradled beneath the heart of a woman. Indeed in Mary, not only motherhood, but pregnancy was sanctified for all time. To Mary alone was given the singular privilege of being the Mother of the Son of God, but all Catholic mothers have the dignity of being mothers of the sons of God.

Why not dedicate, then, in a special manner these months of your life to Mary? As you go about your home performing the routine tasks that now, perhaps, seem so burdensome, remember that Mary kept house for Joseph during her months of waiting. Turn to her for a philosophy of life. Her beautiful words of joy in the Magnificat — sung in thankful recognition for carrying Christ in her womb—should become a part of your daily prayer during your months of waiting.

The Magnificat

My soul magnifies the Lord, *
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
Because he has regarded the lowliness of his
handmaid, *

for, behold, henceforth all generations shall call
me blessed,
Because he who is mighty has done great things
for me, *
and holy is his name;
And for generation upon generation in his mercy, *
to those who fear him.

He has shown might with his arm; *
he has scattered the proud in the conceit of their
heart.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones *
and has exalted the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things *
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has given help to Israel, his servant, *
mindful of his mercy—

Even as he promised to our fathers— *
toward Abraham and his descendants forever.

(Luke 1:46-55)

Another and very important means of grace for the expectant mother is the Church's official blessing of a woman in pregnancy. The complete text of the blessing is given on page 34.

Expectant mothers should ask their pastors for this blessing, and should also read and meditate on it often during this time, especially when the time of birth draws near. It will be a great source of comfort to an expectant mother to be reminded how tenderly and solicitously Holy Mother Church thinks of and prays for her.

Since this blessing is little known to many Catholic women, an excellent project for a parish woman's organization would be to acquaint more women with it. Possibly they could arrange to have it administered following one of the regularly scheduled evening services, preferably on or near one of the feasts commemorating Our Lady's Maternity—such as the Annunciation, March 25; the Visitation, July 2; the Maternity of Mary, October 11; the Expectation, December 18; the Nativity, December 25; or the Purification, February 2.

Over and above the blessing it would bestow, it would awaken in women a real awareness of the spiritual significance of motherhood.

Think, too, of its fine effect on the young girls who might happen to be present. Many of them grow into womanhood and even marry with little understanding of the dignity of bearing a child. For many of them, the manikin look, the sleek line, is their ideal. They worship at the altar of GLAMOR. We should do all in our power to instill a Christian attitude on this subject from the days of early adolescence.

Second Mystery

The Visitation

THE AWAKENING

About midway through your pregnancy you have the privilege of experiencing another of God's miracles. The tiny creature you have nurtured for four and a half or five months of life, has grown and developed to a point where movement is possible, and is now making its first faint stirrings.

This is, indeed, a very important milestone in your period of approaching motherhood. The child is growing. It needs more room—the pretty dresses, the smartly tailored suits in your wardrobe must be laid aside. But just as surely as your waistline expands, so too, will the abundance of grace within your heart, if all this is offered to Jesus through Mary.

At this point in your pregnancy it might be well to recall that Our Lord's first miracle, while on earth, was actually performed while He was still in His Mother's womb. As the Gospel tells us: "Now in those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town of Juda. And she entered the house of Zachary and saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe in her womb leapt. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and cried out with a loud voice saying: Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!"

Mary's journey to visit Elizabeth when she learned

that Elizabeth was to become a mother shows not only how solicitous she was for her cousin's welfare, but also her natural desire to share the joy of her own approaching motherhood with one whose lifetime of prayer for the gift of a child in her womb had at last been answered. Isn't it only reasonable, then, to assume that she takes a personal interest also in you, especially if you are reverent and humble as Elizabeth must have been?

Turn to her often, then, during the months to come, not only for consolation and for help, but for the sharing of your joy: for Mary of the Visitation is essentially a joyful Mary. As your baby's movements within you make you conscious of its presence, say the *Memorare*—

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, and sought thy intercession, was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of Virgins, my Mother! To thee I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.

If you do not already know this beautiful prayer from memory, have several copies about your home—perhaps one in the kitchen, one near the corner where you iron, one on your night stand—until the words come readily to mind. Then, when that tiny hand or foot moves within you wherever you are—riding on a bus, waiting on the doctor's examining table, or even being aroused from sleep by it—your heart will turn instinctively to Mary. You will put

all your trust in her, confident that she will not fail you.

At this time it is important for you to follow the advice the doctor gives you to insure your own health and that of your child. Put aside your personal aversions to certain foods if he claims they are essential.

If he advocates moderate exercise, take it. Why not walk over to morning Mass instead of taking an aimless stroll? Couldn't it be within the realm of the possible that just as your child's bodily health is affected by your pre-natal diet, so too, your unborn child's spiritual conditioning may begin long before birth? What a rich heritage the baby has whose mother frequently receives Our Lord in Holy Communion and keeps close to Our Lady while her child grows within her!

Third Mystery

The Nativity

THE BIRTH OF YOUR CHILD

All through the months of your pregnancy your probable date of delivery stands out and looms ahead of you as the big coming event. All else is subordinate to this, and rightly so. Everything is mentally dated B.B.C. (before baby comes) or A.B.C. (after baby comes). The layette you are preparing, the crib your husband is painting, the frilly white curtains—all must be in readiness by this magic date.

But stop now for a minute, and think, are you so completely concerned in making these material preparations that you have lost sight of the deep spiritual significance of the main event? Are you preparing for it as many thoughtless people prepare for Christmas—with Rudolph the reindeer, Frosty the Snowman, tinsel and glitter—but no Christ Child?

Bearing a child is truly a holy act if it is done in cooperation with God. It seems only reasonable then that much of your preparation should be of a spiritual nature. At least you should think through the situation and try to formulate some Christ-like attitudes toward the day or hours preceding the delivery of your child.

Perhaps the first thing you should remember is that frequently the baby is not born on the exact day or date you plan. Therefore, if your due date

arrives and you experience none of the physical symptoms your physician has told you to look for, **BE PATIENT!** In most cases, medical men tell us it simply means that your baby has not come to term. In other words, it needs a few more days or possibly a week or two more of tender, loving care within your body before it is ready to start life on its own.

If you think of it in these terms—difficult as the added days may be—you will not fuss or fume to be relieved of your burden. You have waited nine months, surely you can wait a little longer when you realize it may mean a much better start in life for your baby. Think: God is giving you a few more days to be completely ready for the birth of your child.

Relax, take things a little easier, pray your rosary more devoutly. The Church urges us to prepare for all the important events of our life by prayer. Remember the retreat you made before the reception of First Holy Communion and before receiving the sacrament of Confirmation. An actual retreat at this time is out of the question, but you could enter into the spirit of one—by receiving the sacraments with your husband more frequently during these final days of waiting, by saying a few extra prayers together, and perhaps by some spiritual reading and meditation.

Certainly, this is a more Christ-like way of spending the final days of your confinement than in bitterness, complaining, and self-pity—which in the end will only leave you tired out and exhausted.

The last days before the birth of our Blessed Lord were trying and difficult for Mary, His Mother. She

was forced to make the long and arduous journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem with her husband, riding a donkey by day, camping with the caravan by night. She understands your feelings and your problems. Ask her during these last days to help you.

Once you realize that your baby is on its way—don't get panicky! A few contractions simply mean that labor is beginning. It is generally a rather slow process with the first baby. Call your physician and follow his instructions.

If it can be arranged, plan ahead so that your husband will be able to take you to the hospital and stay with you during the hours to come. The modern trend is toward welcoming husbands in the labor rooms. It is his privilege to be with you. If he realizes how very important it is for you to remain relaxed and reassured at this time, he will gladly follow the suggestions offered by the sisters and nurses in charge of the floor. Those big hands of his which you admired throwing forward passes on the football field, or engaged in some other equally masculine activity, will prove equally proficient at massaging the tired muscles of your back.

Don't shut him out of your life at this time when you really need him. Let him know that his presence is a real help to you. Psychologists tell us that this will bring you closer together than a second honeymoon in Hawaii.

As time progresses, keep your rosary in your hand. The feel of the beads between your fingers will do much to relax you. The modern theory of childbirth is that the more completely relaxed you are during this first stage of labor when the womb is dilating (in other words, when nature is slowly opening the

door of the little room where your child has lived), the less discomfort you will feel.

The very words of the *Hail Mary* and *Our Father*, said slowly and fervently, will strengthen you and give you faith. For when you say,

*Our Father,
Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name:*

you are expressing your trust in God who created the infant you are at this moment bringing into the world and who is allowing you in a very humble way to share with Him the joys of creation.

Thy kingdom come. Realize that this child you are bearing, after it is baptized, will add one more precious soul to God's kingdom.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Look at your crucifix as you say this part of the prayer. Have *faith* that the good God who hung for three hours on the cross will see you through this very natural, beautiful—but sometimes trying—experience, and will give you the patience to do His will now at this moment and during the hours ahead.

Give us this day our daily bread. Ask our Lord to give you the strength and courage you need for this delivery. Ask Him to watch over your baby, to guard and guide it on its journey into this world.

And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Beg forgiveness for the sins of your past life and offer all your discomfort at this moment in atonement for them. Tell our Blessed Lord how very much you wish to start life anew as you assume your new role in life—that of a mother.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from all evil. Pray that the good God who blessed motherhood for all time by preserving His own Mother free from all sin, will help you and all mothers to overcome temptation—especially, at the moment, the temptations of fear, discouragement, and impatience; and that He will make you strong and worthy of the wonderful title of Christian Mother.

As the hour draws near for the birth of your child, the tempo of the work increases. You will be taken to the delivery room where a whole group has gathered—your own physician, the sister in charge of the floor, the nurses, the anaesthetist. They are all present for just one purpose: to assist you at the delivery of your child. All have been trained to work together as a team. They have gone through this scene many times—only you, the leading lady change with each delivery.

Try to cooperate with their suggestions and requests; it will make things easier for you and better for the baby. Hard work and perseverance are expected of you at this stage. You will hear them say, "Work harder," "Keep working," "Now push once again," until you think these words will be indelibly written in your memory.

All this is a part of God's plan. It is His wonderful way of bringing a new life into the world.

"A woman

About to give birth has sorrow

Because her hour has come.

But when she has brought forth the child,

She no longer remembers the anguish

*For her joy
That a man is born into the world."*

How true indeed were those words of our Lord! What joy will overflow your heart when you hear the wondrous cry of your new-born child. All else is indeed forgotten when you look for the first time at this beautiful creature which you have *earned* the right to call your own child. How happy you and your husband will be when you receive into your arms this precious bundle—a part of you, a part of him—a soul fresh from the hand of Almighty God.

All true love tends to be creative, it seeks an outward expression of its overflowing. This child is an expression of your love for one another, and through it God has truly blessed you by giving you the privilege of parenthood.

Fourth Mystery

Presenting Jesus in the Temple

WE PREPARE FOR BABY'S BAPTISM

Let us turn once again to the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary which during the past months should have become so much a part of your spiritual life. The fourth mystery commemorates the presentation of the Child Jesus in the temple. Our Blessed Lady, according to the Jewish custom, brought her Infant to the place of religious worship, the temple, and symbolically offered Him back to God.

Like Mary, you too must plan to bring your child to the church, to receive the sacrament of Baptism. This day must not be delayed for trivial reasons. A fear of baby catching a cold or a slight siege of colic are surely not justifiable excuses for unduly long postponing the administration of this sacrament.

This is your first serious obligation as a parent. Remember that in your hands rests the responsibility for your child's soul! So be willing to cooperate with the Holy Spirit by arranging for Baptism at the earliest possible date.

You anxiously counted the days and looked forward to his physical birth. Anticipate with even more eagerness his spiritual birth. For just as certainly as a feeling of happiness and accomplishment filled your heart on the day your child was born, so too will an even deeper sense of satisfaction and

abiding joy be yours the day he receives the gift of eternal life in the sacrament of Baptism.

Since this is such an important event in the life of your baby, it is only right that you should make some serious and thoughtful plans for this day—the day of his birth into God's own family. Let's call this phase of your preparations for baby's coming, "preparing a spiritual layette."

The first item which you will wish to include is a *Baptismal Robe*. By this we are not referring to the beautiful baptismal dresses that are handed down in many families. This is a lovely custom, and if such an heirloom is available in your family, you will, no doubt, be proud to use it. But when we use the term, *Baptismal Robe*, we mean, rather, the square of white linen used by the priest in the administration of the sacrament.

In the early days of the Church, the sacrament of Baptism was usually given by immersion. As the newly baptized stepped from the font he was presented with a white baptismal robe, symbolic of his newly granted innocence. Today, as the priest concludes the administration of the sacrament, he places on the head of the newly baptized a white linen square (which is permitted as a substitute for the robes used by the early Christians) and says:

"Receive this white garment,
And wear it unstained
To the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ,
That you may have everlasting life."

Many mothers wish to provide the priest with their child's own white robe so that it may be kept as a lifetime reminder of this memorable spiritual occa-

sion. On the anniversaries of Baptism and on First Communion day it can be used as a valuable object lesson to teach the dignity and duties of a child of God.

To avoid misunderstanding, it is well to point out that there is no one pattern for making the Baptismal Robe. The only requisite is that it be white. Some are made in the shape of loose fitting robes, and others are merely linen squares with the symbols of the seven sacraments embroidered on them. If the date of the baptism is added, a very complete spiritual record of the child's growth in Christ may be kept.¹

The family may also wish to provide the *Baptismal Candle* which is used during the ceremony and is presented to the baptized (or to the sponsor) as the priest says:

“Receive this burning candle
And safeguard your baptism above reproach.
Keep God's commandments,
So that when the Lord comes to the marriage
feast
You may meet Him in the halls of heaven
With all His Saints,
And live with Him forever and ever.”

The only requirement for the candle is that it should be of bees' wax. For practical reasons, it is

¹ *Receive This White Garment* by Therese Mueller. Pio Decimo Press, Box 53, Baden Station, St. Louis 15, Mo. 25c. This booklet gives detailed directions for making the Baptismal Robes and illustrations of the symbols for the seven sacraments.

Bona Vita Farm, R. R. No. 1, Newton, Ohio. Baptismal Robe Kit for making one at home. \$2.50. Some convents are able to supply handmade Baptismal Robes at a reasonable price if notified in advance.

well to select a heavy one that can be lighted many times, since you will wish to burn it on baptismal anniversaries and on other occasions of spiritual significance in the life of your child. You might also try your hand with brush and oil paints to draw a red *Chi Rho* or some other suitable symbol on the candle, to make it look more festive and "special."

There are available today many *birth and baptismal announcements* of a truly Catholic character. These, too, should form a part of the spiritual layette, as should some of the excellent pamphlets on Baptism which explain the full meaning of the sacrament and of the many beautiful ceremonies surrounding its administration.¹ It is a very good idea, too, to secure copies of the Rite of Infant Baptism to present to all who plan to attend the ceremony.²

Of course, it is expected that the mother herself should make every effort to be present. And a most fitting preparation for you and your husband would be to read together the text of the baptismal rite as well as those parts of the Holy Saturday liturgy that tell of the blessing of the Baptismal font, and the blessing of the paschal Candle. It will help you to realize more deeply your dignity as Christian parents.

In some parishes the *Blessing for a Mother After Childbirth* is given following Baptism. Ask your

¹ *Rebirth of the Soul*, by Rev. Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., The Paulist Press. *A Souvenir of Baptism*, Family Life Bureau, N.C.W.C., Washington, D. C.

² *The Gift of Life—The Rite of Infant Baptism*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn.

pastor if this is the custom in your parish. This is a beautiful means of offering thanks to God for the safe delivery of your child and should be sought by all Catholic mothers.¹

Give serious care and thought to the selection of the man and woman who will serve as *sponsors* for your child. The first requisite is that they both be *practical* Catholics — people who in their own lives have shown a deep appreciation for their religion: for sponsors represent Mother Church herself. Remember that in the name of your child they must make a profession of faith, and that they must assume the responsibility for his education as a Catholic in the event that you are unable to do so.

Another important matter is that of selecting a name for the baby. By all means choose a saint's name. Do not succumb to the rather common trend of naming a child for a current TV star, the girl at the corner beauty shop, or no one in particular. Give your child the name of a saint at Baptism, someone he may point to with pride, imitate in his daily life, and pray to later as his special intercessor in heaven.

Learn about your child's saint at once, so that you may begin telling him about his patron as soon as he is old enough to enjoy stories. Many Catholic families follow the beautiful custom of naming the first daughter Mary and the first son Joseph.

A powerful truth for all parents to meditate on is that when your child receives this sacrament, he becomes a son of God, an heir of heaven, a very

¹ The complete text of the Blessing for a Mother After Childbirth may be found on Page 37 of the Appendix.

real and vital member of the Mystical Body of Christ. He is no longer your child to do with as you wish, but a very sacred trust from Almighty God. Just as Mary accepted as her lot in life the prophetic words of Simeon on the day the Child Jesus was presented in the temple, so too, you as parents, must willingly accept from Almighty God all the sacrifices, sorrows, and work that will be required of you as parents.

Our present Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, warns of the responsibilities of parenthood bestowed by the sacrament of Baptism in the following words:

“The souls of children given to their parents by God and consecrated in Baptism with the royal character of Christ are a sacred charge over which watches the jealous love of God. The same Christ who pronounced the words, ‘Suffer the little children to come to me,’ for all His mercy and goodness has nevertheless threatened with fearful evils all who give scandal to those so dear to His Heart.”

Fifth Mystery

Finding Jesus in the Temple

WHAT WILL YOUR CHILD BE LIKE AT TWELVE YEARS?

Let us imagine that you have in your living room a very badly worn chair which you are financially unable to replace, although it is an eye-sore to you and a continual source of embarrassment. But let us suppose, for the sake of a story, that one morning the mailman brings you a present from your mother—ten yards of beautiful hand-blocked linen. (She had probably noticed the chair on her last visit, but tactfully said nothing.) Although you are quite an amateur at sewing, you realize that her gift will make an attractive slip-cover for your problem chair.

Your first impulse certainly isn't to rush for your scissors and start cutting. As a mature individual you sit back and visualize how you wish the chair to look when your project is completed—in other words you work out a plan. Perhaps you go to the library and borrow a book containing descriptions of how to make slip-covers, possibly you consult an expert, or you may try to purchase a pattern or at least make one by carefully pinning paper or the material itself meticulously to the chair.

There is nothing haphazard about your methods. You try by all the means at your command to do a

good job. You do not assume a knowledge you do not possess. You do all in your power to protect the value of the material you are working with—possibly thirty or forty dollars—so that it may serve the purpose for which it was intended.

But pause now for a moment and think—have you made any plans for the early training of the child you will soon hold in your arms? God is entrusting into your hands a human soul, whom He loves with an infinite love. You and your husband are His “agents” in guarding and guiding it during its first all-important formative period.

Before you become lost in the rigidity of baby’s schedule—feedings every four hours, baths, formula, and laundry—to name just a few of the things that will make a mere mention of a forty-hour week look like child’s play—why not take the time to draw up a blue print of some of the things you hope to achieve during your baby’s infancy and childhood?

A thoughtful consideration of these things will not only give you a goal to strive for, but a deeper understanding of life that will see you through the trying first months of baby’s existence. For those first months *are* trying to the inexperienced mother. It is foolish to deny the fact. It is a tremendous jump, from the freedom which the average young American working girl, career woman, or student enjoys, to the restrictions motherhood as a profession requires. The lovable darling in the pink or blue bassinet makes you a virtual prisoner. An infant demands your almost constant attention.

Unless under unusual circumstances, you will consider it your own personal privilege, as well as your duty, to devote yourself to the unfolding of your

child. Since Mary is our model, let us remember that she took care of her Child. It is unthinkable that she would have left Him to the care of strangers.

Some women today find frustration and drudgery in their role as mothers instead of peace and contentment. Perhaps this is due, in large part, to the fact that they look on their career of motherhood as more or less incidental. They feel it is their function according to nature, and forget it is their privilege in the order of grace. They fail to see that in bringing a child to its full perfection of body and spirit they are cooperating in a unique way with the Holy Spirit.

Since you are now on the very threshold of motherhood, it would be wise to give some serious thought to 'Motherhood as a Profession.'

Perhaps in years past when our entire civilization followed a Christian pattern, when a large family was the rule, not the exception, when the home was the chief center of everyone's life, such a study was not so much neglected. Through the natural course of events, girls acquired this knowledge since they did not frequently seek employment away from home at an early age. Today, however, nearly everyone will agree that we need to re-evaluate the role of the Catholic mother in the home.

The reader may be among those who have had the advantage of a course in Christian Marriage and Parenthood, or participation in Cana groups; but for those who have not, these days of comparative quiet before the baby comes will give an opportunity to do some helpful reading on the subject. For this reason we have included a booklist at the close of this chapter.

Some of these titles should be available at your parish or public library. If not, keep requesting them, for usually a demand for a book will warrant its being placed on the shelves. If you find one which appeals to you personally, buy it for your own bookshelf. Consider it a worthwhile investment for your future happiness.

Perhaps our Holy Father's four point program for sanctifying family life might profitably serve as a starting point for your own study.

Our Holy Father understands the full importance of teaching by example. Thus the first point he suggests is to build a *common prayer life*—in other words pray with your children. This habit of prayer is the most important habit which you as a parent have the privilege and obligation of teaching your children. Long before they are actually able to participate, let them be with you as you say the family rosary. What sweeter lullaby could you possibly find—as the baby takes the final feeding of the day—than the beautiful words of the Hail Mary?

Certainly our Blessed Mother will smile with pleasure on a family praying together. It will remind her of another home long ago in Nazareth and the Child she nursed to Manhood.

Meal prayers should also be said together and with reverence. The family's consecration to the Sacred Heart ought to be renewed each First Friday. Family prayers to patron saints should all be a part of the prayer life in your home. By having the family, as a unit, take part in such simple ceremonies as the blessing and lighting of the Advent Wreath, preparing and blessing of the Christmas Crib, and the crowning of the Blessed Virgin Mary, deep and last-

ing impressions are made on the minds and hearts of your children.

Our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, has repeatedly pointed out to parents that they must make religion a more integral part of their family life, that the future safety of the Church depends upon parents assuming this God-given responsibility.

That is why it is so important for parents to realize that the child's fundamental training in religion must begin during the pre-school years. In fact, one authority has gone so far as to state that the sisters and priests in school and church can only water the seeds that the parents have implanted deeply in the character of the child during this most critical period.¹

The second point is to develop a *common work life*. Teach your children from their earliest years to help about the home. Let them learn from the time they are toddlers that the home is really a co-operative enterprise—that everyone must do his share. An extra pair of hands at the kitchen sink as you wash the dishes—ten sticky fingers at the mixing bowl—of course they're a nuisance! But if you shoo the children off to play whenever they plead with you for a chance to help, how do you expect them, as they grow more capable, to do these chores without constant prodding on your part, and constant grumbling on theirs?

Give them the opportunity to learn the sense of joy and satisfaction that comes from a job well done. Household chores will not only keep them closer to the home, but will develop within them a sense of

¹ *The Christian Home—A Nation's Bulwark*, by Rev. J. A. O'Brien, p. 14.

responsibility necessary to their growing into adulthood.

Another point. Psychologists frequently warn parents not to take every element of struggle out of their children's lives—for growth, to a large extent is dependent upon struggle. In other words, let your children work for some of the things they want. If you wish them to mature into self-reliant adults, give them the opportunity to do some constructive work during childhood and adolescence. By your example as parents, rather than by words, impress upon your children a deep respect for the dignity of work.

The third step in building a sanctified family is a *common social life*. Let your family as a unit plan activities—family feast day parties, fishing trips, picnics. Utilize to the fullest the opportunities you have for companionship with your children. Don't let them develop the attitude that to have fun they must "get away" from Mother and Dad.

Direct their recreation into creative crafts, constructive hobbies, music, group reading. It is a serious mistake to allow children to limit all their recreation to such passive entertainment as television, radio, or the movies. Undoubtedly, it will require effort and planning on your part to develop a well-rounded social life for your family as a unit, but a happy contented family will pay dividends in the years to come.

This leads naturally to the fourth point—the development within your children of a deep sense of *family loyalty*—an *esprit de corps*. Psychologists tell us that one of the fundamental needs of a child is to feel that he really belongs to a group, and to

know that he contributes something unique to the group as a whole. Children, therefore, should be taught to think of the common good of the family, to be devoted to their brothers and sisters and to stand by them in time of need—to share with them their joys.

Even the faithful performance of chores should be viewed in this light of family loyalty. All this will not only make them better members of their school and community group, but more patriotic citizens, and above all else, loyal and faithful members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Through these four points suggested by our Holy Father, you should be able to teach your children to lead lives of purpose — impressing upon them frequently the difference between success in the form of such tangibles as money, white-walled convertibles, closets full of clothes, *and* success as God sees it: a heart filled with sanctifying grace.

If you resolve now, at the very outset of your career as a mother, to build your family life on such a set of principles as these suggested by our Holy Father—keeping constantly before you the humble home of the Holy Family as your guide and inspiration—rest assured that with Mary's help you will bring your child to his Confirmation Day, worthy to become a stalwart soldier in the army of Jesus Christ.

BLESSING OF AN EXPECTANT MOTHER

℣. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

℟. Who made heaven and earth.

℣. Save Thy servant, Lord.

℟. For she puts her hope, O God, in Thee.

℣. Be a tower of strength for her, O Lord.

℟. Against Enemy attack.

℣. Let not the Enemy have power against her.

℟. Nor the son of evil come near to harm her.

℣. O Lord, send her aid from Thy holy place.

℟. And guard her from Sion.

℣. O Lord, hear my prayer.

℟. And let my cry come unto Thee.

℣. The Lord be with you.

℟. And with your spirit.

Let us pray.

Almighty, everlasting God, Thou hast granted Thy servants in the profession of the true Faith, to show forth the glory of the eternal Trinity and to adore Its Unity in the power of Its majesty. We ask that Thy servant, N., by her constancy in that Faith, may ever be safeguarded against all adversity. Through Christ our Lord.

℟. Amen.

Let us pray.

O Lord God, Creator of all, Thou art mighty and

awe-inspiring, just and merciful; Thou alone art kind and loving and didst set Israel free from every evil, making our fathers Thy chosen people. Thou didst sanctify them by the power of Thy Spirit and by the co-working of the Holy Ghost, didst prepare the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mary to become a worthy home for Thy Son. Thou didst fill John the Baptist with the Holy Ghost, making him leap with joy in his mother's womb. Accept now the offering of the contrite heart and the ardent desire of Thy servant, N., who humbly petitions Thee for the welfare of the child which Thou didst grant her to conceive. Protect the work which is Thine and guard it from all the deceit and harm of our bitter Enemy. May the hand of Thy mercy assist her delivery, and may her child see the light of day without harm; may it be kept safe for the holy rebirth of Baptism, serve Thee always in all things, and thereby merit everlasting life. Through the same Christ our Lord.

R̄. Amen.

The priest then sprinkles the woman with holy water, and prays—

Psalm 66

May God have pity on us and bless us; *
may He let His face shine upon us.
So may your way be known upon the earth; *
among all nations, your salvation.
May the peoples praise you, O God; *
may all the peoples praise you!
May the nations be glad and exult
because you rule the peoples in equity; *
the nations on the earth you guide.
May the peoples praise you, O God; *

may all the peoples praise you.
The earth has yielded its fruits; *
God, our God, has blessed us.
May God bless us, *
and may all the ends of the earth fear him!
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall
world without end. Amen. [be, *

℣. Let us praise the Father and the Son with the
Holy Spirit.

℞. Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

℣. To His angels God has given charge over you.

℞. To guard you in all your ways.

℣. O Lord, hear my prayer.

℞. And let my cry come unto Thee.

℣. The Lord be with you.

℞. And with your spirit.

Let us pray.

Visit this dwelling we beg Thee, O Lord, and
drive far from it and from this Thy servant, N., all
the snares of the Enemy. May Thy holy angels
dwell here to preserve her and her child in peace,
and may Thy blessing be ever upon her. Save them,
O almighty God, and bestow upon them Thy unfa-
iling light. Through Christ our Lord.

℞. Amen.

May the blessing of Almighty God, the Father,
the Son, ✠ and Holy Spirit, come down upon you
and your child, and remain forever.

℞. Amen.

BLESSING OF A MOTHER AFTER CHILDBIRTH

Vested in surplice and white stole, the priest with his server proceeds to the entrance of the church where the mother with her baptized child awaits him holding a lighted candle. He sprinkles them and all the others present with holy water, saying:

℣. Our help is in the name of the Lord.

℟. Who made heaven and earth.

Ant. She shall receive.

Psalm 23

The Lord's are the earth and its fullness; *
the world and those who dwell in it.

For he founded it upon the seas *
and established it upon the rivers.

Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord? *
or who may stand in his holy place?

He whose hands are sinless, whose heart is clean, *
who desires not what is vain,
nor swears deceitfully to his neighbor.

He shall receive a blessing from the Lord, *
a reward from God his savior.

Such is the race that seeks for him, *
that seeks the face of the God of Jacob.

Lift up, O gates, your lintels; *
reach up, you ancient portals,
that the king of glory may come in!

Who is this king of glory? *

The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.

Lift up, O gates, your lintels; *
reach up, you ancient portals,
that the king of glory may come in!

Who is this king of glory? *
The Lord of hosts; he is the king of glory.
Glory be to the Father; and to the Son, *
and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall
be, *
world without end. Amen.

Ant. She shall receive the Lord's blessing, and
mercy from God, her Savior, because she is of the
generation who seek the Lord.

The priest puts the end of the stole in the woman's hand and leads her toward the altar, saying:

Enter God's temple. Adore the Son of the blessed
Virgin Mary who has given you fruitfulness of offspring.

The mother kneels on the altar step and is grateful to God.

℣. Lord, have mercy.

℟. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

℣. Our Father (*silently*).

And lead us not into temptation.

℟. But deliver us from evil.

℣. Save Thy servant, Lord.

℟. For she puts her hope, O God, in Thee.

℣. O Lord, send her aid from Thy holy place.

℞. And guard over her from Sion.

℣. Let not the Enemy have power against her.

℞. Nor the son of evil come near to harm her.

℣. O Lord, hear my prayer.

℞. And let my cry come unto Thee.

℣. The Lord be with you.

℞. And with your spirit.

Let us pray.

Almighty, everlasting God, by the child-bearing of Blessed Virgin Mary Thou hast turned the pains of child-bearing into joy for Thy faithful. Look now with kindness on this Thy servant, who comes rejoicing to Thy holy temple to render thanks to Thee, and grant that after this life she and her child may, by the merits and intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, gain the joys of everlasting happiness. Through Christ our Lord.

℞. Amen.

The priest sprinkles mother and child with holy water, saying:

May the peace and blessing of almighty God, the Father, the Son, ✠ and Holy Spirit, come down upon you, and remain forever.

℞. Amen.

SUGGESTED READING LIST

BABY GROWS IN AGE AND GRACE by Sister Mary de Lourdes. C. R. Gibon & Co., Norwalk, Conn. (An excellent book showing in detail the close relationship between the physical, spiritual and mental growth of the child.)

COOKING FOR CHRIST by Florence Berger. National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 3801 Grand Ave., Des Moines, Iowa.

MIND THE BABY by Mary Perkins. Sheed and Ward, New York, N. Y.

OUR CHILDREN'S YEAR OF GRACE by Dr. Therese Mueller. Pio Decimo Press, Box 53, Baden Station, St. Louis 15, Mo. 50c.

THEIR HEARTS ARE HIS GARDEN by Sister Mary Marguerite, C.S.J. St. Anthony Guild Press, Paterson, N. J.

YOUR FAMILY CIRCLE by Sister Jean Patrice, C.S.J. Bruce Publishing Co., Milwaukee, Wis.

WITH THE BIBLE THROUGH THE CHURCH YEAR. Bible stories retold by Richard Beron, O.S.B. Preface and notes on the liturgy. Pantheon Books, New York, N. Y.

The following publications of the Family Life Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., Washington, D. C., offer much valuable advice to parents:

THE CHILD'S WORLD (Approximately 200 pages covering the entire field of training in the home. Its publication was prompted by the Bishops' 1950 statement on the child. 35c.)

CHILDHOOD RELIGION (15c).

YOUR HOME A CHURCH IN MINIATURE (Vol. I, 25c; Vol II, 30c; Vol. III, 20c)

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